

**HOUGHTON COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS
SPECIAL MEETING
APRIL 15, 2025**

The Houghton County Board of Commissioners held a Special Meeting on Tuesday, April 15, 2025 at 10:00 a.m. in the 3rd Floor Circuit Court Room of the Courthouse, City of Houghton with the public viewing in person and by Microsoft Teams.

Call to Order:

The meeting was called to order by Chairman Tikkanen at 10:00 a.m.

Pledge of Allegiance:

The Pledge of Allegiance was led by Chairman Tikkanen.

Roll call:

The following commissioners responded to roll call:

Tom Tikkanen, District 1; Joel Keranen, District 2; Glenn Anderson, District 3; Gretchen Janssen, District 4; Roy Britz, District 5.

Approval of Minutes:

None.

Approval of Agenda/Additions:

A Motion was made by Commissioner Keranen and seconded by Commissioner Janssen to approve the Agenda as presented.

The Motion carried by a voice vote. Ayes 5, Nays 0.

Public Comments-Agenda Items only *(5 minute limit):

Kevin Mackey discussed the money paid for the church property and the plans that have not been approved.

Gretchen Hine stated the commissioners have not responded to her email on the cost being higher per inmates.

John Slayton stated for 25 years it's been the same issue. He suggested using tethers on non-violent offenders to save on money, food and housing. He also suggested looking at other opportunities that may be available.

Approval of Bills:

None.

Correspondence:

None.

Old Business:

None.

New Business:

1. Annual Equalization Report

Jaikob Djerf, Equalization Director, stated the report provided to the Board is their Annual Report summarizing the Equalized and Taxable values for Houghton County. Overall, they had equalization factors, reducing value, in the commercial and industrial classes for Duncan, Elm River and Torch Lake Townships. The 2025 Assessed/Equalized Real Property is 1,945,074,532, the Personal Property is 87,804,968, for a total of 2,041,879,500.

There was an increase in the total assessed and equalized values of 218,269,268 or approximately a 11.97% increase. The Taxable Real Property is 1,246,415,432, the Personal Property is 87,804,968, for a total of 1,334,220,310. This was an increase in the total taxable values of 83,131,944 or a 6.64% increase.

A Motion was made by Commissioner Janssen and seconded by Commissioner Anderson to adopt the report of the recommended equalized values as presented.

The Motion carried by a voice vote. Ayes 5, Nays 0.

2. Marina Change Order

Todd LaRoux, Building Department Manager, informed the Board that the tiles that were removed off the wall had issues. They put in a new header system. A support post that was added changed the arrangement of the doors. There is new concrete in the bathrooms. They are working on the roof.

Motion was made by Commissioner Keranen and seconded by Commissioner Anderson to adopt the change order for the marina as presented.

The Motion carried by the following vote.

YES: Keranen, Anderson, Tikkanen, Janssen, Britz 5.

NO: None. 0

3. Houghton County Justice Center

A Presentation was given by Joseph Mrak and Bret Dodd regarding the options available for a new Justice Center.

Brett Dodd stated they began the Jail project on January 13, 2025. He discussed mental health and detoxing issues in the jail along with areas for evaluations. He explained that after inmates are in jail for 30 days, other services are available for inmates. There is a need for multiple-cell blocks. He explained the 6-step process used. The first 4 stages are complete. The 5th & 6th are to reconcile costs of the project, and the variables that may or may not be used. The anticipated time was from October 24-April 25. The draft was issued in March to the Commissioners for their meeting in April. There is a 46-page report of the project. They estimated a growth in the population of people in the next 20 years. Average arrests for the last 20 years is about the same jail capacity for the current 30 beds. Inmates must be separated by gender, offense and severity of the crime. There is a 20% classification factor. Currently, Houghton County is 21 beds under the factor. They are preparing for savings and to make the new jail last as long as it can. He discussed general housing for inmates for 60 beds, 70 beds and 80 beds. During a public meeting it was 50 beds listed.

Option 1-completely demolish church building, and construct a new justice center on that site. This is more costly.

Option 2-complete an addition and renovation of the existing church building

Option 4-new construction on the church site

He stated there are 23 standards that are used to evaluate a jail each year. The only thing that is compliant is that every cell is a certain size. The jail must have a day room. The current building is not compliant. Things are not in the right places. From the last evaluation, the roof and windows have issues. There are violations for civil laws and rights. There are listed money amounts to bring the jail up to compliance. The jail currently is non-compliant due to spaces being too small, no visibility from a single point, lots of obstacles, and potential base line of staff. There are currently 3 part-time support staff.

