

JAIL NEEDS SUBCOMMITTEE
MEETING-5th Floor-Conference Room
DECEMBER 22, 2025 – 1:00 PM
MINUTES

A. Call to Order

Sheriff Saaranen called the meeting to order at 1:00 p.m.

B. Roll Call

Present:

Sheriff Josh Saaranen, Detective Charlie Klein, Captain Travis Dessellier, Faith Morrison, Valorie Troesch, Justin LaCosse, Mike Hamilton and Jennifer Kelly.

By Microsoft Teams: Susanna Peters

The Sheriff will bring discussions/recommendations to the Jail Committee from the Jail Needs Subcommittee.

The subcommittee discussed how this new group should proceed.

Valorie Troesch discussed coming up with non-negotiable items that the jail cannot be without.

Faith Morrison discussed suggesting specific items in a new jail design for the Jail Committee to consider. Goal is to develop a plan the public can support.

Valorie Troesch suggested starting with the 2025 design and comparing the essential items to the non-essential items; be guided by codes and standards.

Sheriff discussed the top three (3) issues are design, location, and cost.

Location four options: (1) Sharon Avenue property, (2) build where the current jail is, (3) build across Dodge Street from the courthouse, or (4) look for a new location. Pros of the Sharon Avenue property is it is a big lot, being out of the downtown neighborhood. There is good access for squad cars and other departmental vehicles. Cons are what to do with the current church building.

(2) Building where the current jail is. With the wrap around jail, it limits expanding, would have to be multi-level causing additional staffing, disrupts operation during construction, the pro is it is cheaper.

Faith Morrison noted that the public had voted down the wraparound design in the 2018 millage.

(3) Block next door: Pro is there is room to build. Cons are parking, snow removal and costs for a tunnel or skybridge to transport inmates to court.

(4) Somewhere else. There are few locations available in Houghton and some that are available have fill (not readily buildable).

(1) Sharon Avenue property: It has the best longevity option—size for other county operations. Con is transportation of inmates for court. Pro is a small courtroom could be built if Judge Daavettila was willing to come (which he is).

Faith Morrison stated the voters have voted no to a large complex in downtown Houghton.

Valorie Troesch stated financially, the County has the property on Sharon Avenue and that is the logical choice. She feels the cost needs to go down and to show the urgency of needing a new jail to the voters.

Charlie Klein stated he heard voters are upset how the Sharon Avenue property was bought.

Faith Morrison stated the square footage of the proposed new facility is not in the plans, and no specifics are in the plan. Rather there are ranges of sq ft. This committee could look at the consultants' tables to make choices that address concern of high cost.

Sheriff explained that MDOC inspectors have stated that the jail is in horrible shape and they would not say it publicly. If an inspection failed, the Sheriff's office would have 72 hours to get inmates to go to other jails. They have been passing inspections every year, but their numbers went down this last year which relieved pressure. When numbers go up even to what they were, we are on verge of failing classification. They need to be able to separate inmates.

Travis Dessellier stated mental health issues are bad in the jail. He stated they need help.

Mike Hamilton stated people think we take inmates for no money. He suggested building a large community building and fill it as we need it.

Sheriff stated we could bill other counties if we house their inmates.

Sheriff stated MDOC reimburses \$35/person a day. Delta County has a contract with Marquette for \$50/day. Marquette County is sending people all over the place now. Houghton County has had three (3) murder-charged inmates for approximately two (2) years now.

Faith Morrison stated inmates can be in our jail while pending trial and if they are sentenced for less than a year they can serve in our jail. She stated voters have expressed concerns that the Sharon Avenue property was not purchased properly but it was purchased by the County Board in open meetings.

Valorie Troesch discussed means to communicate with the public. Improve the County website, divide it into sections, show how the Sharon Avenue property was purchased. Make it user friendly.

Justin LaCasse described an engineering process that could be helpful in getting to a more suitable and less expensive design for a new jail. Begin with “use cases” and a description of processes. The last step is sizing the physical implementation (the rooms and sizes of rooms).

Mike Hamilton discussed the 150-page Master Plan is very long and suggested picking out the most important pages to show the public.

Faith Morrison discussed that the important thing to do is to have specifics on the new jail. The plan was to vague in 2025.

Valorie Troesch suggested using the internet as a tool and benefit to communicate the plan once everything is in place and to advertise.

Sheriff discussed the history of the Sharon Avenue property and requested there be a Public Information Officer to get information to the groups.

The committee agreed to put their recommendation of the location of a new jail into a motion.

A Motion was made by Valorie Troesch and seconded by Mike Hamilton to recommend the Sharon Avenue property as the location for the new jail.

AYS: 7.

NAYS: 0.

Motion carried.

Discussion turned to a new design for a jail project and the needs of the county.

Justin Lacasse discussed requirements and documents for transporting inmates from the jail to the court when the building was designed.

Sheriff stated it does not exist yet. Would be a part of procedures.

