

Jail Committee Report

April 10, 2026



Jail Committee Members

1. Jared Hyrkas, U.P. Engineers and Architects, committee chair
2. Tom Tikkanen, Commissioner, Board Chair
3. Gretchen Janssen, Commissioner
4. Faith Morrison, League of Women Voters of the Copper Country (LWVCC)
5. Valorie Troesch- LWVCC
6. Dan Holcomb, Copper Country Republicans chair
7. Mike Hamilton, trades, retired
8. Todd LaRoux, Building Department
9. Justin LaCosse, Houghton County Democratic Party
10. Andrea Johnson (new member of the committee as of 03/20/26, 97th District Court Drug Treatment Court Case Manager)

Former member: Sharon Foix, Copper Country Republicans (resigned 03/02/26)

Useful web links:

Houghton County	https://houghtoncounty.net
2026 Jail Project	https://houghtoncounty.net/2026_jail_project.php
2026 Jail feedback link	https://forms.cloud.microsoft/g/THKRayEYdu
Jail Committee FB page	https://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=61587667299354f
Jail Committees minutes	https://www.houghtoncounty.net/2026_jail_project.php
2025 Jail Project	https://houghtoncounty.net/jail.php
Abonmarch/Byce master plan	https://www.houghtoncounty.net/jail/hc_jail_development_plan.pdf
2025 Conceptual Design	https://www.houghtoncounty.net/docs/jail_building_imagery.pdf
2018 Jail Taskforce	https://www.houghtoncounty.net/commissions-jail%20taskforce.php
LWVCC	https://lwwccmi.org
Press Releases	https://my.lwv.org/michigan/copper-country/houghton-county-jail-update

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Formation of the Committee

In May 2025, the Board of Commissioners of Houghton County determined that the condition, size, and design of the current jail facility is inadequate and that a new jail should be built. A millage was put before the voters of Houghton County on August 5, 2025 to authorize a \$32 million bond to raise funds to build a new jail for Houghton County (see Appendix). The millage did not pass (44% Yes versus 56% No). Three committees were formed to investigate some aspects of this failed effort:

1. County Held Properties Committee—This committee investigated whether funds for a new jail could be generated from the sale of county-held properties
2. Sharon Avenue and Jail Property-Use Committee—This committee investigated the possible re-uses of both the former church building on the County’s Sharon Avenue property and the current jail building on Houghton Avenue.
3. Jail Committee—This committee had the objective to develop a proposed plan for a new jail/sheriff’s office that the voters will support.

All committees met in meetings open to the public and with minutes taken and posted (https://www.houghtoncounty.net/2026_jail_project.php). The Jail Committee met approximately monthly from November 2025 to April 2026 (see Appendix).

This is the April 10, 2026 report of the Jail Committee to the Houghton County Board of Commissioners.

Actions of the Committee

Our Objective: Develop a proposed plan for a new Jail/Sheriff's Office that the voters will support?

Preliminary discussions

The committee began with a review of the 2025 millage and discussed why it did not pass. The millage had been endorsed by both Copper Country Republican Party and the Houghton County Democratic Party. The discussion raised the following issues with passing the 2025 millage:

Reasons For a "No" vote on the 2025 Jail Millage

1. Voters did not want higher taxes
2. Controversies about acquisition of Sharon Avenue property and potential tear down of church building (waste of money)
3. Inmates don't need nicer places to live
4. Why so high a price (\$32 million)? Why not one of the cheaper plans suggested by the consultants?
5. Need to specify the plans better (uncertainty in the plan)
6. Did not like the specific plan (questions of why not some other plan)
7. Some people want other properties sold to reduce costs to taxpayers
8. Didn't address detainees that have mental health issues or are juveniles
9. The jail issue was pushed down their throat during the campaign to pass the millage
10. The jail project planning conducted was not transparent enough; commissioners not responsive
11. County might take in out-of-county inmates and they do not want this

From this list, some of the issues related to the design of the jail, some were related to issues being addressed by the other two committees, and some reflected lack of support for improving the conditions in the jail or objections to how the project had been developed or presented. See the following table for a breakdown.

Issues related to the design of the jail

Jail Committee

- Voters did not want higher taxes (cost of the jail)
- Why so high a price (\$32 million)? Why not one of the cheaper plans suggested by the consultants?
- Need to specify the plans better (uncertainty in the plan)
- Did not like the specific plan (questions of why not some other plan)
- Didn't address detainees with mental health issues, juvenile holdover

Issues addressed by the other two committees:

Sharon Avenue and Jail Use Committee

- Controversies about acquisition of Sharon Avenue property and potential tear down of church building (waste of money)

County Held Properties Committee

- Some people want other properties sold to reduce costs to taxpayers

Issues that reflect lack of support for improving the conditions in the jail or objections to how the project had been developed or presented

Board of Commissioners

- Inmates don't need nicer places to live
- The jail issue was pushed down their throat during the campaign to pass the millage
- The jail project planning conducted was not transparent enough; commissioners not responsive
- County might take in out-of-county inmates and they do not want this

The Jail Committee focused primarily on the first grouping of issues, all related to the design of the jail. Our activities are described in the sections below.

