

MINUTES
JAIL COMMITTEE
MEETING-5th Floor-Conference Room
NOVEMBER 3, 2025 – 4:00 PM

- A. Call to Order
- B. Roll Call
- C. Approval of Agenda/Additions
- D. Public Comments
- E. New Business
 - 1. Discuss the goals of the Committee
 - 2. Set future meeting dates and times.
- F. Public Comments
- J. Adjournment

Committee membership:

(JH) Jared Hyrkas, chair -was on 2018 Taskforce; did assessment of old church; project manager, civil engineer.

(TT) Tom Tikkanen, Commissioner

(GJ) Gretchen Janssen, commissioner

(FM) Faith Morrison, Hancock resident, has advocated for a new jail

(VT) Valorie Troesch- LWVCC

(SF) Sharon Foix, CC Republicans; think we need a new jail but voted no.

(DH) Dan Holcomb, CC Republican chair; twice running for commissioner; ten-years experience with government contracts; wants it to pass; obvious we need something new; nonpartisan issue; willing to offer services

(MH) Mike Hamilton, trades, retired for 50+ years; Sheriff recruited.

(TL) Todd LaRoux, Building department

Others present:

(JS) Sheriff Josh Saarinen

(TB) Tom Bingham, head mechanical at Courthouse

(AL) Adam Laplander, Canal View Admin

(GH) Gretchen Hein, Osceola Twp resident

Goals and objectives

Chair Hyrkas (JH) – We need a solution that people will support. We all want a new jail (was agreed). All our time will be wasted if we don't come up with a plan that gets us a jail.

TT: many people are so busy with work, families, or are not interested and are not engaged in the discussion.

JH: Objective—get a new plan that the people can support.

Discussion of the current three committees (see <https://houghtoncounty.net/>)

1. Keranen's Committee - County-Held Properties Committee
2. Britz's Committee - Sharon Avenue & Jail Property-Use Committee
3. This Committee –Jail Committee (**note from FM: I suggest: Next Steps Jail Committee**)

JH: Is there a timeline for us to shoot for. My biggest concern with the last election was communication. Once there's a plan it needs to be communicated effectively. In our discussions, we want to see what the pain points are [with the taxpayers] and after that get some things on the table, then set a timeline.

TT: Can we reach a strong consensus on the location? Those questions came up.
Objections related to location.

GH: Concerned with plan to sell county properties to fund the jail. The marina is our only county park. Canal View is going to be sold.

FM: County board is determining the value of their properties and not committed to selling any of them. At county board work session today, none of the commissions said they wanted to sell Canal View.

VT: CCISD has hired a professional survey company to find out why the voters turned down their millage. The questions went through about 25 different things. I concluded that they

are looking to put it back on the ballot and are asking how to overcome the public's reason for voting no. It was a long and complicated survey. Would we consider doing this? This is a complicated question.

JH: I am familiar with surveys done by recreation committees and their plans. Described one he has seen. Survey monkey.

FM: LWVCC did a web-based survey on jail opinions in 2018 and found that it could be difficult to interpret a survey if the respondents are not distributed well. It is hard to tell which of the opinions are the most widely held.

DH: Several comments: 1. I don't think the voters understand the possible ramification of not fixing the jail. 2. Get a white board in here and identify lists as we go through. Can use it to coordinate the timeline for getting things done. How will we organize our thoughts. It's a visual. Jail in the middle; work your way out, and back in.

TL: Do we have a efficiency list of the old jail.

FM: Consultant's Master plan did that analysis; Master plan is posted on the county's website.

FM: Many public presentations were done in March and July of 2025.

General comments: Some voters did not understand the problems in the jail. One reason. Perhaps go through all the reasons why they voted no on the jail.

TT: public asks why did you not take care of the jail. MDOC writes the rules of the jail. We passed our inspections with a laundry list of deficiencies. There are MDOC guidelines for jail design [The Sheriff's office can supply].

