



Committee on Human Services Meeting
Thursday, February 26, 2025 at 5:30 PM
Richard E. Mastrangelo Council Chambers – Second Floor

The Committee on Human Services convened on Thursday February 26th at 5:30 pm. This was a hybrid meeting and the public could join via the zoom link – https://watertownma.portal.civicclerk.com/?category_1d=80.

Present were Anthony Palomba, Chair, Caroline Bays, Vice Chair, and Emily Izzo, Secretary. Also present were Jenna Bancroft, Director of Human Services, Stephanie Venizelos, Assistant Director of Human Services, Domenica Puel, Wellness Coordinator and resident Jacky van Leeuwen.

The purpose of the meeting was to have a discussion with the Human Services Director on the current work of the Human Services Department and their upcoming goals.

The Committee received a presentation from Jenna Bancroft, LICSW, Director of Human Services, and Stephanie Venizelos, Assistant Director of Human Services, regarding the structure, current programming, and strategic direction of the Department. Ms. Bancroft provided both an overview of existing initiatives and a forward-looking discussion of planned expansions, emphasizing that much of this work has already been underway and continues to evolve in response to community need. The presentation is attached.

She expressed strong support for her staff and noted that the Department's progress reflects a collaborative, cross-departmental effort. The Human Services Department oversees programs and wellness initiatives designed to promote health, stability, and connection within the Watertown community. The Department includes oversight of Veterans Services and ADA coordination, the Food Pantry, wellness programming, and the Farmers Market, with an open position for a part-time Farmers Market assistant. The Department also works closely with community commissions and external partners to address food access, housing stability, mental health and substance use, and resource navigation.

Food Access

Ms. Bancroft reported that the Watertown Food Pantry has recently moved to the Parker Building and is currently operating in an interim space. She acknowledged that operating in borrowed church space in the past presented challenges, particularly in terms of scheduling flexibility and control over programming. The new location will allow the Department greater autonomy, expanded hours, and eventually co-location of the full Human Services team. The pantry currently serves approximately 170 households per week. Transportation access remains a key consideration, as the Parker Building location

is not equally accessible to all residents. The Department is developing transportation guides to assist patrons and is exploring coordination with the Senior Center bus to provide rides. Ms. Bancroft also noted that the Department hopes to solicit feedback directly from pantry patrons regarding desired services and improvements. Plans for expansion include maintaining Tuesday hours while potentially adding a Saturday or evening option, as well as implementing appointment times or sign-ups to better manage flow.

The Department is also considering offering additional support services on site, such as health screenings.

Stephanie Venizelos, Assistant Director, discussed the growing demand for food access services and ongoing collaboration with the Catholic Collaborative Food Pantry, the Community Fridge, and other community partners. She noted that changes at the federal level have affected SNAP recipients, particularly with new eligibility requirements. The SNAP CSA program continues year-round and is state-funded, allowing eligible residents to receive fresh produce from participating farms during both market season and winter months. The Department is also exploring the development of a mobile pantry or market to reach residents who may face transportation or other barriers. Ms. Bancroft addressed concerns about residents who are hesitant to leave their homes. The Food Pantry maintains a low barrier to entry; no one is turned away. The Department provides some deliveries and partners with mutual aid groups to ensure food reaches families who are uncomfortable accessing services in person.

Housing Stability

Housing stability efforts are coordinated in partnership with Wayside Youth and Family Support Network, the Police Department, the Senior Center, the Veterans Services Officer, and School Resource Officers. Ms. Bancroft described ongoing discussions to identify service gaps, adjust to changing housing needs, and implement responsive programming. Housing stability will formally fall under the Human Services Department, though she emphasized that the scope of the work requires collaboration and cannot be undertaken by the Department alone. Plans include establishing a Housing Stability Advisory Group to bring together community stakeholders and service providers. The Department is also considering how to measure effectiveness and track outcomes to determine whether interventions are achieving intended results.

Mental Health and Substance Use

Ms. Bancroft discussed Live Well Watertown programming, which provides residents with resources and skills-building opportunities, often hosted at the Library. She also referenced the Watertown Cares Network, which originated during the height of the opioid epidemic and continues to support substance use response efforts. Watertown has received opioid settlement funds, distributed in waves through 2030, with approximately \$250,000 currently available. Ms. Bancroft noted that many communities have not yet allocated their funds and emphasized the importance of sustainability when funding programs. Current efforts include harm reduction initiatives such as distributing Narcan

kits, providing training on Narcan use, and installing kits in City buildings. She reported that these measures have not encountered pushback.

