

+JAIL COMMITTEE
MEETING-5th Floor-Conference Room
DECEMBER 8, 2025 – 4:00 PM
MINUTES

A. Call to Order

Chairman Hyrkas called the meeting to order at 4:07 p.m.

B. Roll Call

Clerk Kelly conducted roll call:

Present:

Jared Hyrkas, Tom Tikkanen, Faith Morrison, Valorie Troesch, Justin LaCosse, Dan Holcomb, Sharon Foix, William Keith, Sheriff Josh Saaranen, Tom Bingham, Todd LaRoux, Susanna Peters.

Absent: Mike Hamilton and Gretchen Janssen.

C. Approval of Agenda/Additions

A Motion was made by Faith Morrison and seconded by Dan Holcomb to approve the Agenda as presented.

The Motion carried by a voice vote. Ayes 12, Nays 0.

D. Approval of Meeting Minutes of November 3, 2025

A Motion was made by Faith Morrison and seconded by Dan Holcomb to approve the November 3, 2025 Minutes as presented.

The Motion carried by a voice vote. Ayes 12, Nays 0.

E. Public Comments

Thomas Vichich asked why the County needs a jail. Faith Morrison stated according to MCL 45.16 each organized County shall, at its own cost and expense, provide a suitable and sufficient jail. She also noted that MCL 791.262 requires proper, efficient, and humane administration of jails.

F. Old Business/Follow Up on Action Items

1. Reminder of our Objective: Develop a proposed plan for a new Jail/Sheriff's Office that the voters will support

Chairman Hyrkas discussed the objectives of the Committee.

2. Jail Information on the website

The Committee discussed options for what should be on the Houghton County website: Houghtoncounty.net. Look for jail information under the 2026 Jail Plan tab.

3. WUPPDR Survey of voters?

Chairman Tikkanen stated he would contact WUPPDR for the survey of the voters.

Dan Holcomb asked the cost for WUPPDR doing the survey.

Faith Morrison noted that at the November meeting the committee had created a comprehensive list of reasons some folks voted no in August; she also noted that surveys are expensive. Sharon Foix agreed. Morrison suggested that the County putting a spot on the website for people to put comments about the jail.

Valorie Troesch supported Morrison's idea.

Alex from IT offered to create the comment link on the website while the meeting took place.

Chairman Hyrkas stated the committee would read the public's comments they submit to the website. The Committee will decided to not to proceed with the inquiry to WUPPDR about a survey as previously discussed.

4. CCISD Survey for their millage

Chairman Hyrkas stated the survey would be expensive. He has the company name and can get information if desired. The Committee decided it was not worth pursuing at this time and the County link for comments would be sufficient.

Dan Holcomb discussed a link on Facebook to go directly to the County website. Comments should not be viewable to the public. Chairman Hyrkas stated the comments should be put on a spreadsheet or other shareable file type and the Committee should keep the comments link open for 1-2 months, then reopen it again later once our suggestion/path forward has been proposed to the Board of Commissioners.

Chairman Hyrkas asked Tom Tikkanen if hiring a marketing firm can be added to the Board of Commissioners Agenda. Tikkanen stated he could not make any promises as there is not much money in the General Fund. He reminded the Committee that donations were made for the August election to assist with advertising.

Chairman Hyrkas stated his number one (1) priority is to use social media to inform the community about the jail discussions. Post would not need to be often (so they don't get arduous or too much of a commitment), and posting one (1) time every week would be plenty.

Faith Morrison stated the Democrat Party, Republican Party, League of Women Voters and the Sheriff Department can share what she is creating to their Facebook Pages or websites. Committee discussed sharing the burden of who creates the content, and the others can then share it, Chairman Hyrkas said he will send out an email to the Committee to get the ball rolling on the first topic/post to be created and shared.

Sheriff Saaranen requested there be a Public Information Officer (PIO) responsible to get information to everyone.

Faith Morrison asked that Chairman Hyrkas add the 3 new people to the committee email from the Democrat Party.

5. White Board

Tom Bingham was able to obtain a whiteboard.

Dan Holcomb wrote things on the white board during the meeting. He will take a picture of the white board at the end of the meetings and share it to the committee members.

New Business

1. Possible funding sources-Federal opportunity

Colin Gwillim from Jack Bergman's Office, attending by Microsoft Teams, discussed what federal grants may be available to assist the County in building a jail. He stated there is potential funding for a community project through Congressionally Directed Spending. It is a community facility program for rural areas, and jails are an approved project type. This happens one (1) time per year through an Appropriation Committee. The Appropriation Committee accepts application in January or February 2026 and then would hope to recommend funding the project for the next fiscal year in the fall. Dan Holcomb will send a memo of interest to Gwillim regarding potential funding.

