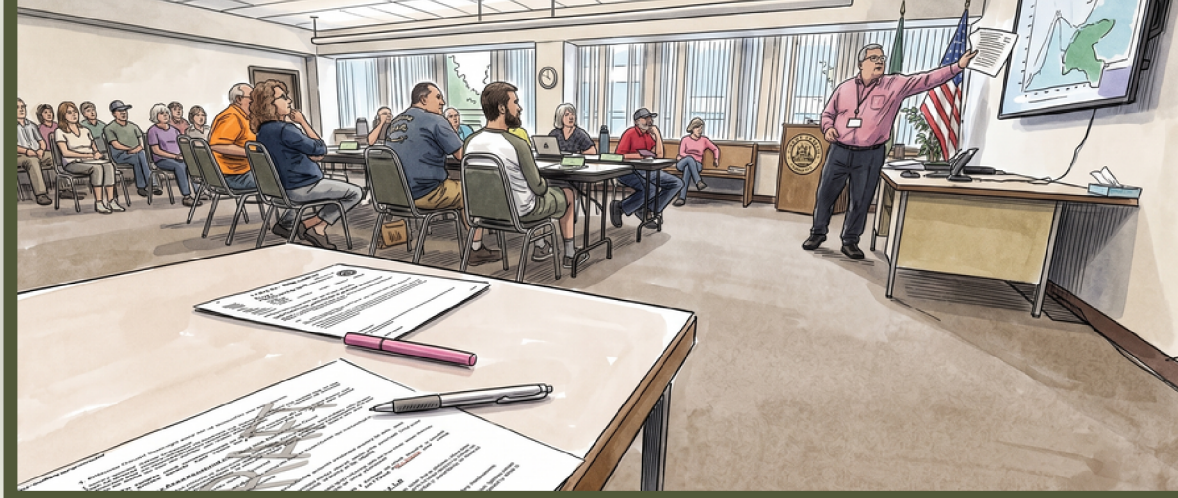




**Fall
2026**

JEFFERSON COUNTY PLANNING & COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

Quarterly

NEWSLETTER



A MESSAGE FROM THE DIRECTOR

If you open almost any household junk drawer, you'll find an assortment of tools, forgotten odds and ends, and items that don't seem to belong anywhere else. In many ways, the Jefferson County Department of Planning and Community Development serves as local government's equivalent. Our department is often the destination for complex challenges and emerging issues that don't fit neatly within another traditional departmental structure.

Unlike departments focused primarily on a specific public service or population, Planning works across disciplines. We touch both the built environment and the people who live within it.

Continued on Page 2...

DEPARTMENT STAFF

Director

Hartley Bonisteel Schweitzer, AICP

Deputy Director

Alicia M. Dewey

Senior Planner

Andy Nevin

Community Development Coordinator

Aileen Anderson

Secretary

Emerald Macilvennie

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Watertown NY 13601

A MESSAGE FROM THE DIRECTOR: CONTINUED

That means one day we may be pursuing highly competitive state and federal grant funding, developing specialized GIS mapping for partner agencies, administering housing and septic replacement programs, or coordinating the County's public transit system. Next, we may be helping municipalities navigate changes in shoreline due to climate, renewable energy proposals, and the emerging opportunities and challenges associated with large-scale data centers, while also managing the County's extensive snowmobile trail system and supporting communities with updating their comprehensive plans and zoning codes. Our role is to bring structure, coordination, and long-term thinking to issues that rarely arrive with clear ownership or simple solutions.

We wear our "junk drawer" reputation as a badge of honor. Professional planners are trained as interdisciplinary problem-solvers, equipped to connect people, ideas, policies, and projects across organizational boundaries. We are comfortable with ambiguity, energized by complexity, and committed to helping Jefferson County navigate both today's challenges and tomorrow's opportunities. Whatever unexpected issue lands on our desk next, our department stands ready to tackle it with creativity, collaboration, and a countywide perspective.