Resource Navigation and Community Collaboration

The Department continues to strengthen referral pathways through 311 coordination, direct services meetings, Veterans Services, and ADA request processing. Collaboration remains central to the Department's approach, including partnerships related to digital equity, transportation access, and community food drives. Ms. Bancroft concluded by reiterating that the Department's work is ongoing and adaptive. While new initiatives are planned, much of the foundation is already in place. The Department's focus remains on expanding access, improving coordination, and ensuring that services are responsive to community needs. The Committee received the presentation and looks forward to continued updates as these initiatives progress.

Members of the Committee expressed their appreciation to Ms. Bancroft and her staff for the presentation.

Councilor Bays made a motion to adjourn which was seconded by Councilor Izzo and was passed 3 – 0.

The meeting adjourned at 7pm.

ELECTED OFFICIALS

Anthony Palomba,
Chair

Caroline Bays,
Vice Chair

Emily Izzo,
Secretary

Watertown Human Services

Watertown City Hall

149 Main Street

Watertown, MA 02472

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OVERVIEW

The Human Services Department oversees the development and operation of programs and wellness opportunities that promote health, sustainability, and connection for the Watertown community. The Department brings together City partners to address needs related to food, housing, mental health, and social services; and works collaboratively to ensure all residents can access resources and support.

MEET THE TEAM

Director of Human Services

Jenna Bancroft, LICSW

Veterans Services Officer & ADA Coordinator

Jay Terminiello

Watertown Food Pantry Coordinator

Kathy Cunningham

Assistant Director of Human Services

Stephanie Venizelos

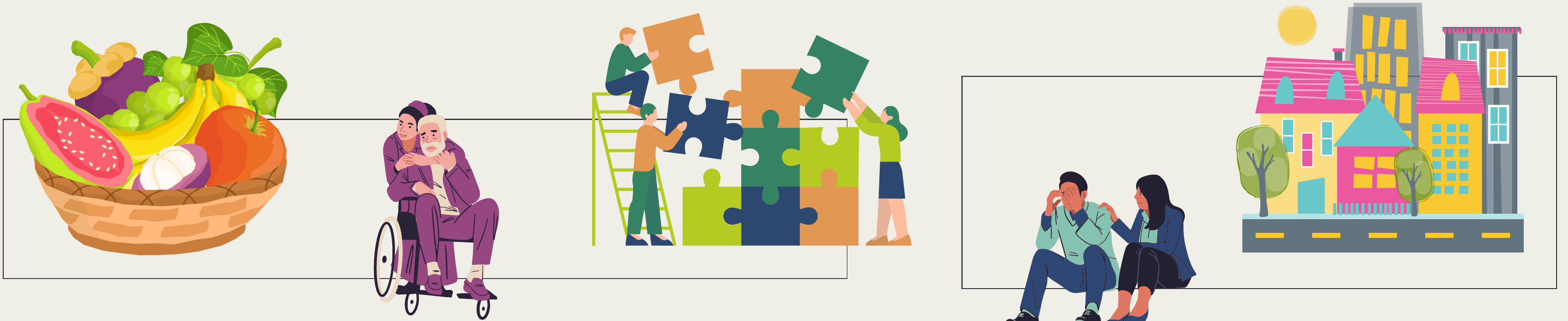
Wellness Coordinator

Domenica Puleo

Farmer's Market PT Assistant

Open

DEPARTMENT PRIORITIES



- Food Access
- Housing Stability
- Mental Health & Substance Use
- Healthy & Connected Community
- Resource Navigation & Referral Pathways
- Collaboration with City Departments & Community Partners

CURRENT PROGRAMS & COMMISSIONS

- Watertown Food Pantry
- Live Well Watertown
- Watertown Farmer's Market
- Veterans Services
- Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) Coordination
- Watertown Social Services Resource Program
(contract with Wayside Youth & Family Support Network)
- Watertown Commission on Disability
- Watertown Human Rights Commission

