

Houghton County Justice Center

Report of the Justice Center Study Committee

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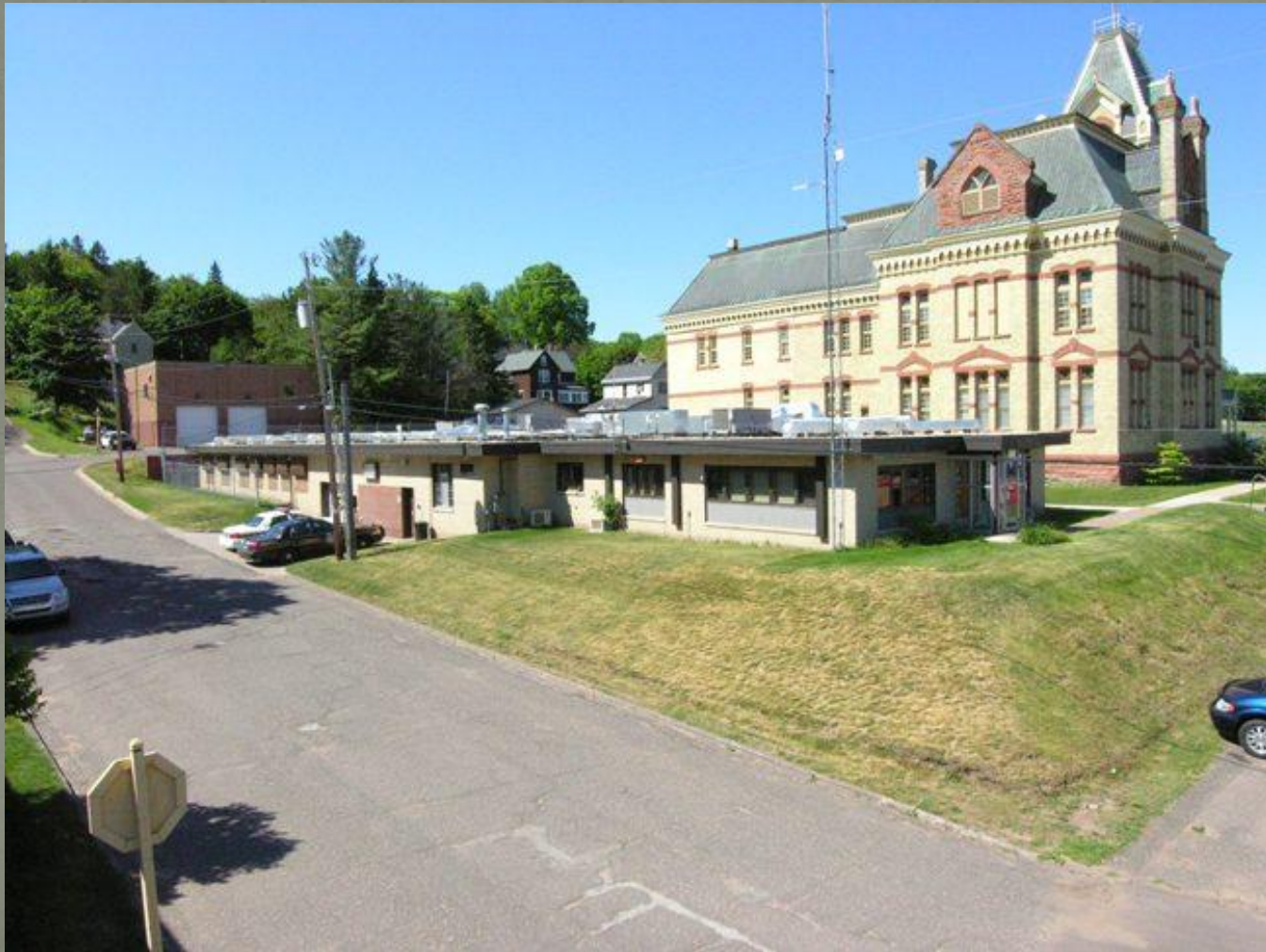
The Assignment

- In late 2009, the Houghton County Commissioners asked their Law Enforcement Committee to conduct a study of the current county jail and court facilities and recommend needed changes, including:
- What needs to be done to assure that Houghton County's criminal justice facilities meet current laws and regulations?
- If new facilities are needed, what are they and where should they be located?
- A committee of citizens and officials from throughout the county, assisted by expert consultants, has studied the issue and prepared this report.