As you read through this quarter's newsletter, you'll see those tools in action across our region. Whatever unexpected challenges or opportunities lie ahead, we're proud to be a place where real-world solutions take shape. Thank you for your partnership as we keep Jefferson County moving forward! - **Hartley**

Fair Housing Forum 2026

The Community Action Planning Council (CAPC) and Jefferson County Planning Department will host the annual Fair Housing Forum on Wednesday, September 23, 2026, from 9:30 to 11:30 a.m. at CAPC, 518 Davidson Street, Watertown.

The forum will provide information on fair housing rights, housing discrimination, and current local housing initiatives. Deanna Nelson, Assistant Attorney General in Charge, will present "Fair Housing in New York State: The Basics," providing an overview of fair housing protections and responsibilities in New York State. Jillian Redder, Director of Housing and Special Initiatives, and Alicia Dewey, Deputy Director of the Jefferson County Planning Department, will provide updates on local housing and homelessness efforts and transportation initiatives.

CAPC serves as Jefferson County's Fair Housing Office and provides information and referrals for individuals with questions or complaints regarding housing practices. The annual forum is an opportunity for municipal officials, housing professionals, service providers, and community members to learn more about fair housing protections and ongoing efforts to address housing needs in Jefferson County.

RSVP by September 18, 2026, by contacting CAPC at tkitto@capcj.org



FAIR HOUSING FORUM 2026

Community Action Planning Council and the Jefferson County Planning Department cordially invite you to participate in our Annual Fair Housing Forum.

Please join us on September 23, 2026, 9:30 a.m. to 11:30 a.m. at Community Action Planning Council, 518 Davidson Street, Watertown, NY.

Jillian Redder

Director of Housing and
Special Initiatives

Alicia Dewey

Deputy Director Jefferson
County Planning Dept.

Local efforts:

Housing/Homeless
Updates and
Transportation
Initiatives

Deanna Nelson

Assistant Attorney
General in Charge

**Fair Housing in
New York State:
The Basics**

Community Action Planning Council serves as Jefferson County's Fair Housing Office and is the information and referral agency for persons with questions or complaints about housing practices. The workshop is intended to educate participants about Fair Housing Rights and create awareness about housing discrimination.

RSVP by September 18, 2026



tkitto@capcjc.org

Please include name and e-mail of any additional attendees.

JEFFERSON COUNTY PUBLIC TRANSIT IS ROLLING!

Jefferson County's new countywide public transit system is officially on the road! Jefferson County Public Transit (JCPT) launched in July and is now providing affordable, accessible transportation to communities throughout the County.

Whether you need a ride to work, school, a medical appointment, shopping, the library, or other community services, JCPT offers a new way to get where you need to go. Service is available Monday through Friday and is open to residents, students, and visitors.

Four Routes Connecting Our Communities

JCPT operates a hub-and-spoke system centered in Watertown, with four primary routes:

- Black River Line: Watertown, Carthage, Evans Mills, Sackets Harbor and Henderson
- Northern Line: Watertown, Gouverneur, Antwerp, Philadelphia, Evans Mills, LeRay and Fort Drum
- Seaway Trail Line: Watertown, Depauville, Clayton, LaFargeville, Alexandria Bay, Dexter and Cape Vincent
- South Jeff Line: Watertown, Sandy Creek, Adams, Adams Center and Mannsville