Communicating with the public

The purpose of the committee was to develop a proposed plan for a new jail/sheriff's office that the voters will support. This purpose had two parts: 1) developing a building plan for a new facility and 2) guiding the plan with considerations of the views of the public, since we seek a plan that the voters will support.

The committee addressed the second part first, discussing what we knew of the views of the public and also establishing methods of communicating with the public both during our work and in a campaign for a future jail millage.

The committee identified that social media is where many members of the public get their information. The committee brainstormed how to get a good sense of the public's views:

1. Solicit direct feedback. The county IT staff set up a link that would allow visitors to give advice, express opinions, and ask questions. (direct link: <https://forms.cloud.microsoft/g/THKRayEYdu>) The comments received there are shared with the committee and become input to the design/discussion.
2. Create videos for Facebook, Instagram, other social media to provide the public with information about jail conditions—a committee member made a trial video which was discussed, and this clarified what kind of videos would be most effective. A volunteer from the community is now actively researching and creating social media videos/posts for the committee.
3. Establish a Facebook page for the committee. With input from a member of the public, the FB page was established and a few members were trained on how to make postings and encouraged to do so. Comments are monitored. (<https://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=61587667299354f>; see Appendix). This effort is largely untapped and would benefit from a willing individual to spearhead it, because we have ideas for many postings to help inform the public. We also have an Instagram page that is only partially active.
4. Issue press releases –The LWVCC has taken this on, and the press releases are emailed to members of the press and posted on the League's website (<https://my.lwv.org/michigan/copper-country/houghton-county-jail-update>).
5. Assemble and post Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs). The LWVCC had FAQs prepared from the previous millage, and these were updated and are posted on the

League's website (lwwccmi.org) and a link to them was posted on the Committee's Facebook page.

6. Improve the County's website- Website Ad Hoc Committee has been constituted and is meeting to improve the public's access to information from the county.
7. Public service announcements- A PSA on WOLV encourages the public to keep up-to-date with the jail discussions.

There are additional tasks on our lists that have yet to be accomplished to aid in the public communication:

1. Need a history of the last 25 years of the effort to address the jail issues (see Appendix).
2. Need a history of the search for an appropriate place for a new jail (this is associated with the 2018 Jail Taskforce's recommendations, <https://www.houghtoncounty.net/commissions-jail%20taskforce.php>).
3. Write up for the public a discussion of why the current jail is in the condition it is (Short answer: the 1963-built jail has been updated as appropriate, but the spaces to do the work are inadequate and hemmed in by the housing so cannot readily be enlarged).
4. Post on social media the reasons why our committee believes the Sharon Avenue property is the best location for the jail.
5. Create additional social media postings based on work done to date and as the County proceeds to next steps.
6. Once videos get developed, add to the YouTube channel for the county (<https://www.youtube.com/@CountyofHoughton>).
7. Post/share on social media the existence of the press releases and links to jail materials on the League's pages.

Seeking additional funds other than taxes

The Jail Committee has pursued federal funding to cover the costs for the design and engineering work for a new Houghton County Jail. Federal funding is available through Congressionally Directed Spending Requests that are submitted by a region's U.S. Representative and U.S. Senators. Two requests were submitted this year, one through Representative Jack Bergman's office and a second through Senator Elissa Slotkin's office. See the press release from the LWVCC in the Appendix.

Issues related to the design of the jail

The strongest opinion expressed by the public is that the cost of the jail is too high. The committee investigated design and building changes that would decrease this cost. One big issue is where to place the jail. A second significant issue is how big the individual spaces in the new jail need to be. And a third issue is which spaces/functions should be in the new jail.

Jail location

The committee discussed several of the possible choices for where to build the new jail including the property nearest to the courthouse, other properties in Houghton and outside of the city of Houghton, and the Sharon Avenue property. We reviewed the findings of the 2018 Jail Taskforce and their recommendations, and we found that report persuasive. That committee looked at Camp Kitwen, a Dodge Street location, and several other properties. Feedback at that time indicated a strong public sentiment against locating a jail near downtown. In response to that feedback, the 2018 Jail Taskforce recommended to the Board to find a property not in downtown Houghton but within the City of Houghton. That is what the Board did, and this was the reason for the purchase of the Sharon Avenue property. Please see the 2018 Jail Taskforce's website for details.

