

JAIL NEEDS SUBCOMMITTEE
MEETING-5th Floor-Conference Room
DECEMBER 29, 2025 – 2:00 PM
MINUTES

Call to Order:

Sheriff Saaranen called the meeting to order at 2:08 p.m.

Roll Call/Present:

Sheriff Josh Saaranen, Captain Travis Dessellier, Faith Morrison, Justin LaCasse.

By Microsoft Teams: Valorie Troesch, Jennifer Kelly, and Mike Hamilton.

Visitors: Corrections Officer Dale Lavigne, Alex Radke (IT)

Approval of Agenda/Additions:

Motion was made by Faith Morrison and seconded by Mike Hamilton to approve the agenda as presented.

The Motion carried by a voice vote. Ayes 4, Nays 0.

The minutes of the December 22, 2025 meeting will be submitted for approval at the next meeting.

Discussion:

The Sheriff introduced Dale Lavigne, Houghton Sheriff Department Corrections Officer.

Faith Morrison discussed helping the public know why a jail is needed. Inmates don't need a jail, the county does. It's about safety of the jail. The jail is unable to separate inmates at this time. People have asked why we cannot add on to the current jail.

Dale Lavigne stated that would open up a can of worms. Once a major renovation is proposed, the entire facility may have to be brought up to code.

Mike Hamilton stated everything has to be updated when a major change is made. Everything was grandfathered in. Discussed the section in the consultant's master plan about fixing up sections of the jail.

Dale Lavigne stated the jail is not just about the inmates. It is about the safety of the officers dealing with inmates, especially those with mental health issues. They want everyone to be safe. It was asked how often there are mental health inmates. **ACTION: Sheriff will get the numbers.** He discussed placement of an inmate in an appropriate facility taking between 2 weeks and 11 months; the jail would typically have one or two waiting for mental health placement. They recently had 1 person for 2 years. There are 8 people waiting for a bed downstate. Sheriff asked Dale Lavigne to compare working for Ontonagon compared to Houghton. She stated there are a lot more inmates in Houghton County and the danger is much higher. They could put 4 people in a cell in Ontonagon.

Mike Hamilton stated the importance of informing the public of the danger in the jail.

Valorie Troesch stated the information about the danger of the jail would best come from the Sheriff as it will carry more weight.

Faith Morrison discussed inmates' medical appointments. Dale Lavigne stated they bring the inmates locally or sometimes go to Marquette for surgery. That takes staff time.

Faith Morrison asked if the booking area can be made safer. Dale Lavigne stated it is too small; removing walls is not an option due to the grandfathering problem and bringing things up to code.

Valorie Troesch stated there was not room to do that in the 2018 jail plan.

Sheriff stated that he would rather fight with someone in open areas where officers can come to aid, not in tight areas. They sometimes have weekly fights, and sometimes daily. Knock-down, drag-out fights. The public is not made aware of the fighting.

Faith Morrison stated people claim that we do not have much crime in Houghton County.

Sheriff noted that we used to have a police blotter column in the paper. Sheriff is researching a daily blotter tab in the sheriff's app, for a field service deputy that would respond daily. **ACTION: Sherrif will look into adding a police blotter for his app.**

Sheriff wants the jail to be as safe as possible and to have the officers in a secure area.

Mike Hamilton said a 5-minute spiel on the radio would be good.

Faith Morrison discussed how Houghton City Manager Eric Waara is on the radio weekly for the City of Houghton and discussed things happening in the City of Houghton. Maybe they could do that for the Sheriff and discuss the jail. **ACTION: Morrison/Sheriff will look into something like this for the county.**

Valorie Troesch discussed the risks and dangers, let people know of doomsday incidents and things that happen in the jail and the repercussions. We need to sell the jail to the voters, and people need to know the things that happen in the jail.

Faith Morrison asked how many inmates in the jail are female. Dale Lavigne stated there are 7 and we have only 2 cells. Not all cells are suitable for female inmates. She discussed overcrowding.

Travis Desallier: There is a shower in each cell, except for 1 cell (just how they were built; one was converted from an office). There are two 6-man cells. They must move inmates around so one person can shower. The inmates are responsible to clean the cells 3 times per week. Having so many internal transfers is also unsafe.

Sheriff stated the nurse comes to the facility and meets with inmates downstairs. There is always an officer with the inmate. They have from zero to 6 nurse visits in a day.