The Current Situation – Main Jail

- The main Houghton County Jail is nearly 50 years old; a jail has been in this neighborhood for the last 120 years.
- The standards for safe and humane incarceration have changed drastically over the years.
- The county's demographics have changed greatly over that time and will continue to change over the next 30 to 50 years.
- Virtually nothing at the jail concerning staff and inmate safety, legal affairs, rehabilitation, etc. meet current standards and requirements.

The Main Jail and Sheriff's Office





Main Jail Problems include:

Lack of visual contact and control

Lack of privacy for visitors and attorneys

Lack of space for activities and education

Roof leaks

Difficulty in segregating maximum and minimum security inmates



Main Jail Problems include:

Inadequate safety and security for staff

Frequent plumbing, wiring, mechanical and HVAC trouble

Lack of adequate fire control system

Jail does not provide adequate number and mix of beds to meet current and future needs.



The Main Jail

The main Houghton County jail is

outmoded,

outdated,

undersized,

and not compliant with legal and ethical standards.



Sheriff's Offices

The Sheriff's offices are located in old Sheriff's Residence, adjacent to the Jail.

This former bedroom serves as the meeting room, interview room, evidence processing room, armory, training room. Proper storage space is very inadequate throughout the building.



The Work Camp

The Work Camp, at the airport, provides 26 non-secure dorm beds and requires additional staffing.

Only minimum security work-release and work-crew inmates can be housed here.

In short, the work camp beds are the wrong types, in the wrong numbers, at the wrong place, to meet current and future needs.

The Current Situation 97th District Court



District Court Facilities

Present court room is only about 1/3 the size of modern standards

Court room is often standing room only

Defendant, Defense and Prosecuting attorneys share one table

Jury box and judge's bench not handicapped accessible

District Court Concerns

Congestion



Privacy



District Court Concerns

Safety



Work Flow



Alternatives Considered

The Justice Center Study Committee investigated and reviewed a broad range of options.

The Preferred Alternative:

- Should be a cost-effective solution, not just for any initial construction, but for long-term staffing and operational costs of the Sheriff's Office, Jail and the 97th District Court operation.
- Should meet the projected needs of Houghton County for the next 30 years.
- Should meet known legal mandates, standards and policies.
- Should be sited and constructed to allow for efficient expansion in the distant future.

Alternative: No Action

- Failure to construct a replacement for the Houghton County Jail, and to provide adequate facilities for the 97th District Court operations is likely to subject Houghton County to greatly increased risks of civil and legislative liability.
- Simply put, “Pay me now, or pay me much more later.”
- Estimated construction costs of the jail facility have roughly doubled since the 2000 proposal was rejected.

Alternative: Construct New Jail at Airport



- Sheriff's Office, by law, must be located in county seat
- Separating jail from court & sheriff's office would greatly increase long-term staffing needs (app \$6 million over 30 years in constant dollars)
- Transport of inmates to and from court in Houghton increases avoidable public risk
- Does nothing to solve problems at District Court and Sheriff's Office

Alternative: Construct new Justice Center at Airport

- State law requires that both the Sheriff's Office and the District Court be located in the county seat
- Separation of other court house functions from the District Court would create significant inefficiencies for staff, attorneys and the public

Alternative: Remodel Present Jail

- Even with a full second floor, the existing jail's footprint (7,900 sq ft) is too small for present and future needs (32,000 sq ft), and the District Court needs are not addressed
- Previous engineering studies have determined that a portion of the existing walls could not support 2nd floor
- Housing inmates during construction a major problem
- Cost would far exceed that needed for new construction on bare ground
- To get enough space for remodel, an adjacent street would have to be closed and adjoining houses would have to be condemned