By state law, the sheriff is required to maintain an office within the county seat, in this case within the city limits of Houghton. A separate requirement states that the Sheriff is the individual responsible for the operation of the county's jail, which includes the safety of the jail's staff and inmates. The lean nature of the operations of the jail and the sheriff's office in Houghton County require active daily participation by the sheriff. Remote oversight by the sheriff would have staffing implications that would add significantly to the operational costs of the jail and may be a practical impossibility without substantial increases to the operational budget. Further, as the separation distance between the jail facility and the courthouse increases, so do labor costs related to transportation of inmates. As a result, locating the jail facility outside the city limits of Houghton would saddle the county with significant recurring obligations that are likely to offset any savings realized in the initial construction of the jail or retrofit of an existing facility. For this reason, while locations outside of Houghton were considered, none were able to overcome the disadvantages described above.

The Jail Committee voted to endorse building the new jail and sheriff's office at the Sharon Avenue property.

Sizes of spaces within the jail

To investigate the details of the design of a new jail, the committee formed a subcommittee, chaired by Sheriff Josh Saaranen, called the Jail Needs Subcommittee. This subcommittee met approximately twice a month and produced a report for the Jail Committee with its recommendations.

The Jail Needs Subcommittee was able to extract from the Abonmarch/Byce (AB) master plan a table of square footages for each of the departments in the jail/sheriff's office. These square footages are said by AB to relate to the appropriate size of a 51-bed jail. A jail that can house 51 inmates is the appropriate minimum size for a county of our jail's average daily population (ADP), accounting for the average amount of extra space that is needed to ensure that proper classification of inmates can take place.

The 51-bed AB numbers form the basis of a discussion of what the minimum sizes should be for the operations of the new jail in Houghton County. The Needs Subcommittee report presents the following recommendations and findings:

- 1. The primary issue is safety. Our jail facility needs to be inherently safe for workers, inmates, and the public. It is not possible to modify the current jail to make the necessary improvements.*
- 2. The five scenarios produced by the jail captain and reviewed by the subcommittee show what the needs are in an improved jail/sheriff's office facility.*
- 3. The AB square footages and layout are a good starting point to understanding the size and work-flow needs in a jail that complies with MDOC [Michigan Department of Corrections] requirements.*
- 4. Estimated costs would go down if we replace the contingency factors used by AB with actual knowledge of what construction surprises we are likely or unlikely to face in a build on the Sharon Avenue property.*
- 5. Experienced engineers/designers are the ones to make tradeoffs that could further reduce the cost of the build (by shrinking spaces, or sharing spaces, for instance). This work would be done in conjunction with the Sheriff's staff to ensure the critical needs are met. Once again, safety and effectiveness of the jail are primary concerns.*
- 6. Anything that reduces inmate population would also reduce costs. Thus, Treatment Court and other diversion programs should be important considerations.*
- 7. An on-site arraignment courtroom, juvenile holding, and space to deal with both inmates in mental health crisis and for drug/alcohol testing are essential additional pieces for a new Houghton County jail and should appear explicitly in the plans with the other crucial spaces that were previously identified by AB.*

A final note. The longer we stretch out the process of making the necessary changes, the more funds are “wasted” on the current jail – an unsafe, out-of-date, not fit-to-purpose facility. It is not fiscally responsible to delay further.

Diversion Programs (reduce the ADP; increase community safety)

Funding from the State of Michigan is available to counties through the Community Corrections Act (CCA) to support local efforts to divert appropriate individuals from jail/prison into community-based corrections programs. Marquette County leads the Regional Community Corrections Advisory Board (CCAB), which Houghton County can join and utilize the existing administrative structure of, to access funds and enhance our justice system operations. As a CCAB member, we could incorporate the use of an evidence-based pretrial risk assessment tool during the jail booking process to inform bail decisions and identify individuals appropriate for pretrial release or alternatives to incarceration such as Treatment Court. At the same time, the pretrial risk assessment identifies those higher risk individuals who should be incarcerated due to an increased likelihood of reoffending or failing to appear for court, thereby improving public safety. In addition to this jail population management tool, as a CCAB member we can increase access to drug/alcohol treatment and other rehabilitation programs to address the needs of individuals involved with the criminal justice system.

To access CCA funds for the next fiscal year, Houghton County would need to appoint one Commissioner from the County Board to the Marquette Regional CCAB by June 1, 2026. An informational meeting with a representative from Marquette County is scheduled for April 30, 2026, at 12:00pm in the Houghton County District Court courtroom for anyone who is interested.

