

JAIL NEEDS SUBCOMMITTEE
MEETING-5th Floor-Conference Room
JANUARY 12, 2026 – 2:00 PM
MINUTES

Call to Order:

Sheriff Saaranen called the meeting to order at 2:02 p.m.

Sheriff Josh Saaranen, Captain Travis Dessellier, Faith Morrison, Justin LaCasse, Susanna Peters, Detective Charlie Klein and Mike Hamilton.

By Microsoft Teams: Valorie Troesch.

Approval of Agenda/Additions: Sheriff Saaranen requested that the Committee add an update on the latest Jail Committee meeting as New Business “A” on the agenda.

Motion was made by Faith Morrison and seconded by Mike Hamilton to approve the agenda as presented with the one (1) addition.

The Motion carried by a voice vote. Ayes 7, Nays 0.

Approval of December 29, 2025 minutes:

Motion was made by Faith Morrison and seconded by Charlie Klein to approve the December 29, 2025 minutes as presented.

The Motion carried by a voice vote. Ayes 7, Nays 0.

Public Comments:

None.

New Business:

A. Update on Jail Committee:

Faith Morrison updated the Subcommittee on the last Jail Committee meeting. Sheriff Saaranen stated a public meeting should be held to allow residents to be present to discuss the Sharon Avenue property before the Board of Commissioners vote on anything.

Faith Morrison discussed the four (4) committees, and suggested the County Held Properties committee report to the Board of Commissioners by a firm date as a first step

Sheriff Saaranen again said that a public meeting should take place. He wants to be 100% transparent with the public.

Clerk Kelly stated a resident asked why the courthouse and current jail and surrounding buildings and property have not been looked at for their value since they are also County Held Properties.

Faith Morrison will ask Administrator Rheault, Roy Britz, and Tom Tikanen if the county's audit document contains the values of all its properties.

Faith Morrison said that although most people do not want to see Canal View and other properties sold, some member of the County Held Properties and Sharon Avenue Property and current Jail Committees and current Jail Committees have some members that are in favor of sales. Their rationale is privately held properties are preferable to publicly held properties.

Sheriff will talk to Chelsea Rheault, Roy Britz, Jared Hyrkas and Joel Keranen to consider having a public event to let the public weight in on the location of the jail before action is taken to decide on the location.

Susanna Peters asked what the answer about the Baraga facility is that was mentioned in public comments of the last Jail Committee meeting. The Sheriff said it's an empty dorm-like building that is for very low security lock-up. It is an old work camp that is within the write of the Braga prison. It is more than 20 miles from Houghton.

Susanna Peters said she knows the building. It has all bunks, a big common room, a barn essentially.

Sheriff Saaranen stated Camp Kitwen is not an option (no longer owned publicly). The Baraga prison will not allow Houghton County inmates.

Faith Morrison stated we need to look at the pros/cons of locations. Sheriff Saaranen stated the Baraga prison is level one (1), that is only for the lowest-level offenders.

Faith Morrison discussed the 2018 Jail Task Force. They conducted a thorough and open discussion of the 2018 millage loss. More than 40 people were on the Task Force and there are minutes on the County website. They evaluated Cap Kitwen and other potential sites and recommended that the County Board look for a new location in or adjacent to the boundaries of the City of Houghton and build a new jail. She stated the County Board then found a property and annexed it to the City of Houghton, which was what the Task Force recommended.

B. Dessellier's newest scenario:

Travis Dessellier emailed everyone the newest scenario prior to the meeting. He read it to the committee. The scenario is at the bottom of these minutes.

The Committee appreciated the latest scenario as it shows the difficulty of the current physical jail for an important process, moving inmates to court appearances, which are frequent.

Valorie Troesch discussed having a small area in the new jail for the 97th District Judge to have hearings with inmates. The 97th District Court hears 98% of the cases in Houghton County.

Sheriff Saaranen stated he believes the intent of the new jail design is to have a small courtroom at the Sharon Avenue property. He discussed the importance of incorporating the access from the jail

The Sheriff will check on the challenges of designing a courtroom at the new jail so that the members of the public could attend hearings at the jail

The committee turned to discussing how to use the scenarios to help the public understand the problems with the current jail building.

Faith Morrison discussed doing little videos with the Sheriff's staff talking to people about jail process (the scenarios).

Valorie Troesch stated the videos do not need to be professionally done. Simple. Honest. Direct. No big budget.

Mike Hamilton asked if the Sheriff does a debriefing with his staff. Sheriff said yes. Sheriff stated he must be careful about inmate rights. He stated the videos could be short and not fancy. Have short conversations.

Faith Morrison discussed the weekly promotion of jail activities

The Sheriff said he would need to talk to legal advisors about the proposed videos.

Valorie Troesch said there would be no breach of confidentiality. Members of the public would play the roles of inmates. There would be a written and visual description of the videos. At some point put the whole series on You Tube.