Alternative: Construct Justice Center at Another Location Within Houghton City Limits

- Cost of land would add substantially to overall project cost
- Separation of Sheriff's Office and District Court from other court house functions is inefficient for staff and the public
- Would diminish potential traffic to downtown Houghton businesses
- The new site might be incompatible with existing zoning

Alternative: Construct an Entire New Courthouse, Jail and Sheriff's Office within the Houghton City Limits

- Extraordinarily expensive!
- Unlikely that existing court house building could be adaptively reused in a cost-effective way
- Site location for the needed building and parking would be difficult to obtain

Alternative: Move Jail, Sheriff's Office and/or District Court to Camp Kitwen



- Same problems as moving operations to the airport Work Camp
- Camp Kitwen was designed to house 240 low security prison inmates in individual rooms along long corridors; major, expensive remodeling required to meet the needs of housing a variety of jail inmates securely.
- State will only lease the facility, reserving the right to reclaim use
- Full time wastewater treatment operator needed
- 500 cords of wood a year for wood heating system

Preferred Alternative

Recommended by the Justice Center
Study Committee

New construction of a Justice Center
on County property to the west of
the existing Court House.

The Houghton County Justice Center

- Is best built as new construction on the County-owned blocks to the west of the Court House (old Houghton High School blocks); presently zoned for General Business
- Would house the Jail, Sheriff's Offices and 97th District Court and offices adjacent to other Courthouse offices
- Would meet the criminal justice space needs of Houghton County until at least 2040
- Should be a modern facility with an exterior design that is compatible with the existing Court House



The 2 blocks west of the Courthouse are already owned by Houghton County

Proximity to Courthouse gives staff efficiencies that would be lost in another location.

Centralizes county services in a single location accessible to the public

Cost and risks of inmate movement are minimized

Keeping Sheriff's office near Courthouse continues to provide security for the entire complex