The committee agreed to go around the room and list **Reasons why folks did not vote yes on the 2025 Jail Millage:**

JH: Most people are getting their news on social media. They're getting them in single screen shot bites. That's how they get it. Need the top pain points to grab their attention. If you don't do that they are not going to know. I am very interested in the jail. I knew what I was looking for. No one else is going to do that. Tons of young people that will not go to evening meetings. First ask to commissioners: spend money on hiring some surveys and social media company expert. Someone to manage your message to the community. Need little information pieces that they can start sharing today. It starts today to interact with the voters. So that they don't have to take it in all at once. That small amount of investment could pay off.

GH: Keweenaw county sends out lots of things on Instagram and Facebook. Toy drive at Christmas. Events in the park.

Sheriff: We have FB; post infrequently.

JH: That's what I'm talking about. (relating to liking how Keweenaw County does their postings; sporadically, but often enough to inform of current topics).

TT: To be effective it needs to be updated on a daily basis.

DH: A great start would be a virtual jail tour and Sheriff talking about the jail in a 2 min video.

Sheriff: if we change anything we are forced to bring all aspects of the jail up to current standards.

VT: Visually. People could see the deficiencies in the jail.

JS: Age and condition; major problem is space. Inmate classification – they cannot be housed together. With jail being full, that's the problem.

TT: Bottom line social media is a good avenue to get news out. We do not have anyone in-house.

JH: Hiring a marketing firm. They'll help you produce content that you can put on your social media account(s).

GJ: How to pay for it?

Reasons voted no from going around the room:

1. Did not want higher taxes (MH). So far that's the biggest.
2. DH getting Sharon avenue property without public avenue
3. Inmates don't need nicer places to live (TL); not thinking about the workers
4. AL: cost. Why so high? Contractors in the room at a previous county meeting/info session said they could do it for less
5. Need to specify the plans better (DH)
6. JS: history, location (they had other ideas), taxes, Camp Kitwin, property acquisitions across the street
7. SF: kitchen remodeled why, if we're not going to keep it
8. SF: Some people want other properties sold
9. SF: didn't cover people with mental health issues, adolescents
10. SF: Some went to the meetings and it turned them off; their views were not appreciated; the issue was pushed down their throat

11. TB: taxes, inmates don't need a nice place to stay
12. GH: I would contact commissioners and would not get a response; did not get email responses; lack of response from public officials; ticked off about the property bought on Sharon avenue; lack of transparency; need to get it out; only came to this meeting because I saw it on the LWV feed
13. SF: taking in prisoners from other counties in 2018; new jail will have so many beds they'll go to do this again (lack of trust that they would not change minds and house out-county inmates)
14. GH: the one plan from the master plan that was chosen for the millage was not the least expensive option; there would be a cheaper one next time so vote no on the first go?
15. VT: Cost. Taxes. Do not want their taxes to go up. Aging community. Also combination of factors are given as excuse they just don't want their taxes to go up.
16. TT: all about money.
17. TT: People were astounded that we put it on the ballot along with the other ballot questions. Timing wasn't good. Was there an alternative, I don't know. Not going to get easier up against school millages or the care/feeding of our seniors. Valorie's point good one. They don't want their taxes to go up, but they can find other reasons.
18. GH: money
19. JH: heard almost every single one of these. He personally felt and agreed with many of them. Would rather pay for a \$24 million jail than a \$32 million one, if possible.

JH: property was purchased because of what the conclusions of the 2018 jail task force were. Tom Tikkanen said there's an answer to every single one of the. The issue is communication. The 2018 Task force agreed that the property should be purchased because of the experience of being on the 2018 Task Force.

TT: One more thing. Last two proposals we did not have unanimous board agreement on the proposal.

TL: Shaving the costs. Jail has standards, specifications, only certain components can be used.

FM: This committee has the opportunity to do the detailed engineering design that the Master Plan lays out the data for. We need to act quickly though. If it takes too long to get to an engineering design, we will lose the momentum of what is on people's minds.

JH: Will give everyone one last chance to talk. Keep the meetings to an hour. Stay on task. Distinct agendas before we come. Need to start taking action. Need a purpose and intent. Develop some goals and objectives today. I'll be more structured in future meetings.