While the focus of this committee is to develop a plan for a new jail that voters will support, it is essential to examine how our jail is being used and the various entry points (e.g., new arrests, probation violations, warrants, etc.) that lead to a jail booking. What processes can be adjusted to more efficiently use taxpayer money and more effectively reduce recidivism? These are discussions that could occur among key justice system decision makers going forward to ensure the most responsible use of our jail space, as well as other county resources.

Note that the jail is over capacity as of the writing of this report.

Recommendations

The Jail Committee offers the recommendations detailed below. Above all, continue to involve the public in all steps of this project. Additional specific recommendations follow.

Moving forward with jail design

Continue the work to do space planning for the proposed facility. Based on the AB 51-bed space numbers (in a draft spreadsheet the committee is working on; not included in this report), volunteer work could continue with some brainstorming sessions to fully identify spaces to be included, including the features and characteristics required to enable safe and efficient execution of jail staff's daily activities. This exercise would ideally result in the following:

- A jail facility vision that meets the specific and basic needs of Houghton County. Note: The jail will be no larger than necessary and at a minimum complexity (i.e. no “gold plating”.)
- By understanding the needs of the Sheriff and his team, efficiencies may be captured in the design of the jail that to minimize staffing and recurring maintenance costs.
- A jail concept that includes modest features and spaces to enable diversion and rehabilitation, ADP is minimized (resulting in a smaller jail facility.)
- Create a block definition diagram (BDD) to document what features/ equipment would need to exist in each. The result would be a reasonably complete list of spaces and a high-level plan of what goes where, which could then be used later by a professional as a resource/starting point to inform the size estimates and also things like the spaces' power/data/utility requirements. The goal would be to make sure when we say “booking” or “evidence storage” that we're all picturing the same thing and we're able to communicate this vision to the professionals and the public.
- By clearly communicating these needs to a future design firm, the non-recurring engineering cost to the county would ideally be reduced by streamlining the requirements definition and stakeholder engagement phases of the design process.

Once this exercise is complete, better definition of the jail size and features would exist. This information could facilitate engagement with local contractors to get their feedback on the likely construction cost (more below). This is intended to be a two-way dialog – feedback will be solicited from contractors on ways to minimize construction costs, if they are willing to provide that feedback.

Local experts' input (RFI, RFQ, Meet and Greet)

Seek input from local experts. At the most recent committee meeting there was considerable discussion of perhaps having an RFI—*Request for Information* event or document submittal or an RFQ—*Request for Qualifications* document submittal where interested parties would submit their qualifications and plan for delivering a jail to the County. Both of these requests, or even a simple workshop or meet and greet, would serve as an open venue to invite local (and not local) contractors to come and hear what type of a build is under consideration and to offer their views of the plans and possible ways forward. It is thought that getting this type of group together could help build confidence that a smaller amount of funding could be sought while still raising enough revenue to build a safe and effective jail that meets standards. Formal engineering plans would need to be contracted for in the future with an RFQ or RFP (Request for Proposals), but getting local input might be a step to help understand how much funding is actually needed, since the current cost estimate, while based on the consultants' expert opinion and by applying estimation techniques based on other areas, still represents a very large range of costs, making it difficult to commit to a specific number without risking of under- or over-estimation.

This discussion went further into project delivery types, and we discussed the traditional Design-Bid-Build, Design-Build, CM with incentivized profit, and the fact that there are a few other possible project delivery methods that might work. We are unsure if they are all permissible under the County's procurement policy and ask that the commissioners determine that with their legal counsel so it can be determined if any of the options besides Design-Bid-Build could be pursued. There is a chance for project cost savings if all delivery types can be considered.

Formal Board commitments

Make formal Board commitments. Members of the public have expressed concerns about what exactly the plan is for the jail project. For example, several years ago, there was discussion of moving the courts to Sharon Avenue and some wonder if that still is the plan. Talk of demolishing the church building resulted in a sharp response from the public, and the change by the Sharon Avenue committee to thoughtfully assessing re-use of that building was a positive outcome. Without a clear and concise plan for jail-related projects, misinformation and assumptions can spread though the community, drowning out the actual deliberations of decisionmakers.