Sufficient and efficient space for future expansion if needed



The Pewabic Street Community Garden

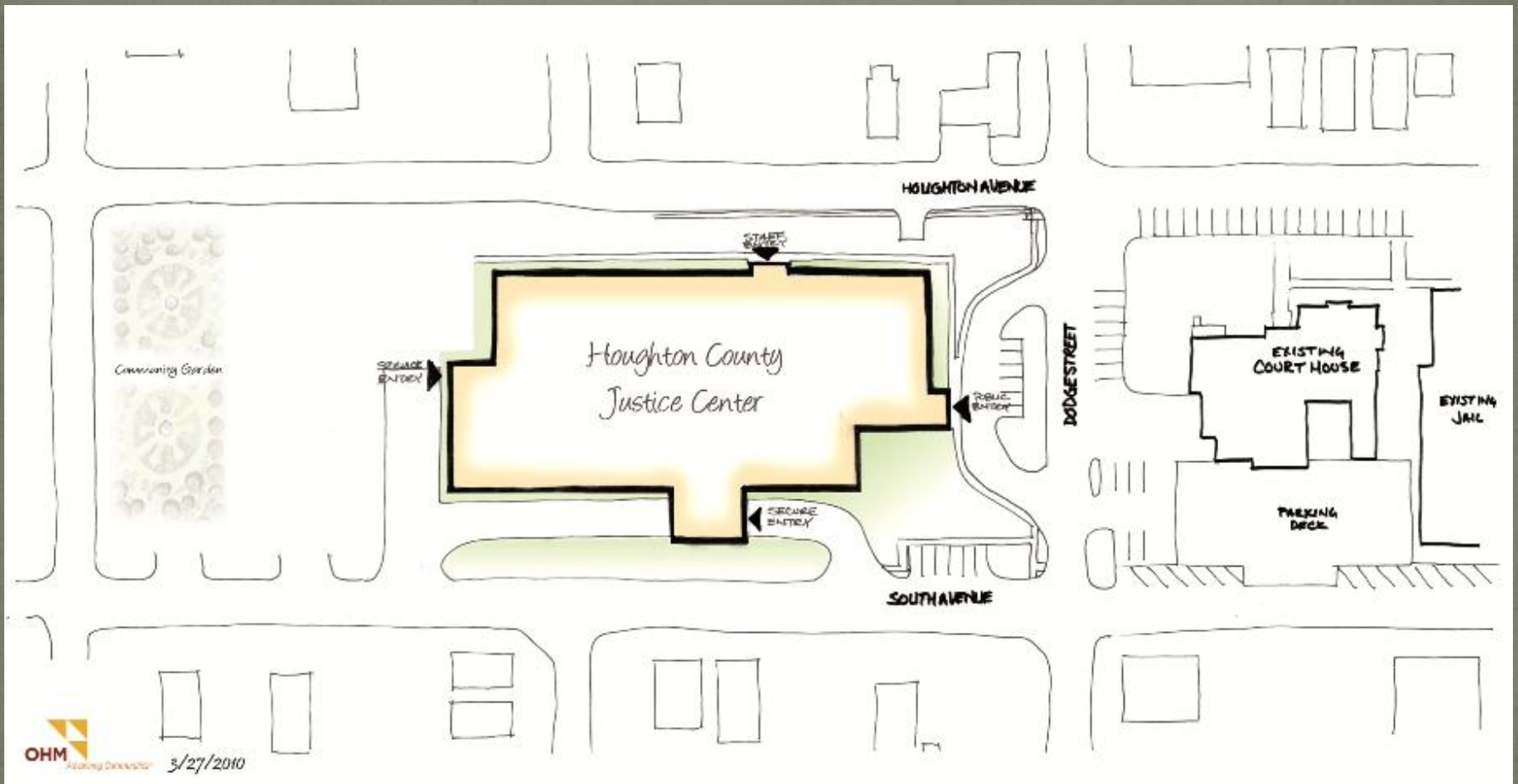
The Garden, started in 2007 on County-owned property, was developed with the understanding that the land might be needed for future construction.

The Board of Commissioners recognizes the importance of the Garden and will assist in moving the Garden to west edge of the new Justice Center complex.

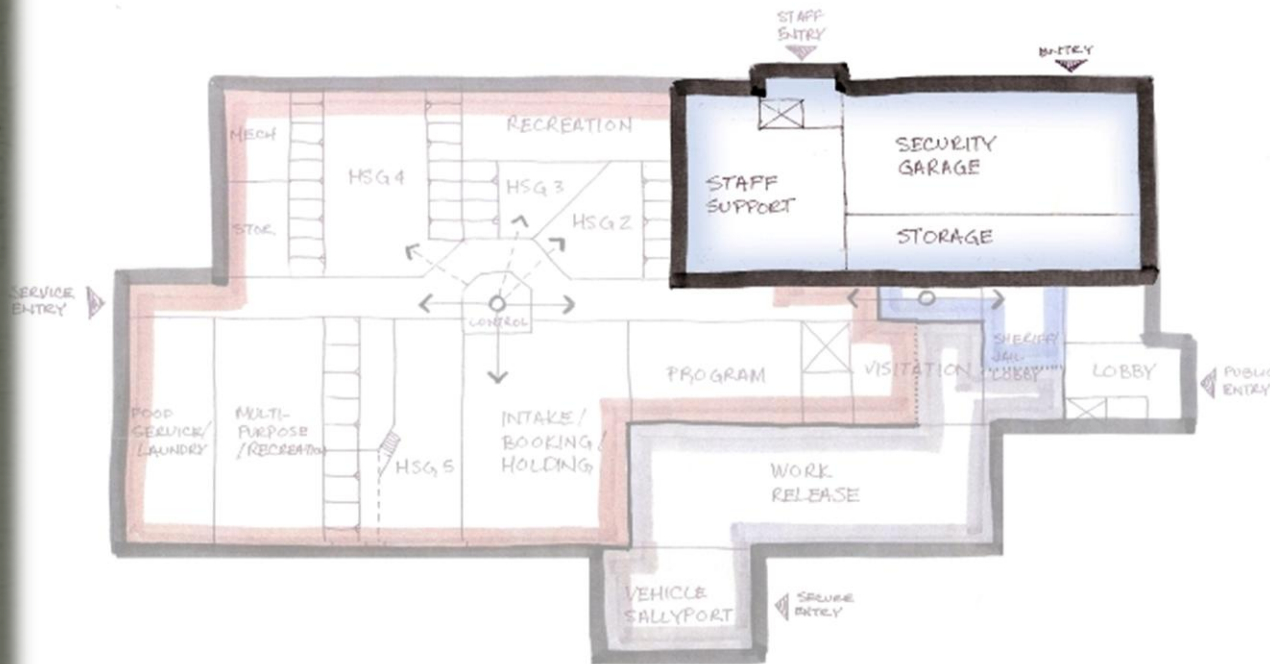
Houghton County Justice Center Conceptual Perspective



