

**HOUGHTON COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS
REGULAR MEETING & PUBLIC HEARING
JULY 14, 2026**

The Houghton County Board of Commissioners held a Regular Meeting & Public Hearing on Tuesday, July 14, 2026 at 6:00 p.m. in the 3rd Floor Circuit Courtroom of the Courthouse, City of Houghton with the public viewing in person and by Zoom.

Call to Order:

The meeting was called to order by Chairman Tikkanen at 6:00 p.m.

Pledge of Allegiance:

The Pledge of Allegiance was led by Chairman Tikkanen.

Roll Call:

The following Commissioners responded to roll call done by the County Clerk, Jennifer Kelly:

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

Absent: None.

Approval of Minutes: May 12, 2026 Regular Meeting; June 1, 2026 Work Session; June 9, 2026 Regular Meeting; March 2, 2026 Work Session:

A Motion was made by Commissioner Janssen and seconded by Commissioner Keranen to approve the minutes from the May 12, 2026 Regular Meeting; June 1, 2026 Work Session; June 9, 2026 Regular Meeting; and the March 2, 2026 Work Session as presented.

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

Approval of Agenda/Additions:

Chairman Tikkanen requested a Public Hearing for Highrock Hardware be added under letter F.

Commissioner Anderson requested #9 be added to discuss engaging language with Raymond James.

A Motion was made by Commissioner Janssen and seconded by Commissioner Britz to approve the agenda with the two (2) additions.

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

Public Hearing-Peak Metal Roof Products

1. Open Hearing

Motion was made by Commissioner Keranen and seconded by Commissioner Janssen to open the meeting.

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

2. Discussion and Public Comment

Jeff Ratcliffe stated the Revolving Loan Fund is complete for job completion requirements. Money was on time. This is to formally close out the grant.

3. Close Hearing

A Motion was made by Commissioner Keranen and seconded by Commissioner Janssen to close the meeting.

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

Public Hearing-Hardrock Hardware Grant

1. Open Hearing

Motion was made by Commissioner Keranen and seconded by Commissioner Janssen to open the meeting.

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

2. Discussion and Public Comment

Jeff Ratcliffe stated this Loan would be to expand operations at Hardrock Hardware in Hancock. The Keweenaw and Houghton County Revolving Loan Fund Committees and Northern Initiatives support this. It is a total of \$180,000. It is recommended for \$70,000 be paid by the Houghton County Loan Fund, Keda would pay \$20,000.

3. Close Hearing

A Motion was made by Commissioner Keranen and seconded by Commissioner Janssen to close the meeting.

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

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

None.

Approval of Bills-\$874,333.03:

A Motion was made by Commissioner Keranen and seconded by Commissioner Anderson to approve paying the bills submitted of \$874,333.03 as presented.

The Motion carried by the following vote.

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

NO: None 0.

Reports:

Standing Committee:

Commissioner Anderson stated the Twin Lakes Park would be opening on August 1, 2026.

Commissioner Janssen stated the City of Houghton approved a Data Center Temporary Moratorium Ordinance. She discussed the Materials Management Plan with WUPPDR. The next revised plan will be sent to the cities, townships and villages. EGLE will need a 2/3 approval which comes out to be about 13 in Houghton County.

Commissioner Keranen read the following statement:

Good Evening.

It's nice to see a roomful of people here tonight. It would be great if they were all here to discuss the matters of Houghton County, such as the Health Department, Houghton County 911, our public defenders, or the possibility of a new jail and how to pay for it. Unfortunately, I'm guessing they are not here to discuss any of those things. They are here because of the nonsense surrounding the traprock valley parade.

I will tell you about parade. It started in 2020, and the purpose of the parade is to celebrate freedom and liberty. Our only rules are, we do not allow commercial advertising or campaigning politicians. If you were to attend the parade, you would find floats that are patriotic, clever, humorous, or involve political satire. One such float from this year's parade caught the attention of those on social media. I am going to venture to guess that none of those people actually attended the parade; rather they made assumptions about the float based on social media posts. I did not build this float, nor did I have anything to do with it. However, some have determined that because I did not ban the float from the parade, this means that I am a white supremacist, among other things. Let me address this. Recall-the purpose of the parade is to celebrate freedom and liberty. So I am not going to ban a float when freedom of speech is one of the core freedoms that is protected by the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution. Someone's free speech doesn't end where the next person's feelings begin. It begins and ends with our Constitution.