What is the solution to this? Going to a millage before there is a formal plan involves asking the public to rely on County leadership to make sound judgements. Will the public agree to

do that? The three-committee process of the last many months is a testimony to the Board's commitment to serious, open engagement with the public. What more can be done? Here are some suggestions:

1. Go on the record (formal votes) about plans that are established. For example, the millage resolution used in 2025 is very broad. Can the millage "ask" be more specific? With guardrails?
2. Commit to shortening the bond or reducing the number of mills if costs are less than imagined, and if it is legally possible to do this. Contingency planning inflates costs to cover unknowns in a project. If things work out well and costs are not as high as feared, the Board could commit to shortening the bond or reducing the number of mills to save the taxpayers money.
3. Establish an ongoing process for the public to have input and share information with the public. Find someone willing to spearhead Facebook postings of the project developments, for example.
4. Address the issues summarized in the third section of the table on page 5 and issue statements about them. For example, can the County commit that it is not seeking to house other counties' prisoners?
5. Support diversion programs. Every arrestee who can safely be released on their own recognizance is money saved by the taxpayers. Every arrestee who is correctly identified as being appropriately incarcerated increases community safety. Also, taxpayers' money is saved every time a county diversion program succeeds in preventing an offender from becoming a repeat offender. The regional Treatment Court is a successful diversion program in place in Houghton County. Greater emphasis on pre-trial risk assessment of arrestees saves money and increases public safety.

Millage planning and timing

Weigh trade-offs for a November vote versus a later vote. The Board of Commissioners is tentatively planning for a November 2026 millage vote. The time is short for completing sufficient design work that would be convincing to the public prior to that.

The Jail Committee has discussed whether engineering plans need to be developed for there to be a successful millage. Are there actions, short of presenting completed engineering plans, that could be taken to meet the needs of the public in their decision making? The committee assessed the advantages and disadvantages of a November 2026 millage election.

Here are the advantages: there will be an election in November and thus the ~\$30,000 cost of a special election in the future would be avoided if the millage is on the November ballot. Also, some members of the public feel that November is the only time to have such an important ballot question, as it is the main election day. Additionally, every necessary repair to the current jail is, in the long term, a waste of taxpayers' money.

Disadvantages include the limited amount of time the County has to develop a new plan that voters will support. If it is the same plan as last time, some of the committee believe it is unlikely to pass. Also, voters may get "jail millage fatigue" and be further infuriated that they keep being asked to support it. Then if it fails and is put on a future ballot, they may feel like the millage is being attempted to be snuck by them if it is done during a minor election in the future. Also, the County will not know in November 2026 if it has been awarded either of the grant requests that were sent in to the federal government, so it may be asking for more than it needs.

Budget the jail project

Budget the jail project. The jail is a priority of the Board; priorities are in the budget. The 2027 budget of the County will soon be under development for September adoption. The costs for moving forward with jail plans should be part of the county's budget and trade-offs with other services made clear. If funds are not raised through a millage, and if the jail is essential, then the costs fall on the general funds of the county. Even if the funds can be raised through a millage, it would show good will to the county residents if the county can prove that it will pay for a portion of the jail with its annual budget so that the millage ask is less than the full cost of the jail.

Future of the Committee

Many of the Committee members are committed to continuing the work of the County on this project as the planning proceeds. The next scheduled meeting of this committee is May 7, 2026 at 4pm in the 5th floor conference room of the Houghton County Courthouse. They would encourage members of the other committees to join them if those committees are not continuing after this point.

Acknowledgements

Members of the public who made public comments at our meetings or on our Facebook page through the County's link or otherwise communicated them to the committee. The Sheriff and his staff, whose participation has been essential.

Jennifer Kelly and staff of the Clerk's office – for minutes, agenda, Microsoft Teams, participation in the meetings.

Chelsea Rheaux, Paige Setter-Hallwachs, Alexandra Jahfetson, and other members of Houghton County Administration who have assisted.

Alex Radke-Houghton County IT support.

Krissy Sundstrum for her assistance with setting up Social Media accounts.

All members of the various committees past and present working to address the County's jail needs.

Behind-the-scenes volunteers who have worked to address the needs of the people of Houghton County for a safe and efficient jail.

Members of the Board of Commissioners.

Appendices

- I. Jail Resolution passed by a 4-1 vote of the Houghton County Board of Commissioners May 13, 2025 calling for the construction of a new jail for the county.
- II. Meeting dates and the members of the committee's subcommittee.
- III. Houghton County Jail Committee Facebook Page
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I.

**RESOLUTION SUBMITTING
JAIL AND COUNTY BUILDING IMPROVEMENT BOND
PROPOSAL**

COUNTY OF HOUGHTON

State of Michigan

Resolution #25-007

Minutes of a regular meeting of the County Board of Commissioners of the County of Houghton, State of Michigan (the "County"), held on May 13, 2025, at 10:00 a.m., Eastern Daylight Time.

PRESENT: Commissioners: Tikkanen, Keranen, Anderson, Janssen, Britz.

ABSENT: Commissioners: None.

The following preamble and resolution were offered by Commissioner Anderson and supported by Commissioner Janssen.