Justice Center Conceptual Site Plan



Justice Center Lower Level Floor Plan

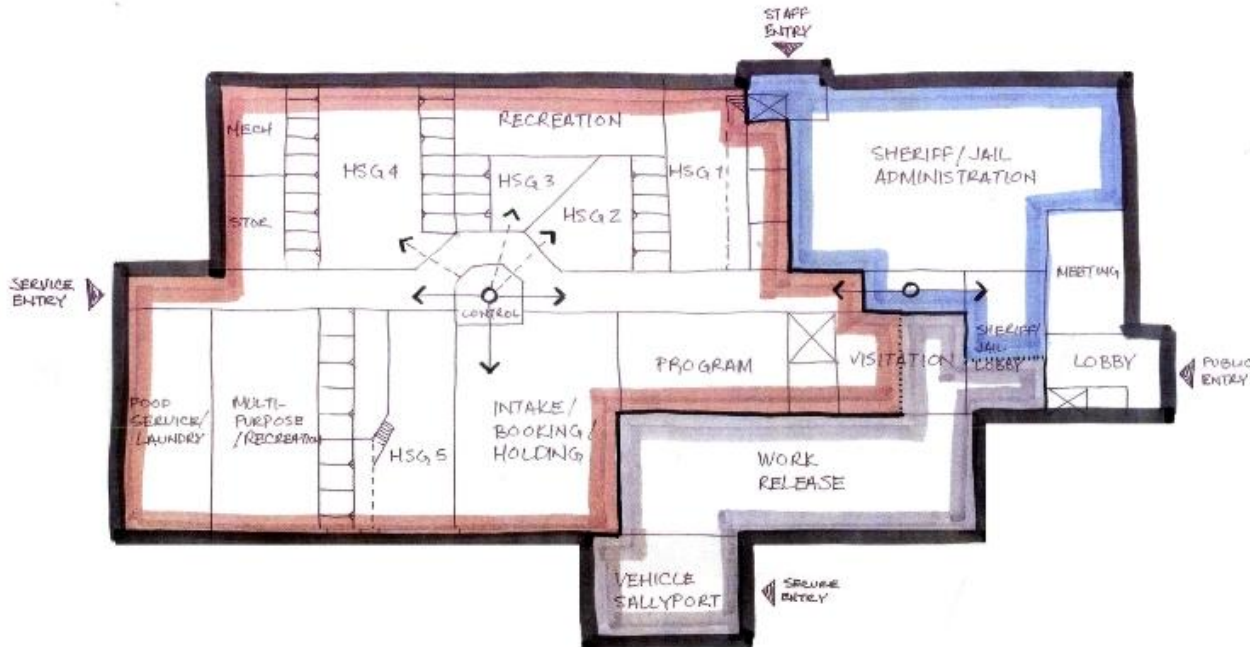


The lower level provides a secure parking garage and elevator for court and sheriff's office staff.

Justice Center Main Level Floor Plan

The space for the jail is on a single level, but 2 stories high to allow for “stacked” cells controlled from a single control booth.