But let's be honest. This isn't about a float. What this is about is a world view. It goes back to my stance on gender. This is clearly evident by the flyer that the "non-partisan" Keweenaw Indivisible group shared over social media calling for me to resign. The group incorrectly, and frankly irresponsibly, defined a simple 4th of July parade as an event that glorified ICE and white supremacy. That statement was completely false. They also used the flyer to reference my 2-genders proposal from December. They went back to something that had absolutely nothing to do with a parade float.

However, they also made a statement that I actually wholeheartedly agree with. They called for the community to show me that hate has no home in the Keweenaw. This is true. Hate has no home in the Keweenaw, or anywhere for that matter. Let me be clear. I have never said I hated anyone. You have never heard from me any name calling, profanity, or threats. Go back and read my statement from December. You won't find anything other than a clearly stated biblical based world view. My world view is shaped by my faith and by the truth of the Bible. YOU may find the values and beliefs that stem from my faith offensive. But I didn't define them, God did. And I have the absolute right to hold to these beliefs because of our great constitution.

On the other hand, I am now going to show you where you WILL hear hate. Here is just one of the communications (voicemail) I have received over the past few days.

(To be clear the text and words in " " are from a phone call I received. They are not my words, just the words of a concerned citizen.)

"Hello, I am a Michigan Tech alum and a Yooper by blood, although from Sault Ste. Marie and you are a racist piece of shit, and you should kill yourself. You should, you really should. That would be great.
Thanks. Fuck you."

Our country was founded on Godly principles because our great founders stated (in case you forgot) our rights are unalienable. Translation- they come from GOD! They don't come from a king (even though some say we have one). They don't come from any elected official. Not 5 county commissioners, not from Lansing, or from 545 people in Washington DC. I have the right to bring my biblical worldview into the public square just as much as the extreme left has the right to bring their secular worldview in.

But let's be clear. The people here today calling for my resignation do not want my world view in Washington DC, Lansing, or Houghton County. And because I dared to do that in December, that is why they are here again today. That is why I'm being called all kinds of nasty, mean spirited, profanity laced names, and am facing threats and character assassination. This is what the extreme left does. It's pretty much the only play in their playbook.

The intolerance and hateful rhetoric is coming from the extreme left -not from me. I will not allow my character to be smeared by my political opposition, and by people who have never even spoken to me or spent any time with me. I will trust the people who know me or have worked with me to be the ones who judge my character.

So what you will most likely hear tonight during our public comment time will be more false assumptions about my character, riddled with profanity and hate. I hope I am wrong.

What's ironic about all this is, I am 100% supportive of you having the right to believe whatever you wish. You can believe in atheism. You can believe there are 27 genders, or there is no such thing as gender. You can believe in illegal immigration or open borders. You are free to be a Socialist, Marxist, or Communist. You are free to believe whatever you wish; because again, we have unalienable rights.

But what you are NOT free to do is to RESTRICT ME from being a God-fearing conservative with values and morals that Americans have treasured for 250 years.

It has become obvious that the extreme left feels it is reasonable to attack any other Houghton County resident who holds the same values as me and dares to speak up. They've been pressuring their affiliations and even threatening their livelihoods. This is completely unacceptable. If you believe in what I'm saying and you dared to speak up, or plan to speak up tonight, thank you. I know it's not easy.

Commissioner Britz stated he and Commissioner Janssen attended the audit at Canal View and felt they provided great accountability.

Chairman Tikkanen had nothing to report.

County Officers:

Casey Polkinghorne, Airport Manager, gave a report to the Board.

Unfinished Business:

1. Easton Laitila, Continuance of Contract

Administrator Rheault stated she recommended continuing Easton Laitila's contract for one (1) more month at the rate of \$2,000.00 for the one (1) month.

2. Joseph Mangan, Continuance of Contract

Administrator Rheault stated she recommended continuing Joseph Managan's contract for one (1) month at the rate of \$5,000.00 for the one (1) month.

A Motion was made by Commissioner Anderson and seconded by Commissioner Janssen to approve paying Easton Laitila \$2,000.00 for one (1) additional month, and to approve paying Joseph Managan \$5,000.00 for one (1) additional month.

