

**MEETING MINUTES**  
**WATONWAN COUNTY HUMAN SERVICES**  
 February 18, 2026

**CALL TO ORDER**

The Watonwan County Human Services Board met in regular open session, in the community room, located in the Watonwan County Human Services building, in the city of St. James, MN, on **Wednesday, February 18, 2026, at 9:00 A.M.**, pursuant to notice given as required by law. The meeting was called to order by Board Chairman, Bill Miller.

**ROLL CALL**

ATTENDEE NAME	TITLE	STATUS
Jim Pettersen	Commissioner – District 1: <i>2026 Board Vice Chair</i>	Present
Bill Miller	Commissioner – District 2: <i>2026 Board Chair</i>	Present
Jim Branstad	Commissioner – District 3	Absent
Scott Westman	Commissioner – District 4	Present
Dillon Melheim	Commissioner – District 5	Present
Kimberly Hall	Citizen’s Representative	Present
Chris Knoll	Citizen’s Representative	Present
Amy Pluym	Director	Present
Erin Marks	Accounting & Support Services Supervisor	Absent
Jodi Halvorson	Financial Assistance Supervisor	Present
Barb Salmela-Lind	Community Health Services Manager	Absent
Joan Stordalen	Social Services Supervisor	Present
Katy Goldschmidt	Social Services Supervisor	Present

**PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE**

**APPROVAL OF THE MINUTES**

A motion was made by Westman seconded by Hall to approve the minutes of the **January 21, 2026**, meeting. Motion carried unanimously.

**CORRECTIONS / REVISIONS / ADDITIONS** to agenda – none.

**APPROVAL OF THE AGENDA**

Melheim motioned, Pettersen seconded, and the motion carried unanimously to approve the agenda as presented.

**NEXT REGULAR BOARD MEETING** will be held on **Wednesday, March 18, 2026, at 9:00 A.M.** (Location: Watonwan County Human Services, Community Room, 715 2nd Ave. S., St. James)

**NEW STAFF INTRODUCTIONS** – postponed until next month’s board meeting.

**DIRECTOR’S REPORT OF AGENCY OPERATIONS** – *Amy Pluym*

## **Budget**

- 5% of revenues, 4% of expenses at 8% of the year.
- Out-of-Home Placement is 6% of the budget, at 8% of the year.
- State Operated Services / Acute Care hospitalizations are at 10% of the budget, at 8% of the year.

## **Other**

- Federal Actions: **Ongoing state injunctions and appeals related to federal actions** impacting the Supplemental Nutritional Assistance Program (SNAP), Minnesota Family Investment Program (MFIP), and the Social Services (SS) Block Grant.
- Pluym and Goldschmidt are currently in the process of completing **revalidation for waiver services** as part of provider enrollment.
- Continued **delays** in Non-Emergency Medical Transportation (**NEMT**) **payments**. Also experiencing payment delays from **UCare**.
- **MN E-Connect is implementing a new setup fee and ongoing fees for billing**. We are currently exploring alternative, cost effective options.
- **Day on the Hill** is scheduled for March and Region 9 Directors will be attending.
- **Floor Project**: One bid has been received; currently awaiting a second bid.
- The **strategic planning** process is underway for setting new goals for the agency. Plans are being made to use the March Employee Forum for an all-staff discussion on this matter.

## **INCOME MAINTENANCE / CHILD SUPPORT UPDATES – Jodi Halvorson**

### **Income Maintenance**

- Minnesota Eligibility Technology System (**METS**) and **MNsure are separating into two different systems**. County staff will use METS to determine eligibility for Medical Assistance (MA). There will be some differences with the updated system and processes, so staff will participate in training scheduled from March through July to ensure a smooth transition.
- The state is conducting a **SNAP Management Evaluation Review**, which occurs for our county every three years. During this review, they will assess our customer access to Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) services, evaluate our application processing timelines, and review cases involving time-limited recipients. In addition, they will verify that all required posters and notices are properly displayed, conduct client interviews, and collect recordings of staff phone interviews with clients as part of their compliance review.
- County staff are attending a **SNAP** meeting today to learn about **the new immigration policies** and the required system workarounds that will need to be implemented.
- Minnesota Valley Action Council (**MVAC**) has hired a staff member to provide **employment services** in the St. James office as part of our contracted services. This individual will begin training soon.