Valorie Troesch discussed the difference in transportation for inmates between the current jail and a potential new jail. Dale Lavigne: Wheelchairs and inmates needing crutches is hard/impossible now and becomes a liability. Would be fixed in a new facility. Less overall disruption with movements in a new facility. She noted that when she is downstairs at the nurse's office with an inmate she is out of hearing/being heard range of the other officers. This is not safe.

Travis Dessellier discussed scenarios he prepared to give the public an idea of how the jail processes are carried out in the current building. He went through the booking scenario. **ACTION: Append the three scenarios to these minutes.**

Discussion continued. Travis Dessellier: If an inmate needs a wheelchair or cannot do steps, it's an issue. Sometimes must ask neighboring county to assist and lodge the inmate. Sally port is bad and cannot have 2 officers working together in that space. Sheriff stated that they cannot make it bigger and install an elevator. He stated general maintenance has been top notch over the past for painting and fixing things. The roof is the biggest issue right now-infrastructure problem. Previously holes were put into the roof for a critical HVAC problem. Now there are leaks; the holes were a mistake, but there was a lawsuit filed citing improper air circulation and it had to be addressed immediately. Another issue is there should not be any firearms in the booking area. The firearms should be locked up. For the road officers to circulate in the current jail it is a challenge to follow the firearms rules and still get to where you need to be. Third issue is the inmates should be read their Miranda rights in the interview room, and they should be recorded and maintain they know their rights. All these activities have to take place in the small and busy space we have. Faith Morrison stated it's legally important that the officers do this at

the right time and make note of it, and if the new jail is designed better, everything would be better.

Sheriff stated sometimes there are 6-7 officers in a small space. Dale Lavigne stated an inmate can become aggressive seeing that many officers, so the Sheriff will sometimes ask some to leave the area.

Faith Morrison stated we are improvising in the spaces instead of having dedicated spaces for the work. We need to know the square feet of space. It is in the consultants' report.

Alex Radke noted that there is no second egress from the basement; that is where the emergency manager's office is. The only way out is past the booking area; not safe.

Dale Lavigne stated the types of drugs being smuggled in these days can be deadly.

Sheriff stated a new facility body scanner is needed and there is grant funding available.

Travis stated he tries to have 2 officers present for a strip search which is currently done in the laundry room; this is the only available space.

Dale Lavigne stated the hallway is narrow if there are bodies rolling around.

Justin LaCasse showed everyone a slide presentation on the requirements, functional and physical things that needs to exist. He can show an analysis in what is done now, and how things could be done at a property facility. He could try to use the scenarios and put them in these categories. He stated there would be one way to do things in the current jail.

Faith Morrison suggested identifying the right set of scenarios to use to show the public on booking, transporting inmates from jail to the courts.

Valorie Troesh discussed the critical spaces vs. the number of beds. The sally port is a big issue, and we cannot use the one we have now.

ACTION: Sheriff will work on a list of spaces that we currently have vs. what we should have.

ACTION: Dessallier will prepare additional scenarios that illustrate the way the current building is not suited to what officers/staff need to do in the jail.

Faith Morrison suggested using Justin LaCasse's presentation to assist with the design.

Valorie Troesch suggested not to focus on cells and the number of beds, but to focus on the safety and needed spaces.

Faith Morrison discussed that the report had construction costs for a 60, 70 or 80 bed facility. Classification requirement mean a larger number of spaces is needed. Not looking to make it nice

for the inmates but need the outside working space. Sheriff discussed the cost for additional spaces.

Sheriff stated that in terms of size, we don't want it to fill up as soon as we build it.

Faith Morrison stated we need to know the implications before the Board deals with the design.

Sheriff and Justin LaCasse will go over to the Sheriff Department to discuss the scenarios.

Faith Morrison stated we do not want the spaces too small. Task is to look at the plan for spaces, and what may be too much space. There are no courtrooms in the tentative floor plans from the consultants. She will try to figure out the square footages.

Mike Hamilton asked can we have a physical list of the stuff we have issues with. What did the inspectors say?

Sheriff said it's brief, one page. Haven't had to do any corrective action other than "shots across the bow." MDOC is hesitant to speak too much in public.

ACTION: LaCasse will take the three scenarios and put them into his system to discuss at the next meeting.

ACTION: Morrison will find the square footages of current/proposed jail in the report.