Justin LaCosse said that the still pictures from the consultant's report could be used as well.

Valorie Troesch volunteered to be an actor for the videos. She stated one (1) video should be about the sally port and how you cannot open both doors of a police vehicle. People need to see the limitations. There are some places the public needs to see.

C. LaCosse's system:

Justin LaCosse stated he has a breakdown of the three scenarios diagrammed. If the committee decides to continue, we dig down into the granular steps. What are we going to do with this when it's done. We could tabulate the steps: this is what happens in these spaces; can you

imagine doing these things in this small area? The next steps are to look at the booking area (Laundry area). The table of steps is not as accessible to the public as a video, though. Not as digestible. But the tabular steps could help explain why it is not worth it to spend money on the existing jail.

Susanne Peters discussed the jail having no visiting spaces, not safe for kids or for people needing therapy or other programs. We would like the public to think about things that are going to be better having more space.

Travis Desselier stated they do not have in-person visiting. Visiting is only done through the kiosk or tablets. Faith Morrison commented that this is the case throughout Michigan these days.

Sheriff noted that out of sight, out of sound is the standard for handling juveniles; this is not easy to provide reliably in our current jail.

Susanne Peters asked how juveniles are dealt with. Travis Desselier stated they put the inmates on lockdown while a juvenile is walking through the jail.

Faith Morrison suggested making a rough video to see how it would turn out.

Faith Morrison will work with the Sheriff to see if we can make a video as a proof of concept. Would have to pass legal muster, however.

Old Business

Sheriff's numbers on mental health inmates:

Sheriff Saaranen said approximately 90% of Houghton County inmates are addicted to alcohol, drugs or have a mental health issue. They recently had an inmate with mental health issues that was in the holding tank for a month. He needed medications, but they could not force him, and the Court would not authorize medication. We were put into the situation of having to react to what he did rather than having the opportunity to be proactive.

Susanna Peters asked how nursing works at the jail.

Sheriff said we have a contract with a nurse who meets with inmates in the basement. She works a couple of hours a week.

The Sheriff and Travis Desselier discussed the history of the kinds of inmates they have been seeing in the Houghton County Jail. Pre-meth, it was all alcohol. There was an opioid era. Now we are seeing heroin and fentanyl. In the mid-20-teens we started to see needle use. Now it's crystal meth, opioids, and less alcohol. A lot of folks dealing with alcohol are getting a diversion program.

Faith Morrison discussed having an article for a press release that would give that history.

Susanne Peters talked about addictions and services that are available. Sheriff stated there is no space in the current jail for providing services. Susanna Peters stated people want services for sick people.

Faith Morrison discussed how to make things better compared to how things are now.

Sheriff will track down narratives of how the job of law enforcement in Houghton County has evolved over the last 20 years.

Faith Morrison will consider a press release with the inmate history discussed above.

Sheriff adding police blotter to his app

No discussion.

Sheriff will have an update at a later date.

Morrison/Sheriff looking into radio appearance for Sheriff (or something like that)

No discussion.

Faith Morrison will stop and see Todd VanDyke and request a series of public service announcements.

Sheriff look at list of spaces jail currently has; what we should have

No discussion.

Sheriff will get a more in-depth list together.

Morrison's look at Master Plan and square footages listed

No discussion.

Faith Morrison will continue looking into this.

Next meeting date and time:

The Committee agreed to meet next on **Thursday, January 29, 2026 at 3:00 p.m.** in the 5th floor conference room, with Teams available. Note the new time due to some conflicts members had.

Public Comments

Sheriff stated he is willing to give tours to people of the jail.

Adjournment:

Motion was made by Faith Morrison and seconded by Susanne Peters to adjourn the meeting at 3:40 p.m..

The Motion carried by a voice vote. Ayes 7, Nays 0.

JOSH SAARANEN
Sheriff

JENNIFER KELLY
COUNTY CLERK/REGISTER OF DEEDS

APPROVED: _____
JK

Inmate brought over to Court Scenario

Inmate Doe, who is lodged at the Houghton County Jail is scheduled for an arraignment at 97th District Court located on the third floor of the Court House. Inmate Doe is requested to be brought over to the Court House for his arraignment. Corrections Officer goes to Cell 312 where inmate Doe is being housed, open the trap to the cell door and request inmate Doe to place his hands outside of the trap so that handcuffs can be applied and double locked prior to taking him out of the cell. Staff once outside of the cell, pat him down. Each inmate for any movement outside of their cell is required to have their jail issued oranges on.

The trap located on the Cell door is in an area that most inmates need to be handcuffed with their hands located in front of them instead of being placed behind their backs due to the height of it. Handcuffs in front of an inmate gives them a wider range of movement and accessibility to grab unauthorized items during internal movement.