The Motion carried by the following vote.

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

NO: None 0.

New Business:

1. Peak Metal Roofing Products Loan Closeout

Motion was made by Commissioner Anderson and seconded by Commissioner Janssen to close out the Peak Metal Roofing Products Loan as presented.

The Motion carried by the following vote.

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

NO: None 0.

2. HCRLF, Highrock Hardware loan approval

a. Resolution #26-13 Community Development Block Grant Loan Program (CLP) Authorizing Resolution

Motion was made by Commissioner Anderson and seconded by Commissioner Janssen to adopt Resolution #26-13 for Highrock Hardware as presented.

The Motion carried by the following vote.

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

NO: None 0.

3. Kevin Store, Copper Shores, Updates

Mike Babcock and Jessica Mills provided a handout to the Board and the public. Mike stated the waiting list has been removed and they are continuing to provide home deliveries to over 60 aged senior citizens. Jessica stated they have served 20-30 in Twin Lakes and 25-30 in Alston. They are working setting up in Sidnaw. The Chassell VFW is a new location they will use and they are looking for other places. A quarterly handout will be provided in the future. They are continuing to do fundraising in 2026 as they did in 2025. The fundraising is done in addition to the millage.

4. Pete Baril & Roy Manninen, Health Department Annual Appropriation

They provided a handout to the Board. They have 55 employees.

Roy stated since 2019 their revenue has been flat. They closed out their MERS. They are now in need for more money from the Counties they serve.

Pete stated they are looking for Houghton County to invest in their local health department to get better infrastructure. They use local money to spend as needed, such as WIC. All programs are monitored. They have had several jobs that either the workers have left or were terminated and WUPPDR did not fill those positions. They feel like they can fix the deficit. They talked to Baraga County on Monday and will be in Keweenaw on Wednesday. Then they will visit Ontonagon and Gogebic.

Commissioner Anderson suggested waiting on the County audit to be done.

5. Houghton County 9-1-1, I AM Responding Renewal + 5 yr. contract w/ Negaunee Regional Dispatch Center

Jon Giacchino, Undersheriff, stated the I AM app is what 26 fire agencies use and it is a push notification from Negaunee for mapping. This is a 3-year renewal at the rate of \$12,298.70.

Motion was made by Commission Keranen and seconded by Commissioner Britz to approve the 3-year contract for the I Am app for \$12,2908.70.

The Motion carried by the following vote.

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

NO: None 0.

Jon Giacchino explained the 5-year contract with Negaunee Regional Dispatch Center.

Motion was made by Commission Britz and seconded by Commissioner Keranen to approve the 5-year contract with Negaunee Regional Dispatch Center.

The Motion carried by the following vote.

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

NO: None 0.

6. Tri-County Public Defenders, June 2026 Payment Request \$74,698.58

Motion was made by Commissioner Anderson seconded by Commissioner Janssen to approve payment in the amount of \$74,698.59 to the Tri-County Public Defenders as presented.

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

7. Resolution #26-12 Supporting House Bill 5249 (2025-2026) to Expand Rural Emergency Medical Service Capacity

Motion was made by Commissioner Britz and seconded by Commissioner Anderson to approve Resolution #26-12 as presented.

The Motion carried by the following vote.

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

NO: None. 0

8. Jail Millage, Special Meeting

Chairman Tikkanen discussed having a special meeting to discuss the ROM's that are due by July 29th.

Faith Morrison stated August 11th by 4:00 pm is the deadline for ballot languages for the November ballot. Industry Day is on July 15th.

Motion was made by Commission Anderson and seconded by Commissioner Janssen to schedule a Special Meeting on Wednesday, August 5, 2026 at 1:00 pm.

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

Motion was made by Commissioner Anderson and seconded by Commissioner Janssen to direct the Jail Committee to give the Board their best estimated cost for a new jail including contingency plans once they receive the ROM's from the contractors.

The Motion carried by the following vote.

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

NO: None 0.

9. Raymond James agreement

Motion was made by Commissioner Anderson and seconded by Commissioner Janssen to direct Administrator Rheault to sign the agreement with Raymond James as presented.

The Motion carried by the following vote.

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

NO: None 0.