WHEREAS, the County Board of Commissioners (the "County Board") of the County of Houghton, Michigan (the "County"), has determined that it is necessary for the health, safety and welfare of the County and its residents and property owners that the County acquire, construct, furnish and equip new county jail facilities, and remodel, re-construct, renovate, furnish and equip existing county buildings, including interests in land, site improvements, and parking improvements, together with rights-of-way, appurtenances and attachments thereto, and demolition of existing buildings (the "Projects"); and

WHEREAS, the County Board has determined that the County should borrow money in an amount not to exceed Thirty-Two Million Dollars (\$32,000,000), and issue general obligation unlimited tax bonds of the County in such amount, in one or more series (the "Bonds"), for the purpose of paying all or part of the cost of the Project; and

WHEREAS, the County Board has determined that a proposal to issue the Bonds for the Project shall be submitted to the qualified electors of the County at an election to be held in the County on Tuesday, August 5, 2025 (the "Election Date"); and

WHEREAS, in order for the bond proposal to be submitted to the qualified electors, it is necessary for the County Board to certify the ballot wording of the proposal to the County Clerk as required by Act 116, Public Acts of Michigan, 1954, as amended (the "Michigan Election Law").

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED THAT:

1. The bond proposal attached hereto as Exhibit A (the "Bond Proposal") shall be submitted to a vote of the qualified electors of the County on the Election Date.

2. The ballot wording of the Bond Proposal is hereby certified to the County Clerk for submission to the County's electors on the Election Date. The County Clerk is hereby authorized and directed to file this Resolution and/or complete any such forms, certificates or documents as may be required by the County Clerk to evidence the foregoing certification and/or submission by no later than Tuesday, May 13, 2025.

3. The County Clerk is hereby directed to (a) post and publish notice of the last day of registration and notice of the election as required by the Michigan Election Law; and (b) have prepared and printed, as provided by the Michigan Election Law, ballots for submitting the Bond Proposal at the election, which ballots shall contain the proposal appearing herein, or the proposition shall be stated as a proposal on the voting machines, which ballots may include other matters presented to the electorate on the same date.

4. The estimated millage rate in the first year and simple average annual millage rate set forth in the Bond Proposal, which have been prepared for the County by Robert W. Baird & Co. Incorporated, financial advisors to the County, are reasonable estimates of such millage rates based on current assumptions.

5. The County may incur expenditures for the Project prior to receipt of proceeds of the Bonds and may advance monies for that purpose from funds available to the County, to be reimbursed from proceeds of the Bonds when available. The County makes the following declarations for the purpose of complying with the reimbursement rules of Treas. Reg. § 1.150-2 pursuant to the Internal Revenue Code of 1986, as amended:

- (a) If the ballot proposal is approved by the electors, the County reasonably expects to reimburse itself with proceeds of the Bonds for certain costs of the Project which were paid or will be paid from available funds of the County subsequent to sixty (60) days prior to today.
- (b) The maximum principal amount of debt expected to be issued for the Project, including issuance costs, is \$32,000,000.
- (c) A reimbursement allocation of the capital expenditures described above with the proceeds of the Bonds will occur not later than 18 months after the later of (i) the date on which the expenditure is paid, or (ii) the date the Project is placed in service or abandoned, but in no event more than three (3) years after the original expenditure is paid. A reimbursement allocation is an allocation in writing that evidences the County's use of the proceeds of the Bonds to reimburse the County for a capital expenditure made pursuant to this resolution.

6. Miller, Canfield, Paddock and Stone, P.L.C. is hereby approved as bond counsel for the Bonds.

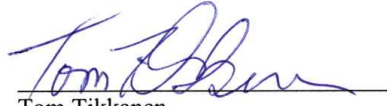
7. Robert W. Baird & Co., Incorporated is hereby approved as registered municipal advisor for the Bonds.

8. All resolutions and parts of resolutions, insofar as they conflict with the provisions of this resolution, are hereby repealed.


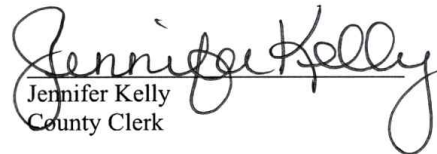
AYES: Commissioners: Anderson, Janssen, Tikkanen, Britz (4)

NAYS: Commissioners: Keranen (1)

RESOLUTION DECLARED ADOPTED.


Tom Tikkanen
Chairman

I HEREBY CERTIFY that the attached is a true and complete copy of a resolution adopted by the County Board of Commissioners of the County of Houghton, State of Michigan, at a regular meeting held on May 13, 2025 and that the meeting was conducted and public notice of the meeting was given pursuant to Act No. 267, Public Acts of Michigan, 1976, and that the minutes of the meeting were kept and will be or have been made available as required by the Act.