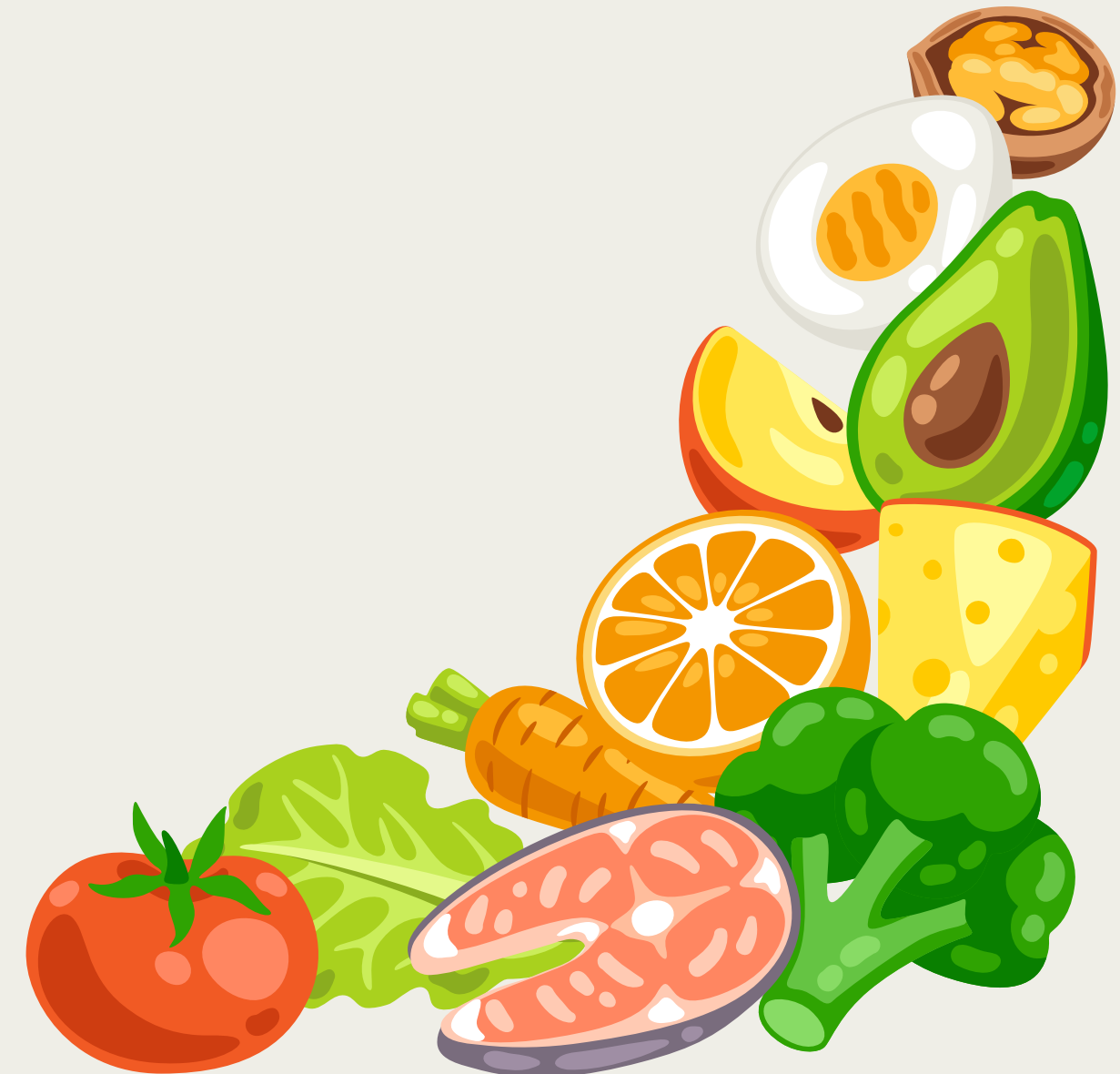
FOOD ACCESS

What we're doing:

- Watertown Food Pantry
- Watertown Farmer's Market Food Assistance
- SNAP CSA Program

What we plan to do:

- Watertown Food Pantry
 - New Space
 - Additional Hours
 - Resource Collaborations
- Mobile Pantry/Market
- Winter Market
- Food Access Advisory Group



HOUSING STABILITY

What we're doing:

Tenant/Landlord Resources

City Department Collaboration

Streamlining Services through Direct
Service Providers

What we plan to do:

Housing Stability Program

- Resource Navigation
- Rent Assistance
- Tenant and Landlord Education
- Community Partnerships

Housing Stability Advisory Group



MENTAL HEALTH & SUBSTANCE USE

What we're doing:

- Opioid Settlement Funds: Planning & Harm Reduction
- Live Well Watertown (Stress Less)
- Watertown Cares Network

What we plan to do:

Opioid Settlement Funds:

- Request for Information to fund existing providers and new programs for education/prevention, harm reduction, treatment, recovery
- Regional approach to recovery services

Community Mental Health Programming

Mental Health & Substance Use Advisory Group

RESOURCE NAVIGATION & REFERRAL PATHWAYS

What we're doing:

Direct Services Meetings

311 Referral Pathway

Online Resources

Veterans Services

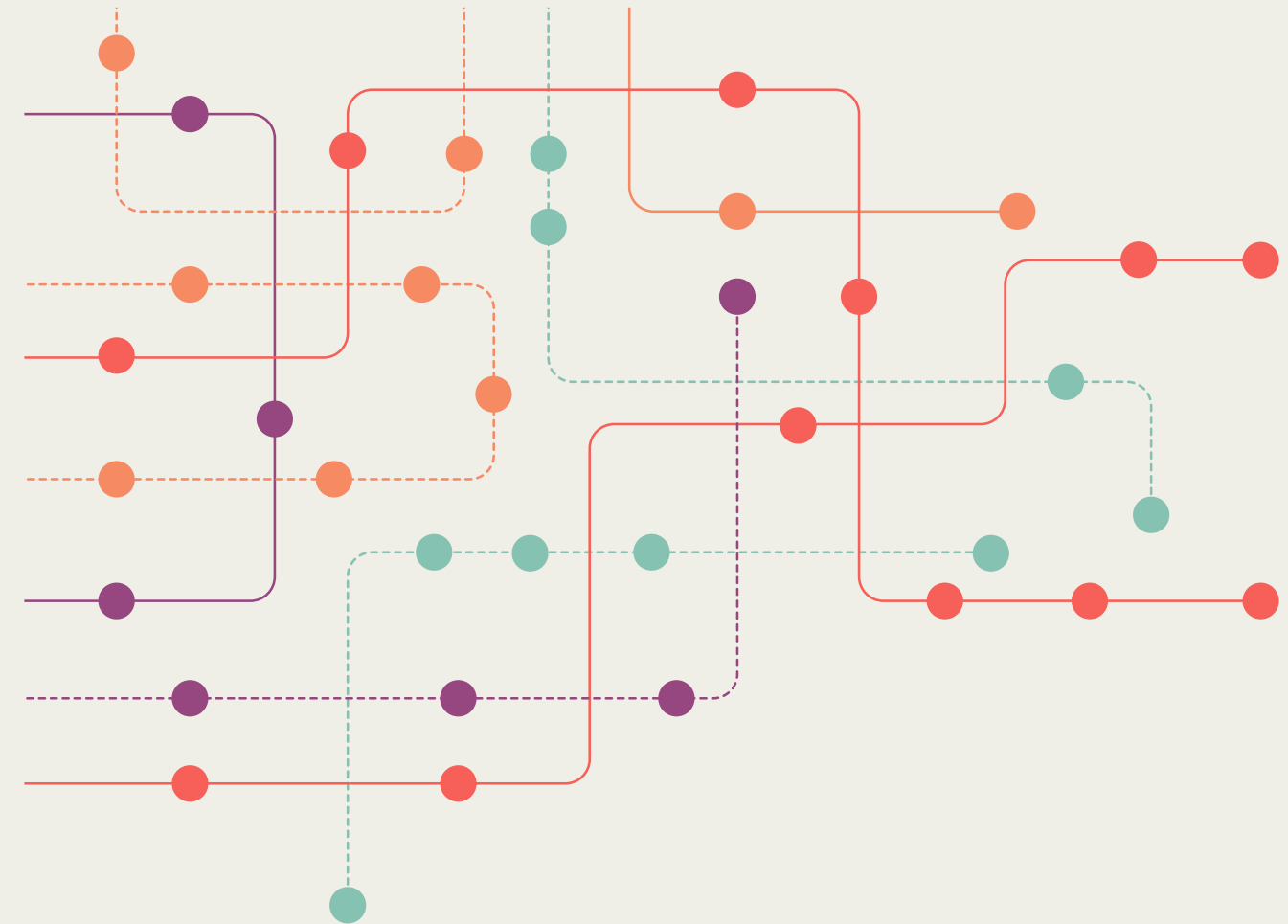
Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) Requests

What we plan to do:

Resource Guide

Essential Needs Gift Cards (collaboration with

Watertown Police Department & Recreation)



HEALTHY & CONNECTED COMMUNITY

What we're doing:

Live Well Watertown

- Eat Well
- Move More
- Stress Less
- Connect with Community

Seasonal Farmer's Market

What we plan to do:

New Community Connect Series

Volunteer Fair

Snow Shoveling Volunteer Expansion



HUMAN SERVICES COLLABORATIONS

What we're doing:

Watertown Community Food Drive

Watertown Housing Authority Programs

Cradles to Crayons Partnership

Transportation Access

Digital Equity: Library, Senior Services, WHA, Wayside

What we plan to do:

Human Services Quarterly Meeting

Advisory Groups: Housing Stability, Food Access, Mental Health &
Substance Use, Direct Services

Thank you!

Jenna Bancroft, LICSW

Director of Human Services

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