ACTION: Sheriff will see if someone from MDOC can attend our next meeting by Teams.

ACTION: Report to the Jail Committee on the Subcommittee progress (they meet 1/5/26):

1. Developing scenarios, i.e. what are the kinds of things that go on in the jail building? Including, for example, arrests, interviews, chain of evidence, following the law in the treatment of those detained, public services.
2. Noting the deficiencies in the current jail building that affect these processes and how they should be (emphasizing officer/visitor/inmate safety, legal rights, best practices).
3. Breaking the scenarios down into the steps, spaces, and staff/others that are involved.
4. For each structural unit (room), determining activities that happen and how big they need to be for Houghton County
5. Examine consultants' report for suggested sizes and costs issues to better understand; plan to map to the above.

Next meeting date and time:

The Committee agreed to meet next on January 12, 2026 at 2:00 p.m. in the 5th floor conference room, with Teams.

Public Comments

None.

Adjournment:

Motion was made by Valorie Troesch and seconded by Faith Morrison to adjourn the meeting.

The Motion carried by a voice vote. Ayes 4, Nays 0. Meeting adjourned at 4:10pm.

Booking Scenario

John Doe was involved in a single vehicle accident by crossing over the fog line and hitting a tree. Upon arrival to the scene by the Houghton County Sheriff's Officers, a heavy smell of intoxicants and slurred speech by Mr. Doe was observed. He was placed under arrest for O.W.I. (Operating While Intoxicated) after going through field sobriety tests.

Officers arrive at the Houghton County Jail to lodge Mr. Doe. Corrections Staff meet them at the back door to the jail to obtain any personal property off Mr. Doe prior to entering the facility. Note, a search and removal of personal property should first be conducted by the arresting agency prior to entry of the jail."

Proper entry into the Jail for all incoming arrestee's should be brought in through the Sally Port. Due to the current size of the Sally Port, it is nearly impossible to open car doors once entered inside of the Sally Port. Individuals with any sort of handicap or disability that would limit them from going up stairs would need to be transported around to the side of the courthouse. From there they would have to be taken out of the patrol vehicle to be escorted down the sidewalk and through the front door of the Sheriff's Office.

Mr. Doe after all personals are removed is brought into the booking area of the jail. Arresting Agency Officers remove their duty weapons and place into the lockbox located in the booking area. Corrections staff conduct a pat down search of Mr. Doe to remove any other possible items. At this point Corrections staff are informed by the arresting agency what he is being lodged on and informed that he was involved in an automobile accident. The arresting agency is informed that he needs to be cleared by medical at Portage Health ER prior to lodging due to being involved in an automobile accident. Corrections Staff supply the arresting agency with a "Fit for Confinement" form to provide the ER. Mr. Doe is then transported from the jail to Portage Health by the arresting agency. After a half hour, he is transported back from Portage ER to the jail and escorted into the jail booking area through the back door to start the booking process.

Proper entry into the Jail for all incoming arrestee's should be brought in through the Sally Port. Weapons should be locked up also in the Sally Port, but is not necessary. For safety of corrections staff, officers, and inmate (s) locking weapons in a confined area and not the booking area is ideal.

Mr. Doe will remain handcuffed and placed onto the booking bench to go through a series of questionnaires asked by Corrections Staff. Note, arresting officer is to remain during the whole booking process until the individual is placed into a cell. While going through the booking process on a bench that is feet from the booking officer Mr. Doe becomes agitated and stands up from the bench in attempts to physically throw a punch at the arresting officers. Arresting officers and the two corrections staff subdue and restrain the individual in the booking area. Due to the limited space in the booking area, a computer is knocked down in the booking area that is used to obtain fingerprints. Mr. Doe was able to be restrained and placed back on the

booking bench in attempts to complete the booking process. Mr. Doe settled down and complied with the rest of the booking process. His mugshot was taken in the booking area and signatures obtained for proof of personal property that was taken at arrest/lodging and medical questions were asked and understood by Mr. Doe. He was allowed a free phone call once the booking process was completed. Fingerprints will be obtained once inmate Doe is sober.

The booking of inmate Doe was done in properly. Areas of concern include if the booking area were in a bigger, more secure space, with adjacent rooms for housing electronics, the live scan machine that was broken could have been avoided. Note there is also the intoxalizer computer used to obtain BAC of individuals arrested for OWI located next to the booking bench as well.