The kitchen square feet is projected for the number of inmates. The work camp can be added in the future. 48 parking spaces will be needed. Currently, there are 16.

Someone from the public asked why the jail has not been closed down.

Option 1-The church has a type 5 construction which means the building is not made of steel. Currently only the Sheriff offices can be put in the church.

He stated Delta County has Option 2 for a jail. The cost was \$17 million. Houghton County would be \$24 million. Costs would be higher for a smaller jail.

He stated these are just estimate and could reduce space by 5% of costs, but due to tariff costs at this time, things are unknown. These are the best scenarios.

The jail will need space for equipment storage. Current storage will be moved to the new site.

Pre-Charette options 1 to 4 may take one and a half years. Options 1 & 3-eliminate. Option 2 & 4 are left.

Someone asked what would be the impact of taxpayers. Administrator Rheault stated for a millage of 1.5 mills it would be \$14.00 per month per taxpayer.

Public Comments:

Faith Morrison asked the Board when they will discuss this further and if they plan to put it on the ballot.

Chairman Tikkanen stated the next Work Session is on 5/5/25 at 10:00 am. It is a public meeting. No decisions are made. Time to make plans. The Board will try to choose which option to pursue.

Gretchen Hine suggested a google survey instead of coming to meetings.

Tom Cambolt stated the State has a sledgehammer over Houghton County. The choice is for the State to mandate a jail, or the taxpayers can work out a plan.

Rod Guilbault stated that any life-threatening issues are taken care of with a new jail.

Jim Quinlan, a former jail worker, stated the Houghton County Jail is the most dangerous site for Sheriff and deputies. He said everyone can continue to kick the can down the road, but bigger issues will come. He feels a need to protect the inmates and staff.

Matthew Peterson, said he is torn between yes and no. Drugs are a big problem in our County. He questioned why the need is to get a new jail when inmates are let go.

Chairman Tikkanen stated they are let go do to overcrowding and the District Court evaluates who can be released. Especially when at emergency numbers.

Sarah Green suggested making the public more aware of jail issues.

Chairman Tikkanen stated in 1960 the Jail was in the basement of the courthouse. Voters turned it down and the state closed it down. Faith Morrison said it was turned down twice. Chairman Tikkanen said Houghton County is stubborn and needs to make a choice as a community or let the State come in and mandate things.

Ruth Gill asked what the estimated cost is if the State comes in and are Houghton County taxpayers liable for it. Chairman Tikkanen discussed health services that cost near half a million annually.

Carolyn Peterson stated she felt bad Houghton County has the worst jail.

Chairman Tikkanen stated he feels the jail has not been closed down because of the Sheriff and deputies' dedication to get things done.

Craig Waddell asked about costs and a class action lawsuit.

Graham Jaehnig-Gazette, stated he worked with Sheriff McLean. Discussed transporting inmates downstate. This causes a shortage of deputies at the jail. Chairman Tikkanen stated there must be 2 deputies in a car for every transport.

Sheriff Saaranen stated it takes money to house inmates, to feed them, and mileage to travel.

Carolyn Peterson asked if there are costs involved with transporting juveniles.

Dan Holombo asked why the jail is in such poor condition and why the issues weren't addressed if the roof was leaking, get someone in to fix it.

Chairman Tikkanen commented on a lawsuit on required ventilation that was added and caused the leaking roof. The Board has tried to address these issues. He feels there are diminishing returns on fixing issues.

John Slayton said he supports the Houghton County Jail. He suggested the Board do things correctly. He asked if the church is receiving free rent, and for the Board to get a better perception out in the public.

Chairman Tikkanen stated these are good hard questions. He stated they are renting for free but gave the Board a good deal on the property. The property is in the City of Houghton now thanks to Portage Township and the City of Houghton.

Commissioner Britz stated the Jail has been maintained and the roof has been shoveled.

Chairman Tikkanen discussed getting more information out to the voters, the taxable value on the tax bill to go on the website.

Announcements:

None.

Adjournment:

A Motion was made by Commissioner Keranen and seconded by Commissioner Tikkanen to adjourn at 11:58 p.m.

The Motion carried by a voice vote. Ayes 5, Nays 0.

Tom Tikkanen, Chairman

Jennifer Kelly, County Clerk