**Child Support** – nothing new to report.

**PUBLIC HEALTH UPDATES** – *Barbara Salmela-Lind absent – no report.*

**SOCIAL SERVICES UPDATES**

### Children's Unit - Joan Stordalen

- We have been doing **outreach** to share information about our social services programs. We've attended the Madelia and Butterfield-Odin Career Fairs and will be attending the St. James **Career Fair** next week.
- We've begun **billing** for our **motivational interviewing skills** use with child welfare case management cases so we will be able to report the increased revenue from this preventative service.
- Staff information: 2 social services staff will be taking advantage of the new bonding time with their infants. We have been planning carefully around their time off to ensure client coverage by shifting those cases evenly amongst other staff who are able to serve these families during their leave of absence.

### Adult's Unit – Katy Goldschmidt

- Jessica Veenstra, MnChoices Team Lead, continues to see a steady flow of new MnChoices referrals.
- We are still awaiting **CMS approval** for the under-65 waiver updates to **implement the 2026 rate changes and related policy updates**. Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) approval is anticipated by March 1, 2026.
- Adult Mental Health (AMH) continues to maintain a steady caseload.
- Adult Protective Services (APS) is off to a busy start in January, with nine reports received and four screened in for investigation.
- We have been notified of upcoming managed care audits for Medica and UCare, which will take place in April and May. We are still awaiting notification from Blue Plus.
- We continue to experience an increase in calls related to the **UCare transition for our MSHO members**. Case Managers, Jenn Eckstein and Lyndsey Firchau have been doing an excellent job answering questions, reaching out to providers and pharmacies, and reviewing new procedures with members transitioning to a new health plan. We estimate that approximately 25% of our UCare MSHO members have transitioned to their correct health plan of choice. There also continues to be a backlog at the Department of Human Services (DHS) in processing new applications.

### **PERSONNEL**

- Pettersen motioned, Knoll seconded, and the motion passed unanimously to approve the End of Probation and move to **Permanent Status** of **Haley Olson**, County Agency Social Worker.

### **STAFF TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT**

- Nothing new to report.

### **COMMITTEE MEETING REPORTS**

#### Brown County Evaluation Center – Westman

- Met January 12, 2026. 2025 year in review indicated a financial loss for the year. Rates were raised for 2026.

#### CHS (Community Health Services) Advisory Committee – Knoll

- Met February 2, 2026. Reviewed grant requests and approved one for sensory items. Also discussed bike projects in St. James and Fairmont.

Enterprise North Inc. – Pettersen

- Revamping the policy manual.

LAC (Local Advisory Council) – Hall

- Next meeting is March 10, 2026.

MRCI (Managed Resources Connections Inc.) Board of Directors – Miller

- Miller reports he will need to complete a background check and finger printing.

SCHSAC (State Community Health Services Advisory Committee) – Melheim

- Next meeting is March 12, 2026.

VFC (Visions for Families and Communities) Collaborative – Branstad

- Miller attended the February 11, 2026, meeting in Branstad's absence. Reviewed annual updates and reports. Approved 2 of the 3 mini grants requested. Also approved all of the dedicated program requests.

## MONTHLY FINANCIAL CLAIMS

- Melheim moved, Hall seconded, and the motion passed unanimously to accept the following **donations** from **Augustana Lutheran Church, St. James**: 41 receiving blankets, 8 baby blankets, 1 Yagel Mate, 30 bibs, 13 sleepers, 56 onesies, 6 baby wipe packages, 4 packages of newborn diapers, 4 books, 9 sleep sacs, 6 outfits, 5 newborn hats with mittens, 4 burp cloths, and 210 count of diapers.
- Melheim moved, Hall seconded, and the motion passed unanimously to accept the **donation** of 7 quilts from **St. Olaf Church, Odin**.
- Melheim moved, Westman seconded, and the motion passed unanimously to approve the **monthly claims** in the amount of **\$231,969.94**, which includes the monthly credit card payment of \$5,986.24.

## CONTRACTS / AGREEMENTS / POLICIES

- Pettersen moved, Knoll seconded, and the motion passed unanimously to approve the July 1, 2026 through June 30, 2027, Cooperative Agreement with **NorthStar Data Partners, LLC** to provide support services for the Foundational Public Health Responsibilities (FPHR) Grant.

## OTHER

- Melheim moved, Westman seconded, and the motion passed unanimously to allow **Agency Closure** on March 30, 2026, from 8:30 a.m. until 12:00 p.m. for all-staff training.

## ADJOURNMENT

Having no additional business, Melheim motioned, Pettersen seconded, and the motion carried unanimously to adjourn the meeting at 9:35 A.M.

Respectfully submitted,

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Katy Goldschmidt, Social Services Supervisor

Dated: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Bill Miller, County Commissioner – Board Chair

Dated: \_\_\_\_\_