Jefferson County Public Transit

More Flexible Than You Might Think

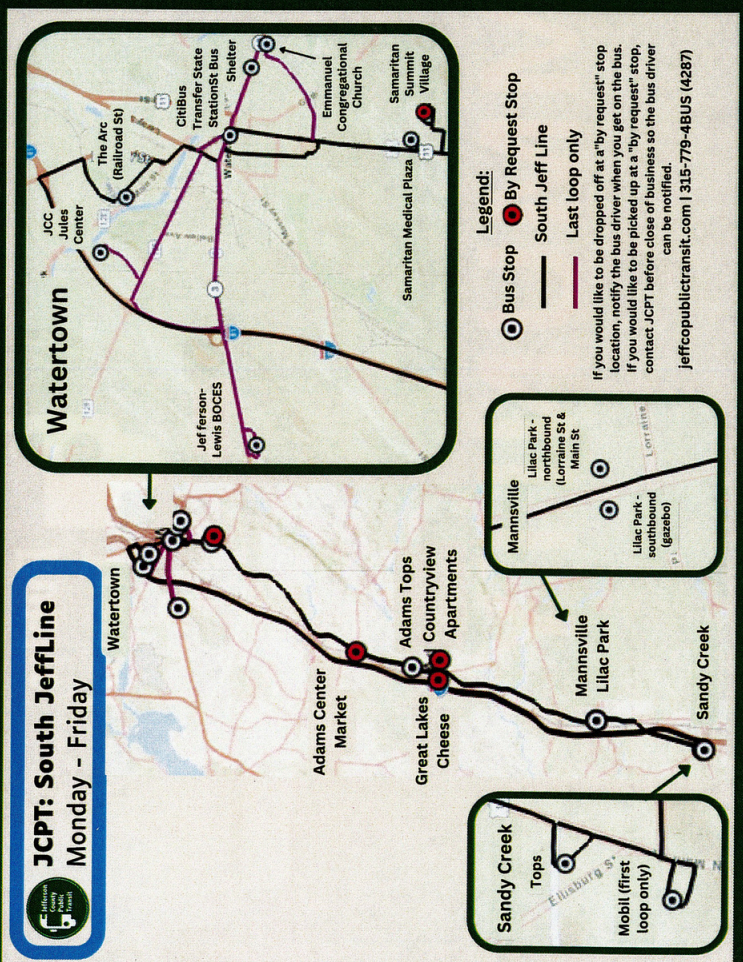
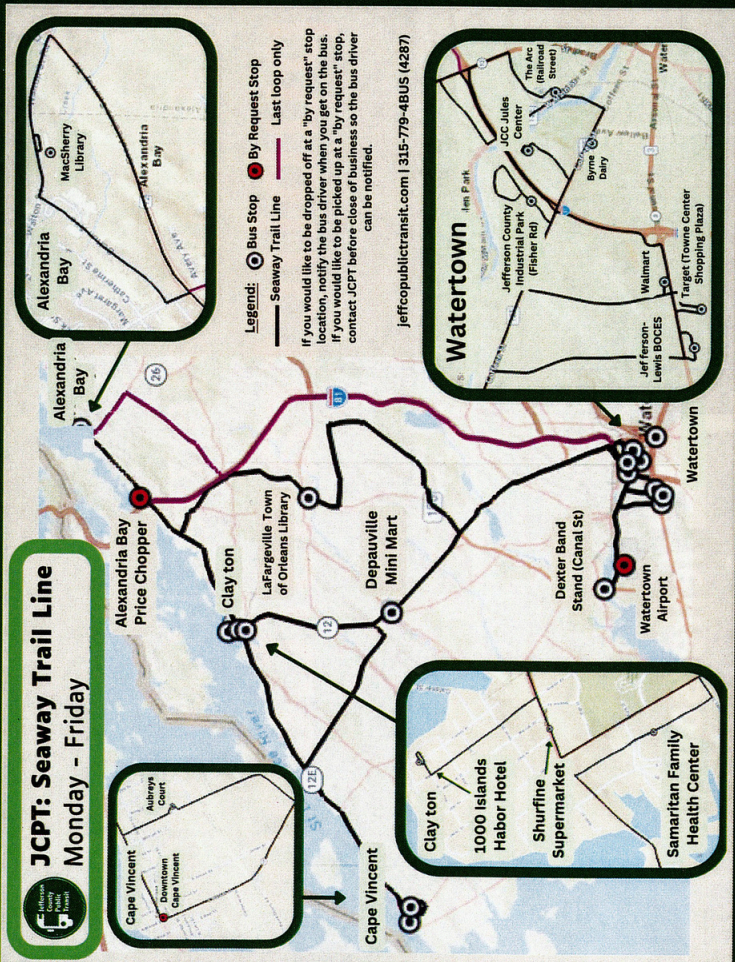
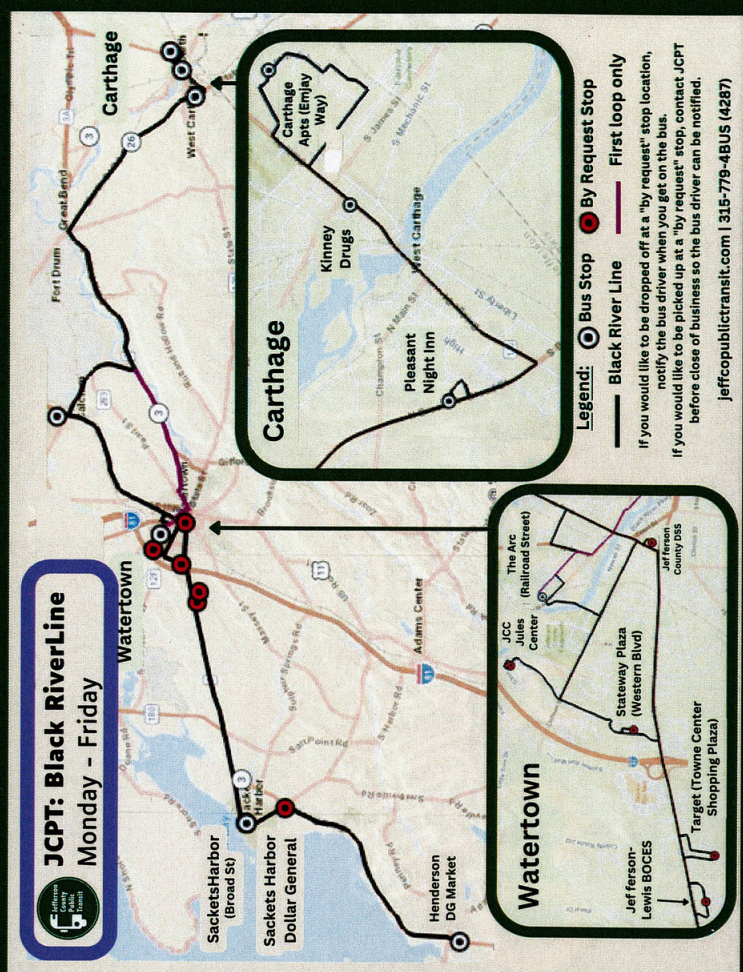
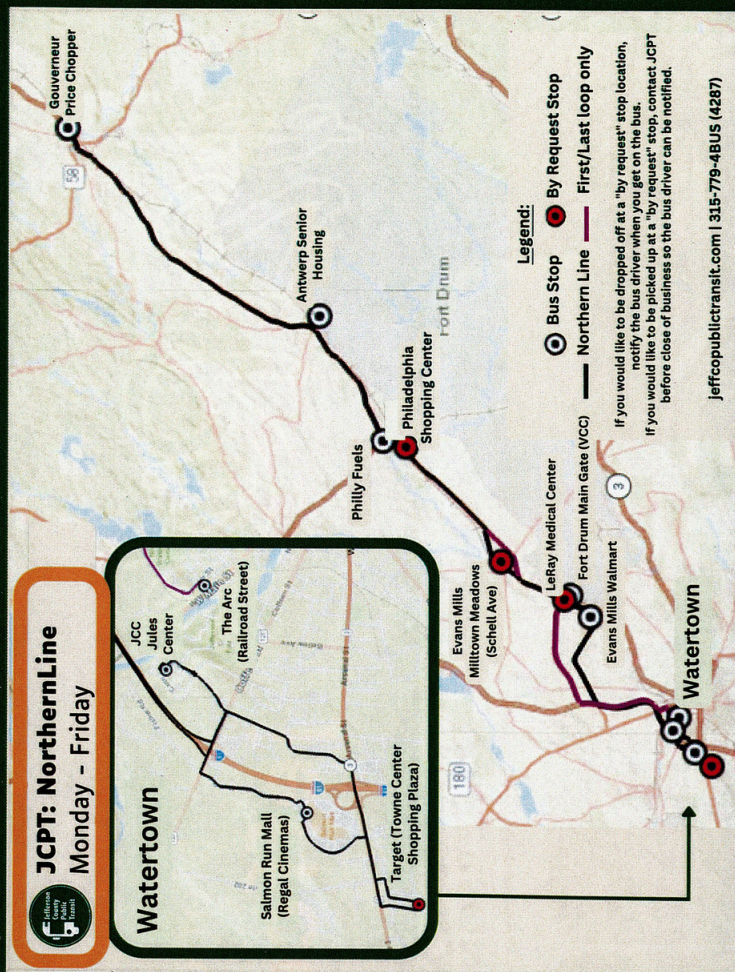
You don't necessarily have to live next to a designated bus stop to use the system. In addition to scheduled stops, JCPT offers several options designed specifically to make public transportation work in a rural county.