Faith Morrison stated the consultants’ put jail needs/processes into color-coded blocks for building a new one.

Justin Lacasse stated he is trying to figure out if we need 3 bays or how many bays.

Sheriff stated there would be 70 beds in general pop, there would be juvenile cells, drunk tanks, and holding cells.

Faith Morrison discussed classification. You cannot put a female with males. The consultants gave the 60, 70 and 80 bed options and the prices for each; the prices did not vary that much. We currently have 28 beds, but with classification we can only hold less than that.

Valorie Troesch questioned how many kinds of cells are needed in the jail, and what the MDOC requirements are.

Sheriff discussed the trends in jails. Right now and for the first time, we have three (3) Prosecutors in Houghton County along with the drug court, bond trends, and he has concerns with needing space for education, juvenile holdings, and holding cells. Jail diversion programs are good. Drug court he supports 100%. Jail bond trends (no bail rules) currently reduce inmates. Pendulum is swinging (might go back). Has gone back and forth through the years. Are we going to be immediately unprepared for that in the future if we build too small?

Faith Morrison stated she would like to hear what holding cells we have now compared to what we should have. The difference in dealing with a drunk and disorderly inmate now and what it could be. Having the staff dealing with inmates and injuries. Justifying space needed.

Sheriff stated there are two (2) holding cells that can hold multiple people, however, 1 cell was used by one (1) individual for three (3) months (on a mental health hold). That individual is now downstate. To meet classification requirements staff have to shuffle inmates around; that makes for a lot of internal transfers and is also a safety risk.

Travis Dessellier stated he gave tours showing the holding cells. They cannot find parts for fixing things. Sheriff stated the parts cannot be manufactured either.

Faith Morrison stated the committee needs to find a way to tell the story on how things happen at the jail and then explain why a new facility is needed and why things are the way they are at the current jail.

The jail was built in 1963. Voters question who allowed the jail to get in the condition it is in. Any substantial changes to the jail mean that it has to be brought up to current standards.

Discussion turned to creating scenarios to help the public understand what goes on in the jail and why the current building is not acceptable and cannot be made acceptable.

Justin LaCasse suggested going through everything, for example, on a drunk driving arrest and writing it down for the next meeting. Finding out the frequency of arrests also.

Valorie Troesch suggested a video of a jail tour showing all the inadequacies. Sheriff said that all of the jail cannot be shown on video for privacy concerns and regulations.

Valorie Troesch suggested we also need a scenario on the internal movements of the inmates at the jail to the court, for the inmates to see an Attorney or Pastor.

Faith Morrison discussed a scenario on mental health inmates who are not cooperative and have to be brought to the hospital.

Valorie Troesch stated we should address why some situations can't be dealt with now. What's preventing it from being done.

Travis Dessellier will create scenarios for the next meeting based on the discussion above.
Perhaps these will result in short videos that could be shared with the public.

Justin Lacasse stated the committee needs to know what the jail is not in compliance with.

Valorie Troesch stated in 2018, the jail population was 60 people at the jail and work camp.

Sheriff stated there is a lot of diversion now for some offenses (OWI, suspended license). Before, they were lodged, now they are released. Jail reform happened.

Valorie Troesch discussed seeing what the numbers are for people lodged and arrested.

Sheriff said that Marquette had an escapee murder someone and the local politics became more law-and-order. There is a good amount of domestic violence. Hard to predict jail populations and classifications.

Sheriff will bring statistics on people lodged and arrested.

Mike Hamilton talked to a banker. The banker stated the cost would be about \$500/square foot for a commercial property. Now, that price should be doubled. A new jail is only getting more expensive.

Valorie Troesch suggested finding out what the Sheriff Department wants to do but cannot do due to limitations. Juvenile care, medical treatment.

The committee discussed the presentation at the last Jail Committee meeting concerning obtaining jail funds from the federal government.

Sheriff stated federal spending money in the past has helped purchase patrol cars with a 50/50 match from the Agriculture Department. There is a Bridges program he would like to do, but there is not enough room at the Jail for this program to happen at this time.

Summarize (to do):

1. Get short stories that tell the needs and experiences of the Houghton County Sheriff Department. Need ideas. (Travis Dessellier)
2. Sheriff to get statistics on arrests and housing at the jail. Trends and historical.
3. Space categories for the jail. All will look at consultant's reports
4. Previous millage was vague and plain.
5. Do a press release. One topic is history of the Sharon Avenue purchase

Valorie Troesch suggested talking to Commissioners Britz and Janssen on the properties they looked at and to find out what a more specific plan buys the County.

Next meeting date and time:

The Committee agreed to meet next on December 29, 2025 at 2:00 p.m. in the same location.

Public Comments

None.

Adjournment:

Motion was made by Valorie Troesch and seconded by Mike Hamilton to adjourn the meeting.

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

JOSH SAARANEN
Sheriff

JENNIFER KELLY
COUNTY CLERK/REGISTER OF DEEDS

APPROVED: _____
JK