Jennifer Kelly
County Clerk

II: Meeting dates and the members of the committee's subcommittee.

Jail Committee Meetings (monthly)

1. 11/3/25
2. 12/8/25
3. 1/5/26
4. 2/2/26
5. 3/2/26
6. 3/23/26 (joint with Jail Needs Subcommittee)
7. 4/6/26
8. 5/7/26 (scheduled)

Jail Needs Subcommittee Members

1. Sheriff Josh Saaranen
2. Detective Charlie Klein
3. Captain Travis Dessellier
4. Faith Morrison
5. Valorie Troesch
6. Justin LaCosse
7. Mike Hamilton
8. Jennifer Kelly
9. Susanna Peters

III.



Houghton County Jail Committee · [Follow](#)

March 4 · 🌐

What is the Houghton County Jail Committee?

The voters in Houghton County have rejected funding for a new jail 3 times in the past 16 years. Each time, voters have said that the process was not transparent, that the proposed jail plan is too expensive, that a new jail simply coddles prisoners, etc. This Jail Committee was formed by volunteer residents after the most recent millage proposal failed in August 2025. The committee members believe that the Houghton County jail is a dangerous place for the people who work there and for the public. It needs to be replaced. The purposes of the Committee are to:

- Get voter feedback about why the jail millage failed
- Give the public an opportunity to ask questions, get answers, and give ideas
- Keep voters fully informed about what is going on in terms of planning for a new jail facility
- Make a recommendation to the County Board of Commissioners for a fiscally responsible safe and modern jail concept that the voters will approve

What kind of information is shared here?

- Current Jail Deficiencies
- Location for new jail
- MDOC requirements
- Consequences of doing nothing
- Required spaces in a jail
- Size
- Building type / construction materials
- Total cost
- Cost to the taxpayer

What can you do?

We invite you to ask questions, make comments, share ideas and suggestions, and give feedback. We will read and consider everything you submit. You are entitled to share your opinions but please be respectful. What you submit will be seen by everyone who accesses this page. You are also welcome to attend Jail Committee meetings. They are all open to the public and are announced in advance.

Comparisons among past millage requests



Attempts to replace the jail in:

1. **2000**
 - a) 34 beds + 21 work camp beds
 - b) Failed 25%/75% **\$3.3 million**
2. **2011**-on the property next to Courthouse (Dodge St)
 - a) 110 beds + 21 work camp beds (Too big)+**Sheriff's office & District court**
 - b) Failed 26%/74% **\$15 million**
3. **2018** on the back of the Courthouse (work camp where current jail is located; **no new sheriff's office**)
 - a) 55 beds; **Jail only**
 - b) Failed 49%/51% **\$11 million**
4. **2025**—Sharon Avenue, Jail **and Sheriff's office, small courtroom;**
 - a) 70 beds, **\$32 million**
 - b) Failed 44%/56%

PRESS RELEASE LWVCC, April 7, 2026

LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS OF THE COPPER COUNTRY

Addressing Issues with the Houghton County Jail

Faith Morrison, *Advocate for Addressing HoCo Jail Issues*
fmorriso9@yahoo.com, cell: 906-487-9703
website: lwwccmi.org

Special Topic: Two Congressionally Directed Spending Requests Submitted for Engineering Costs related to the Houghton County Jail Project

The Houghton County Jail Committee has pursued Federal funding for expenses in design engineering work for a new Houghton County Jail. Federal funding is available through Congressionally Directed Spending Requests that are submitted by a region's U.S. Representative and U.S. Senators. Two requests were submitted this year, one through Representative Jack Bergman's office and a second through Senator Elissa Slotkin's office.

History

First submission (Representative Bergman)

On December 8, 2025, Jail Committee member Dan Holcomb invited Colin Gwillim from Representative Jack Bergman's Office to attend the committee meeting to discuss what federal grants may be available to assist the County in building a jail. From the minutes of that meeting: "[Gwillim] stated there is potential funding for a community project through **Congressionally Directed Spending**. It is a community facility program for rural areas [**FY 2027 Community Project Funding Requests**], and jails are an approved project type. This happens one (1) time per year through an Appropriation Committee. The Appropriation Committee accepts application in January or February 2026 and then would hope to recommend funding the project for the next fiscal year in the fall [Fall 2027]."

The Jail Committee agreed that this idea was worth pursuing. At the January 5, 2026 Jail Committee meeting there was a discussion of what should be the "ask" for the request, and it was determined that engineering work towards the jail design of up to \$2 million would be appropriate and would best advance the campaign to address the problems with the Houghton County Jail. Holcomb agreed to spearhead the application process.