The other issue is that now we have an inmate handcuffed in a cell with other inmates. He could potentially utilize the handcuffs to choke someone out, etc... Although once an inmate is handcuffed, they are almost immediately removed from the cell once applied. If we had a series of doors between each cell would accommodate the process and procedure of handcuffing much safer for staff and inmates.

Note, not all inmates are required to have handcuffs placed behind their back due to being able to sign documents, sitting for extended periods of time, use of the belt restraints, etc... The safest way of handcuffing is hands to be placed behind the inmates back.

The CO opens the cell door with the large set of key rings and escorts inmate Doe down the main catwalk of the jail and through the secure door, which requires them to open the door with an addition smaller key ring. The CO and inmate Doe walk past the sally port garage door, holding cell door, women cells, laundry room, and into the booking area before the rest of the restraints can be applied. Once in the booking area/corrections cubicle inmate Doe is advised to kneel down on the booking bench so ankle restraints can be applied. Once these are applied and double locked he is advised to stand up so belly restraints can be applied around his waist and cuffs placed on. Inmate Doe is given a pair of orange shoes for walking over to court.

The Houghton County Jail operates with large sets of keys for locking and unlocking multiple doors, including cell doors, secure doors, and exit doors. Issues with this is that they are big and bulky for Corrections staff to carry around; they have the potential to be grabbed or ripped away putting officer safety at risk. Accessibility to replace the keys is tough, which may require locks to be replaced or whole doors. The ability to have a central control center would allow Corrections staff to safety monitor internal movement and electronically unlock doors as needed to maintain safe flow of movement without stops or hiccups. The general location of the housing for male inmates at the Houghton County Jail is located in the back of the jail that requires

inmates to walk past numerous doors, which could potentially give them access to unauthorized items as they are escorted to the booking area. Having inmates in the booking area to apply restraints or even just doing a booking allows the inmate to visually see our camera system due to lack of space in corrections. This could lead to potential inmates seeing female inmates on camera (vice versa), juveniles, and the security of the jail.

Inmate Doe is now ready to be walked over to the courthouse. Corrections staff escort inmate Doe from the booking area through the secure door and past the kitchen, administrative offices, and through the main lobby of the Sheriff's Office. Inmate Doe is escorted out of the front door to the Sheriff's Office and walked down the sidewalk to the courthouse. They enter the front entrance of the courthouse and advise inmate Doe to stand on the right hand side of the wall/steps to be escorted up stairs to the third floor. Once on the third floor inmate Doe is walked down the hallway past individuals from the public, offices, and into 97th district court room that is packed full of individuals waiting to be seen.

Once court is completed for inmate Doe, he is escorted back to the jail the same way he was brought over.

Inmate Doe once his restraints are applied and checked he is escorted through a secure door that walks him past the jail kitchen, administrative offices, and out through the front lobby where the public could be. Issues at hand, this allow the inmate to possible see confidential information/lay out of the jail and sheriff's office, ability to grab unauthorized item putting officer and inmate safety at risk, attempted assault on officers or public, etc... Once outside of the front door of the Sheriff's Office he now is in an open area outside which could lead to an attempted escape, although his ankles should be shackled staff still needs to be mindful of the potential for him to have a cuff key or similar item, which he could use to unlock restraints.

Most inmates know the date and time of their court appearance and if they are going to be needed to be escorted over to court, this allows them to give their people a heads up of when they are going to court. Issues with this is that it gives them a chance for a potential escape as well, which could involve outside help. This could be a very dangerous situation, which could include use of weapons, hostage situation, or loss of life.

Inmate Doe is escorted down a sidewalk to the Courthouse, which is roughly about a 100 yards between the Sheriff's Office and the Courthouse. You have people entering and exiting each building at all times of the day, putting the public at risk for an assault or worse. Once inside the Courthouse inmate Doe is escorted up a flight of stairs. Inmates are advised to walk along the side of the wall with staff on the other side of the inmate to stop the potential for them to jump off the staircase, which could cause self-harm or an escape. Once at the top of the stairs inmate Doe is walked past public areas, offices, and employees prior to entering a packed 97th District Court. Issues are public safety, officer safety, and other employees whom are working at the Courthouse. This procedure is then repeated for escort back to the jail allowing multiple occasions for an unwanted/bad situation.

Best practice would be to have a tunnel, skywalk, or some other means to escort inmates to and from court. This would allow them to be out of the public eye while be escorted, reduce the possibility of inmate on staff assaults, escapes, limit the ability to grab unauthorized items, etc.... Located at each courtroom a holding cell should be constructed for inmates required to be seen so they are in a secure area. Inmates should not have to be escorted past administrative offices, kitchens, or through a public lobby before exiting a facility. We should not have to worry about walking up a flight of stairs, although the elevator could be used but also has its concerns (break down, public on it, waiting for it, so on).