- **Flag Stops:** See the bus traveling along its route? Riders can wave down the driver, who can stop when there is a safe location to pull over.
- **Route Deviations:** With advance coordination, buses can travel up to ¾ mile off the regular route for passenger pickups and drop-offs.
- **JCPT Connect:** Live too far from the route to comfortably walk or bike to it? JCPT Connect provides FREE connecting transportation to and from a convenient location along the bus route. Call 315-782-8024 at least 48 hours in advance to arrange a ride.

Affordable & Accessible

A single ride costs just \$2, with discounted multi-ride passes available, including 20 rides for \$36. Cash is accepted on the bus, and passes may be purchased at The Arc Jefferson–St. Lawrence on Railroad Street in Watertown. All JCPT buses are ADA-accessible and equipped with bike racks, giving riders even more options for completing their trips. Check out route maps, schedules and stop locations, and start planning your trip at jeffcpublictransit.com.

Questions or need help planning your ride? Call 315-779-4BUS (4287).



LYME OPEN HOUSE

The Department continues to provide technical assistance during the Comprehensive Plan Update process for the Town of Lyme and Village of Chaumont, which began in June. The draft community survey continues to receive more responses each week, and will be open until the end of September. Currently, 236 respondents have submitted surveys online. A public open house was conducted on Thursday, August 27th, to kickoff the process publicly. During the open house a strengths, weakness, opportunities and threats (SWOT) issues session was conducted for the Town and the Village, Agriculture, land use and housing inventory information and surveys were also made available for completion and submission. After the public open house and survey period ends, chapters will be drafted to address future land use issues. The process will include Updated Vision, Goals, and Strategies for both the Village and Town respectively.



SEPTIC SYSTEM REPLACEMENT GRANT UPDATE

Funding Alert: Jefferson County Secures \$550K Septic System Grant

Jefferson County has secured \$550,000 in Round 5 state grant funding to help shoreline property owners upgrade or replace deficient or failing septic systems. The initiative targets properties within 250 feet of priority local waterbodies—including Lake Ontario, the St. Lawrence River, Hyde Lake, and Moon Lake—outside municipal sewer districts.

Failing systems contribute to nutrient pollution that threatens drinking water, local tourism, and fishing. Eligible single-family, two-family, seasonal, or small business property owners can receive a **50% reimbursement for eligible project costs, up to \$10,000 per system.**

How to Participate:

1. Check parcel eligibility using the Jefferson County Septic Grants Portal online map.
2. Complete and submit the application form.
3. If approved, hire a licensed engineer and contractor to upgrade and/or replace the system.
4. Submit receipts for reimbursement.

More Information: <https://www.jeffersoncountyny.gov/departments/planning/septic-grants>

Contact: Aileen Anderson, Community Dev. Coordinator, at planning@jeffersoncountyny.gov



FALL TRAINING SESSIONS

September 9, 2026: [Get Grant Ready Workshop](#) 6:30-8:30PM

Successful grant applications begin long before a funding opportunity is announced. Join our JCPCD Staff for an interactive workshop designed to help local governments and community organizations become more competitive for state and federal funding. Learn practical strategies to strengthen your community's readiness, discover programs that can improve grant competitiveness and explore where to find funding opportunities and other grant resources. Whether you're new to grants or looking to improve your success rate, you'll leave with practical tools, valuable resources, and a roadmap for future funding.