The following photos are examples of these various functions as recently constructed in Lincoln and Vilas counties, Wisconsin.



Jail, Main Floor Features

**Security Door off main
corridor**

**“Stacked” cells and day
room space**



Jail, Main Floor Features

Control Booth in Main Corridor



View from Control Booth into Housing



Jail, Main Floor Features

Receiving & Holding



Receiving & Holding



Jail, Main Floor Features

Work Release Dormitory

Work Release Transition Area



Just for Comparison...

Houghton County Jail Control Booth



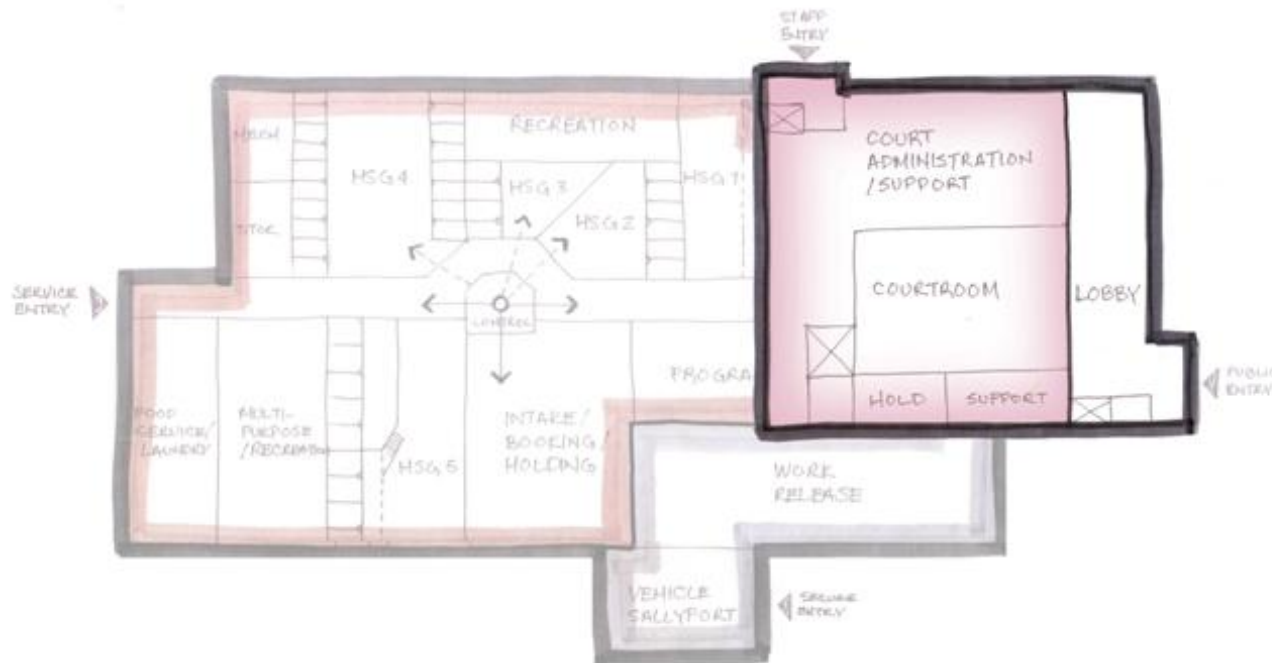
Lincoln County Jail (WI) Control Booth



Justice Center Upper Floor Level

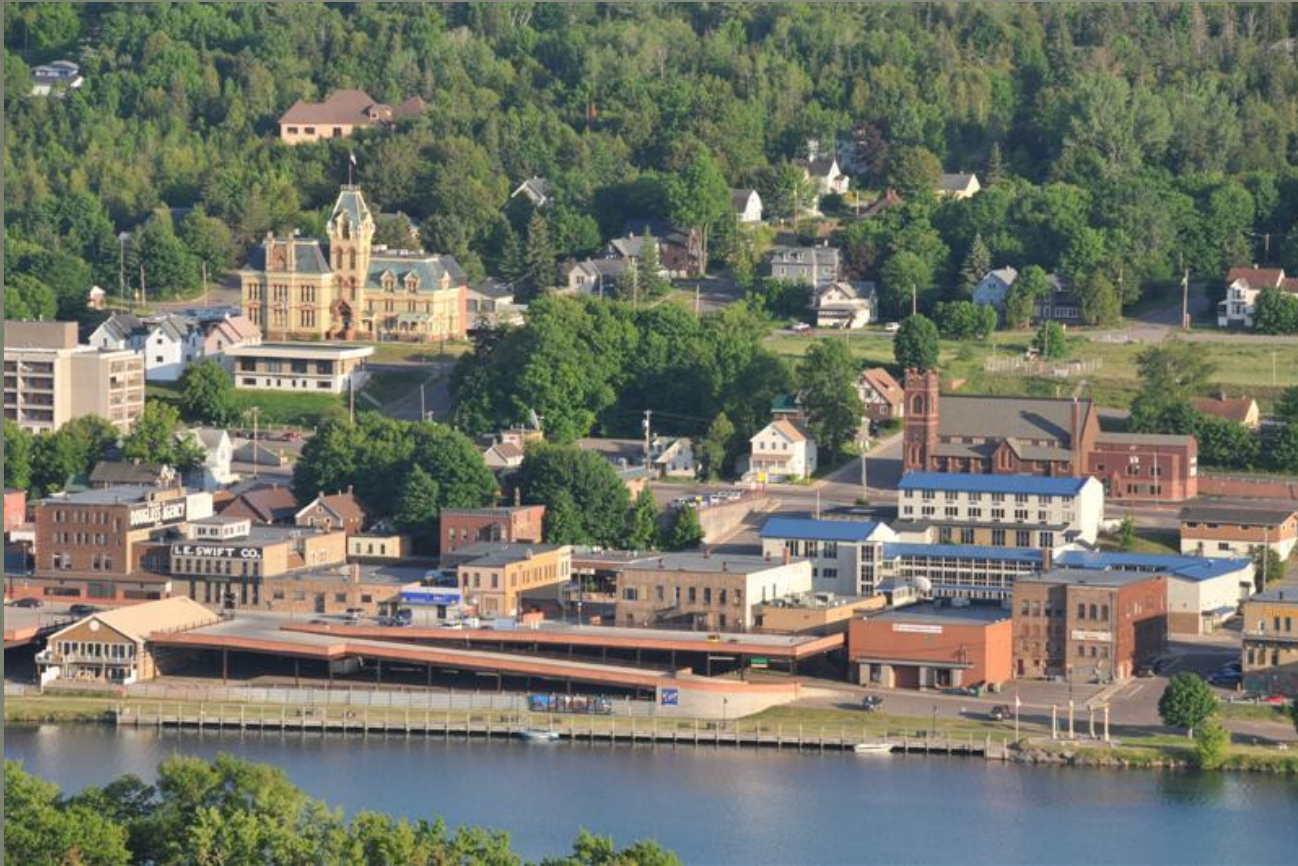
The second floor of the east end of the Justice Center will house the 97th District Court and supporting offices.

A secure elevator will allow direct prisoner access from the jail to the court holding room.



Financing the Houghton County Justice Center

- Preliminary estimates indicate that the cost of a new Justice Center would be about \$15 million.
- A bond, financed over a 30 year period, would provide the money needed for construction.
- An initial levy of less than 1.3 mills, averaging 0.99 mills over time, would be needed.
- The owner of a \$100,000 home would pay an average of \$33.91 a year over the life of the bond.
- The facility will open with current staffing levels.
- New construction, with increased energy efficiency, should result in only modest additional operating and maintenance costs.



Our Challenge

More than 120 years ago, the people of Houghton County decided to invest in the future by funding and building a Court House that still serves the County and is a revered part of our landscape.

Now it is our turn!

Houghton County Justice Center Conceptual Perspective