Gwillim stated projects have been in the amounts of \$250,000 to \$2 million. There is no restriction on the amount someone can request. Shovel ready projects have the best chance of being approved. Fourteen (14) submitted requests last year and thirteen (13) were approved. Recently, the funds have been available through the Department of Agriculture. The process is for applications to be received by the deadline and then the Members of Congress go through the projects and decide. It is a competitive process and takes many months. The application is not complicated though and basic questions to describe the project/need. Nothing is posted currently. He will try to locate previous years information and will forward it to Dan Holcomb.

Sheriff Saaranen stated the last costs estimate for a new Jail/Sheriff Department were \$20 to \$40 million depending upon many factors.

Colin Gwillim stated that things can be submitted to both Representatives and Senators to get support because either congressional body could fund it.

Faith Morrison stated the Committee needs to come up with a Jail plan that the public will support. People had stated there were no specifics in the previous plan. Suggested for ways to shrink and simplify the jail plan to reduce the costs. Suggested putting details to the plan so people who what they are voting on. It may require doing some more detailed planning now before it goes out to a vote again. Morrison suggested aiming for a sort of “bid document” that details what is to be built—like a document that would go out for a bid.

Chairman Hyrkas discussed the four (4) options that are in the Jail Consultant’s Master Plan on page 147. The Jail Master Plan is on the County website under the Jail Committee tab. The committee will likely want to come up with a new plan that is a blend of some of these options.

Faith Morrison stated the facility must meet Michigan Department of Corrections (MDOC) guidelines.

Sheriff Saaranen stated that the jail needs are an important topic when revising the plan and recommended starting a Sub-Committee to meet with him and his staff to hear what their needs are.

Chairman Hyrkas stated Sheriff Saaranen will head up the Jail Needs Sub-Committee. Faith Morrison, Justin LaCosse, Valorie Troesch will be on the committee and Jim Quinlan will be asked to join. It is possible Mike Hamilton would be interested as well (Dan Holcomb will check).

2. Legal requirements for where the Sheriff Department and/or jail need to be located

Faith Morrison stated that by Michigan law, the Jail can be anywhere in the County, but the Sheriff’s Office must be in the County Seat.

Sheriff Saaranen stated he must run the Jail and does not want the jail and offices separated. This would require the jail in the County seat.

Chairman Hyrkas mentioned that debates between the courthouse being close to the jail, or the jail being at a separate location and having to transport the inmates to the courthouse have been previously investigated and those results are discussed in the 2018 study and recent Jail Master Plan. Every time this issue has been discussed, they have found there should be a Court at/with the jail.

Faith Morrison stated there are square footage numbers in the consultants’ report on the sizes needed for the jail and the courts.

Sheriff Saaranen stated District Court has the most cases, and this would be a good discussion for the Jail Needs Sub-Committee.

3. Location options

Dan Holcomb stated there are 3 options. The Sharon Avenue Property, the current jail site, or across Dodge Street from the courthouse. He asked if the exact amount of square footage is available for the lot across the street. The committee agreed that the space isn't large enough since half of the parcel was sold off some years back.

Tom Bingham stated the lot across the street is where the snow is put, and if that space is used for anything else, it will be expensive to have the snow hauled away.

Tom Tikkanen stated the Sharon Avenue Property has the capacity to have a full County Government Facility for a future courthouse and other purposes.

Chairman Hyrkas discussed having a first social media push and have at least a 2-3 series (to keep them small) of short blurbs to the public on why Sharon Avenue is the best property for a new jail. Describe the process and history the County used in finding the property.

4. County Assets

Faith Morrison stated Sharon Avenue and Jail Property Use Committee voted for demolition of the church on the Sharon Avenue Property as reflected in their posted minutes. Tom Tikkanen said this action has been reconsidered. There had been a review of an older report indicating that the building could be reused if the roof was just reinforced. This agenda item will be further discussed at the next meeting.

5. Goals for/before next meeting(s)

This agenda item will be further discussed at the next meeting.

6. Next meeting date and time.

The Committee agreed to meet next on January 5, 2026 at 4:00 p.m.

G. Public Comments

Graham Jaehnig discussed a letter from an inmate that they received years ago. The inmate described the poor conditions in the jail.

Alex Radke, County IT, stated he has two (2) questions ready for the survey on the County website. It is now live on the website.

George Eakin stated he appreciated the transparency at the meeting and liked the direction things were going.

Jim Quinlan, former Commissioner and employee at Camp Kitwen, offered to help.

J. Adjournment

Motion was made by Dan Holcomb and seconded by Valorie Troesch to adjourn the meeting at 5:38 p.m.

The Motion carried by a voice vote. Ayes 12, Nays 0.

JARED HYRKAS

JENNIFER KELLY
COUNTY CLERK/REGISTER OF DEEDS

APPROVED: _____
JK