

**HOUGHTON COUNTY APPOINTMENT COMMITTEE
ORGANIZATIONAL MEETING
APRIL 10, 2025**

The Houghton County Appointment Committee held the first Committee meeting on Thursday, April 10, 2025, in the 5th Floor Conference room of the Courthouse, City of Houghton.

Call to Order:

Judge Strome called the meeting to order at 1:00 p.m.

Pledge of Allegiance:

The Committee did the Pledge of Allegiance.

Roll call:

The following Committee members responded to roll call done by Jennifer Kelly, County Clerk:

Fraser Strome-Probate Judge, Dan Helmer-Prosecuting Attorney and Jennifer Kelly-County Clerk.

Also in attendance was Todd LaRoux-Building Department Manager, Lindsay Ringuette from EGLE, and Renee Cunningham, Chief Deputy County Clerk who was doing the minutes.

Judge Strome stated there are two (2) MCLs for the Appointment of a Drain Commissioner. One has the Prosecutor and County Clerk; MCL 280.21, and the other has the Probate Judge, Prosecutor and County Clerk; MCL 189.209. Prosecutor Helmer stated this is a temporary appointment until the candidate would have to go on the ballot.

Judge Strome felt he could continue as Chair of the Appointment Committee. Prosecutor Helmer and Clerk Kelly agreed.

Judge Strome thanked John Pekkala for his many years of excellent service as Drain Commissioner.

Approval of Agenda:

The Committee agreed to strike the rate of pay on 6b. The law states the Board of Commissioners cannot reduce the Drain Commissioners pay, only increase it.

Motion was made by Fraser Strome and seconded by Daniel Helmer to approve the Agenda with the one (1) correction.

The Motion carried by a voice vote: Ayes 3, Nays 0.

Public Comments:

Todd LaRoux discussed John Pekkala's role in supporting the lakes and lake levels. The Building Department cannot issue a building permit if the Drain Commissioner does not issue a soil erosion permit.

Lindsay Ringuette, Soil Erosion Program Auditor, stated she sent an email to the Committee after she saw the Agenda. She has concerns with the time frame of appointing a new Drain Commissioner. She stated she did not want to put a violation on the County of not having the program coverage. A permit has to be approved within 30 days.

Discussion of Appointing a New Houghton County Drain Commissioner:

Judge Strome stated the Appointment Committee is to appoint someone until the public can elect. He does not see a reason someone cannot be appointed.

Lindsey stated there are 2 tests the candidate will need to pass. Testing is scheduled for April 21, 2025. There is a 375 page manual.

Judge Strome stated the Open Meetings Act must be followed. The Appointment Committee must give some time for other people to apply.

Clerk Kelly stated she had a conversation with John Pekkala and he stated would be willing to help out until someone was appointed.

Judge Strome said the Prosecutor and County Clerk can appoint John Pekkala to stay on until he is not needed. He commented on the battles that have gone on with Twin Lakes lake levels and how important it was that Clerk Kelly brought this to his attention.

Prosecutor Helmer recommended we have a Microsoft Teams available for the next meeting. He questioned the timing of the 2024 election and now the retirement.

Judge Strome commented on 1 of the applicants having 1 of the certifications from the 5 applicants who applied through the Administrator's Office.

Lindsey stated testing cannot be delayed.

Judge Strome said the easiest solution is for John Pekkala to help out until a new person is in place.

Clerk Kelly requested the Committee get it in writing that John Pekkala is willing to help out until a new person is in place. The Committee agreed.

Lindsey will send a list of Drain Commissioners in surrounding area to the Appointment Committee.

The Committee will go with 2 plans. Plan A-Ask John Pekkala. Plan B-choose someone from the list to be in place temporarily until the new appointed Drain Commissioner has their certifications.

Prosecutor Helmer stated he wanted to explain that the Appointment Committee could not discuss things prior to the first meeting. No one was ignoring John Pekkala, but the Committee could not meet until today's meeting. It was hard to coordinate the 3 Committee members schedules.

Judge Strome stated if John Pekkala wants to be done, then we will have to get a temporary Drain Commissioner effective May 31, 2025.

Todd LaRoux stated there were 125 soil erosion permits done in 2024. John did many permits for Northern Natural Gas.

Where to post vacancy effective 5/31/25? Gazette? Indeed?

A Motion was made by Prosecutor Helmer and seconded by Judge Strome to accept the five (5) applications that have been received.

The Motion carried by a voice vote: Ayes 3, Nays 0.

Clerk Kelly will type up a notice for the County website about the vacancy.

Prosecutor Helmer will contact the 5 candidates who have applied.

Lindsey will send the Committee the link for the testing for the vacancy posting.

Is there a job description? Rate of pay?

Clerk Kelly will get the job description. Prosecutor Helmer spoke with Administrator Rheault and she informed him that John Pekkala spoke with the Personnel Committee, and he agreed to contract with Houghton County.

Applications or letters or resumes:

The Committee will take whatever a candidate submits.

Deadline for submitting interest? Submit to County Clerk?

The deadline for applications/resumes will be next Thursday. The Committee prefers the appointed candidate will be certified or be signed up for the testing/certification. Candidates can submit their paperwork to the County Clerk.

Set Next Meeting:

The Committee will meet on April 21st at 3:30 to review applications/resumes. Then the Committee will meet on April 28th at 10:00 am to do interviews.

Prosecutor Helmer will contact the candidates.

Clerk Kelly will get the notices on the website, do a press release, and get proper notices on the doors of the courthouse.

Public Comments:

Todd LaRoux commented on working with John for years and what a great person and worker John is.

Prosecutor Helmer stated he was glad the Appointment Committee did things the right way and followed the law. He stressed how the 3 on the Committee wanted to do it the right way.

Judge Strome said the Committee can focus on the right person, and take their time and not be rushed.

Prosecutor Helmer agreed the Committee has to do it the right way.

Adjournment:

Prosecutor Helmer made a Motion to close the meeting with a second from Judge Strome at 3:10 p.m..

The Motion carried by a voice vote. Ayes 3, Nays 0.

Fraser Strome

Daniel Helmer

Jennifer Kelly