There will be ample time for questions and answers at the end of the presentation.



Register here:



September 28, 2026: [Beyond the Basics Workshop](#)

Session A: Public Meetings and Hearings & Record Keeping 3:30-5:30 PM

Effective local government starts with good process. This session covers the fundamentals of conducting public meetings and hearings, managing public participation, complying with the Open Meetings Law, and creating accurate records that support transparent, defensible decisions and preserve your board's work for years to come.

Session B: Hot Button Land Uses 6:30-8:30 PM

Local governments are not able to regulate all uses the same way: some uses have special statutory protection or rules established through case law and require special consideration, such as religious uses, mining, and telecommunications facilities. Other uses might be new to the local officials attempting to regulate them, such as solar energy facilities, barn weddings, and short-term rentals. This course is an overview of some of the land uses that many local officials find challenging, along with the statutory rules and case law associated with them and options for regulating them. There will be ample time for questions and answers at the end of each presentation.

If approved by your municipality, this workshop can provide up to 4 hours of training to meet the NYS Municipality Training requirements.

Register here:



Both sessions A & B presented by: NYS DOS



Department of State
Local Government

To make sure our workshops deliver the most value possible, we want your input. Is there a specific planning topic, zoning challenge, or regulatory hurdle your municipality is facing? Please reach out and let us know what training topics would be most helpful to you and your board!

Need a refresher course? Past training videos are available on our **website**.

Get in Touch: Share your suggestions or questions with our team by emailing us directly at: planning@jeffersoncountyny.gov

239-m 2026 EXEMPTIONS UPDATE

Jefferson County has made some changes to the GML §239-m referral process to help keep local decisions local! This summer, the Board of Legislators adopted an updated 2026 exemptions list that removes routine planning and zoning actions from review that generally do not have significant countywide or intermunicipal impacts. Once implemented locally, the new framework means that certain minor variances, small-scale development projects, accessory structures, rooftop solar and EV charging installations, telecommunications co-locations, temporary uses, and other routine actions will no longer need to make an unnecessary trip through the County Planning Board before a local board can act.

Information on the updated framework and a reciprocal resolution template were mailed to municipalities in July. The new exemptions do not take effect automatically; each town, village, and city must adopt the reciprocal resolution before it can begin using them. Additional information and copies of the resolution template are also available on the County Planning website here:

www.jeffersoncountyny.gov/departments/planning/239m-exemptions.

As always, major development, substantive zoning changes, utility-scale energy projects, new telecommunications towers, highway access issues, airport compatibility concerns, and other matters with broader regional implications will continue to receive County Planning Board review. For our municipalities, the practical result should be fewer unnecessary referrals, less paperwork, and faster decisions on routine local matters, all while preserving County review for the projects where a regional perspective adds value.

Questions about whether a particular action still requires County Planning Board review? Please contact Jefferson County Planning at (315) 785-3144 or planning@jeffersoncountyny.gov. We are always happy to help municipalities determine whether a referral is required, especially before a local board spends time preparing the referral paperwork!

WHAT TO SEND WITH YOUR REFERRAL

Each referral must utilize our [Referral Form](#) and include a “full statement” of the action being reviewed. That means everything your local board has received as part of the application, such as:

- A completed Environmental Assessment Form (EAF)
- Site plans drawn to scale, showing existing and proposed features
- Project descriptions, reports, or studies (traffic, drainage, lighting)
- The Proposed zoning text or local law if it involves a code amendment

Submitting a complete package ensures both the local and County boards can make timely, informed recommendations.

Early referral submission is encouraged!

Submission Deadline	CPB Meeting Date
Thursday, September 17	Tuesday, September 29
Thursday, October 15	Tuesday, October 27 @ Watertown Airport
Thursday, November 12	Tuesday, November 24
Thursday, December 17	Tuesday, December 29