Other Business/Communications:

1. Western U.P. Planning & Development Region, Official Notice for Local Units of Government

Motion was made by Anderson and seconded by Commissioner Janssen to direct Chris VanArsdale to respond to the questionnaire from WUPPDR.

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

Travel:

- 1. Todd LaRoux, COCM Conference 9/20/26-9/25/26**
- 2. Joel Watson, COCM Conference 9/20/26-9/25/26**
- 3. Lisa Mattila, MACT Conference, 8/9/26-8/12/26**

Motion was made by Commissioner Janssen and seconded by Commissioner Keranen to approve all three (3) travel requests as presented.

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

Appropriations:

- 1. Western U.P. Health Department, Quarterly July-September 2026 \$69,106.50**
- 2. Copper Country Community Mental Health-\$13,707.91**
- 3. Western Upper Peninsula Planning & Development Region-\$3,717.75**

Motion was made by Commissioner Keranen and seconded by Commissioner Britz to approve the above-mentioned Appropriations as presented.

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

Public Comments:

Lexi Tater addressed the Board regarding Joel Keranen and asked him to resign.
Sharon Foix addressed the Board and supports Joel Keranen.
Steve Foix addressed the Board and supports Joel Keranen.
Joan Chadde addressed the Board regarding the Traprock Valley parade.
Teresa Kariniemi addressed the Board and supports Joel Keranen.
Inga Johnson addressed the Board regarding Christian values and immigrants.
Christine Seppala addressed the Board and supports Joel Keranen.
Aili Palmer addressed the Board regarding Joel Keranen.
Yvonne Ollivier addressed the Board and supports Joel Keranen.
Amber Campbell addressed the Board and supports Joel Keranen.
Kyle Nettler addressed the Board regarding Joel Keranen and asked him to resign.
Selona Skubick addressed the Board regarding Joel Keranen and asked him to resign.
Shannon addressed the Board regarding Joel Keranen and asked him to resign.
Hailey Macias addressed the Board regarding Joel Keranen and asked him to resign.
Harmony Pete addressed the Board and supports Joel Keranen.
Ary Azimuth addressed the Board regarding Joel Keranen.
Chaundel Summaico addressed the Board regarding Joel Keranen and asked him to resign.
Devin Raasio addressed the Board and supports Joel Keranen.
Levi Niemela addressed the Board regarding the same sex Resolution and supports Joel Keranen.
Hannah Rundman Lowney addressed the Board regarding care for immigrants.
Clay Peterson addressed the Board regarding Joel Keranen.
Alan Salmi addressed the Board regarding Joel Keranen and democracy.
Judy Chizen addressed the Board regarding Joel Keranen.
Heather Mroz addressed the Board regarding Joel Keranen and asked him to resign.
Krissy Tepsa addressed the Board and supports Joel Keranen.
Gail Ongie addressed the Board and supports Joel Keranen.
Jerome Niemela addressed the Board and supports Joel Keranen.
Richard Cannibas addressed the Board regarding Joel Keranen's conduct.
Levi addressed the Board and supports Joel Keranen.
Bill Lahti addressed the Board and supports the Constitution and First Amendment.
Caleb Swain addressed the Board and supports Joel Keranen.

Zoom: Lynn Barrett addressed the Board regarding Joel Keranen.
Ashley Bergeron addressed the Board regarding Joel Keranen.
Alex addressed the Board regarding Joel Keranen.
Patrick addressed the Board regarding Joel Keranen.
Ann Bimbird addressed the Board regarding Joel Keranen.

Chairman Tikkanen called for a 5 minute break at 8:45 p.m.

Chairman Tikkanen called to be back in session at 8:50 pm.

Steve Raasio addressed the Board and supports Joel Keranen.

Announcements:

Chairman Tikkanen stated there is a public auction at 10:00 am for 2 properties.

Clerk Kelly announced that Early Voting begins on Saturday, July 25, 2026 until Sunday, August 2, 2026 from 8:00 am to 4:00 pm at the HOCO Arena.

Adjournment:

A Motion was made by Commissioner Keranen and seconded by Commissioner Anderson to adjourn at 8:58 p.m.

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

Tom Tikkanen, Chairman

Jennifer Kelly, County Clerk

APPROVED:_____

CLERK’S INITIALS