Anyone want to comment?

MH: still talk to people one on one. People were not nasty. One-on-one is more feasible with older people.

JH: news releases, press releases

DH: At the next meeting, would like to talk about 1) locations more in depth 2) county assets 3) legal requirements as far where the sheriff's dept has to be (ask county prosecutor could give input).

JH: Can get previous task force things out on our platform to get the conversation going. Next meeting: three things Dan mentioned. Also starting from scratch; have fresh mind.

TL: Actual set of construction drawings needed. (JH concurs but mentions that it's likely only Schematic Design is necessary).

JS: Double down on Dan's suggestion in terms of location. Three options: Sharon avenue property, lot across Dodge, starting to look for other properties.

SF: location, I agree. Not happy with Sharon avenue location. Inside dealings with the church.

TB: location

AL: property meeting they talked about tearing the church down. ARPA funds not taxpayer dollars. Tear it down asap. Different avenues of financing the jail. Voters willing to spend less. Get it down to the \$22-24 million to lessen the pain.

GH: purchased the Sharon Avenue property. Ton of people who have a strong reaction to that (TT agrees). Location is Important. How you would use existing space in an efficient manner, keep costs down for the voter. What other millage will HoCo give up to get a jail?

TT: HoCo has been economically depressed since 1960s. now it's getting stronger. How to do the tradeoffs. It's all about money. The one millage vote [2018] that was closest to passing was the cheapest one (\$11,000,000). End of the day it's all going to be about the cost. First is have full agreement on location.

VT: What criteria to use to determine the best location?

MB: Utilities for the location. Size.

TL: 6 acres; don't forget space for parking.

GJ: Sheriff's vehicles need to be free to come and go rapidly; Sharon Avenue perfect for that. I don't care who owned it before us. If we need to sell it, we are not going to lose money. I don't understand the objections.

TT: we were able to acquire it under the assessed value. They [the church] did not pay rent but they absorbed the costs of maintaining and operating the facility.

TT: we need a new jail now. Who are we building it for. Building it for our future. For the future needs of Houghton County.

TL: There are issues with the quality of the land for building. We were looking at property over at the Sears area that was a big fill. Got to get all that garbage out from your construction site. Can't build on top of fill.

GJ: There was a drainage ditch

TT: Not too long into the future we could build a new courthouse at that new site. (this building is going to be obsolete).

TT: Maybe the best site is right here (add to the back of the building). It's affordability. [return to 2018 plan].

Jared: Let's discuss next meeting schedule. It will be a task to get one more meeting before the end of the year.

Comment: helps to meet after 5 or 4-5pm is fine (MH, DH)

TT: open to us being on a list serve. Can we communicate as a group. Not wait until the next meeting.

FM: But the members of the public may want to know about our discussions; we should have open meetings. Maybe we could have Teams.

JH: At some point all that we care about is talking to the public. Right now, we have a lot of things to take care of to get to a point we can share our committee's work and ideas with the public. We have work to do outside of the meetings (or the meetings would be hours long), then we can just report on results at the meetings.

FM: The public cannot attend a "round robin" email train.

GH: MS Teams would be nice. Comments in the chat.

The committee agreed to have a meeting Monday Dec 8 4pm in the 5th floor conference room, with Microsoft Teams for the public and members who cannot attend.

Tom Bingham can look into obtaining a white board or equivalent technology.

Faith Morrison: will look for 2018 final report and get it on the county's website.

JH: Would be good to make some progress on identifying/planning for a marketing firm or social media guru. Not going to be a short process. If they were part of our meeting they would see what needs to be said.

FM: would love for the actions of committees to be pushed out to the public (press releases)

GJ: how to do that and how to pay for it?

JH: do it simultaneously

TT: may need citizens group to solicit donations.

TT: need to disperse it in bitesize chunks.

TT and GJ will follow up on the marketing idea and funding as well as a WUPPDR survey.

VT or JH will contact the ISD to see who they are using for their survey and how much it costs.

Committee adjourned at 5:30pm.

Done by Faith Morrison