Over several months Holcomb completed the application with input from the Jail Committee and the Congressman's office and submitted it to Congressman Bergman's website in March 2026 with two letters of support:

1. 97th District Court Judge Nicholas Daavettila and Houghton County Prosecutor Daniel Helmer
2. Houghton County Sherrif Josh Saaranen

Second Submission (Senator Slotkin)

On March 25, 2026, Jail Committee member Valorie Troesch spoke with Jay Gage, Senator Slotkin's U.P. representative, about opportunities for federal funding for the Houghton County jail project, specifically, funds to help with engineering/architectural development plans. She indicated to Gage that a similar proposal was submitted to Rep. Bergman's office for \$2 million.

Troesch learned that there are federal funding opportunities available through Senator Slotkin, through the **FY27 Congressionally Directed Spending** program, but the deadline for grant submission was rapidly approaching (deadline = 11:59 pm Monday, March 31, 2026). Gage said that a proposal for \$1 million would be appropriate for engineering development of the jail project.

Troesch contacted other members of the Jail Committee and folks interested in supporting the Houghton County jail project and volunteered to coordinate the submission of a request. She was able to obtain five letters of support:

1. Houghton County Board of Commissioners
2. 97th District Court Judge Nicholas Daavettila and Houghton County Prosecutor Daniel Helmer
3. Houghton County Sherrif Josh Saaranen
4. Chief Public Defender David Gemignani from Tri-County Public Defenders
5. Co-Presidents Faith Morrison and Linda Belote, League of Women Voters of the Copper Country

Troesch submitted the request through Senator Slotkin's online portal on March 28, 2026.

Both requests are for fiscal year 2027 monies and the proposals went to federal programs that are highly competitive. The projects that receive funding will be notified in 2027.

In both submissions, a good case was made for the need for the engineering plans. The public has expressed that it will only support a jail building project that is clear, economical, and sufficiently well planned; getting to this level of design requires the kind of engineering work proposed. Frank and open conversations with the public are needed to move forward with a solution to address the issues with the Houghton County Jail.

The letter of support from the League of Women Voters of the Copper Country is appended.



March 26, 2026

To Whom it May Concern,

On behalf of the League of Women Voters of the Copper Country we are writing to support the **FY 2027 Community Project Funding Request** addressing engineering and design cost for a new Houghton County Jail (Houghton, Michigan). The request is for the much-needed funds to cover essential steps towards building a new jail and sheriff's office to replace the 1963 jail that is currently in place.

Houghton County has needed a new jail for a long time, and the LWV of the Copper Country has been working with the Houghton County Board and other stakeholders to address this problem for three decades. We are a vibrant rural community that has seen recent growth after decades of struggle after our signature copper mining industry declined and then disappeared from our community in the 1960s. We are caught in a bind—the jail is an expensive investment for our community, but we struggle to afford the engineering and design work that would allow us to build community support for this long-term investment.

Four different plans for a new jail have gone before the electorate and failed in the last 25 years (2000, 2011, 2018, and 2025). Each design was different and an attempt to convince the public of the need and merits of each design. The failure of these ballot measures indicate that the voters need more details and more input in order to support what is now a likely \$35 million project.

The proposed *Community Project Funding* would assist Houghton County by providing **\$1 million in funds** for engineering and design work that would specify sizes and spaces to be included in the project and their associated costs and tradeoffs. This detailed engineering work is absolutely essential to the ultimate project of convincing the electorate to fund the new facility. The community's participation in examining the design plan, weighing in, and making compromises to reduce costs, is essential community work without which we are unlikely to succeed in the fifth time the County requests funds for the needed jail.

The current jail was built in 1963 and has been expanded into the former living quarters of the sheriff that were once part of the facility. The jail is older than the computer revolution, and updating and maintaining technology-related updates is one of the problems with the jail. As more than 6 decades have passed, it has been increasingly difficult to keep up with advances in corrections policy and standards. The working spaces of our jail facility require many rooms to serve two or three or four purposes, causing the jail staff to have to juggle the various things that are happening at any one time. This is a recipe for incidents, is inherently unsafe, and it has only been through the diligence and talents of our current jail staff that we have avoided a serious incident in the last several decades. To be proactive in providing essential jail services to Houghton County, we need a new jail.

As a non-partisan community group that has been active in the community since 1960, the League of Women Voters of the Copper Country is in an excellent position to comment on the jail situation in our county—the need is urgent, and allocating the requested funds would have a significant impact throughout our region. We urge you to award this funding.

Sincerely,



Faith A. Morrison
Co-President



Linda Belote
Co-President

League of Women Voters of the Copper Country
P. O. Box 815, Houghton, MI 49931