Once the booking process was complete inmate Doe was escorted into the laundry room adjacent to the booking area so he could be strip searched by a male Correction Officer. Located in the laundry room are the jail issued orange clothing that inmate Doe was changed over into once the strip search was complete. He was issued a prepared tote that included a blanket, bed sheet, towel, flat sheet, and a hygiene kit. Inmate Doe will now be placed into a holding cell due to him being under the influence. The time, date, and office who conducted the strip searched was logged into the jail strip search form.

Strip searches are to be conducted in an area that is not under camera surveillance. The hallway that it is conducted in is big enough for one officer to comfortably conduct the strip search. The laundry room is not under video surveillance and is utilized by inmate workers to wash and dry laundry, put away laundry, fold items, and refill totes as needed. It is also used as a storage room for inmate mats that are issued, safety restraint chair, and a few locked doors that hold our commissary items and restraints.

A proper strip search should be conducted in a secured holding cell that is not on camera and allows several officers to enter. There should be a pull down shade outside of the holding cell so no one can visually see the inmate being strip searched. If that inmate becomes combative officers now have a cell that the inmate is already in and can take proper actions to restrain the inmate and safely exit the cell.

Scenario Cell Placement for Intoxicated Inmate

Inmate Doe was booked in and strip-searched; he is now ready for placement into one of the two holding cells at approximately 0200. Due to one of the Holding Cells, being currently utilized for a female inmate on suicide protocol inmate Doe has to be placed into the Holding Cell located in the back of the jail near General Population inmates. Inmate Doe does not like this due to it being around other inmates that could hear and potentially see him, but is the only option at this time. He becomes combative and actively resists staff as they escort him from the laundry room to the holding cell. Once safely placed into the Holding Cell in GP inmate Doe begins to kick the door and scream. This causes a disturbance in the jail as inmate Doe has woken up the majority of the inmates in the back of the jail. Other inmates begin to holler vulgar language at him and start an up roar with corrections staff to move him.

Corrections staff now have to come up with a game plan to have internal movement to accommodate inmate Doe. Field service was called back from the road to assist with this movement. Cane 1, 2, 3, & 4 are cells located by the booking area that are typically utilized by female inmates. Each cell can hold up to two inmates per cell. There is currently seven female inmates between the cells and are housed accordingly due to classification reasons. Now corrections staff has to move all the female inmates together to open a cell up for one male inmate, risking the potential of an inmate on inmate assault/liability.

The simply solution is to have more holding cells available, but due to current size, population, and situation at hand it was deemed necessary to move the female inmates into one cell in hopes that nothing will happen during that time frame of inmate Doe being lodged in one of the Cane Cells. These cells have wires exposed, metal bench seats, and metal bunks all that could be potential risk for an intoxicated inmate to cause self-harm or use as a weapon. These type of movements occur frequently due to lack of space, which puts staff, inmates, and the jail at risk for injury or liability. Due to field service returning to the jail to assist corrections staff we now have limited patrol on the roads at this time or response to emergent situations.

Scenario Sick Call with Nurse

Inmate Frank placed a Sick Call kite in with medical to be seen. Inmate Frank has been housed in a cell separate from other inmates due to he has a handicap and requires movement by use of a wheelchair. The nurse office is located in the basement of the jail and requires an inmate to walk down two flights of stairs into a non-secure area. Because of his handicap, the jail nurse is now required to conduct (which should be a private conversation between inmate and nurse) the assessment in the booking area that is record by cameras. The nurse (who is contracted for 14 hours a week) has to bring their materials from the basement to the booking area.

The current jail does not have reasonable accommodations for qualified inmates with disabilities. The location of the current nurse office requires inmates to walk down two flights of stairs. There is no ramps, elevators, or other means to access the basement without going down the stairs. Due to lack of space, the only feasible spot for a nurse office is in the basement requiring those inmates with disabilities to have any type of medical questions/concerns conducted in a record area. There should be a nurse office close or adjacent to the booking area in a secure area that is located on the current floor of the main jail. This would allow inmates with or without disabilities easy access to and from their cells without the need of being escorted down stairs into a non-secure area. This would limit the potential of an inmate falling as they are escorted down stairs, inmate and staff altercations, and privacy concerns.

The current nurse office is roughly 10 by 6 foot area with limited space to conduct inmate and nurse visits. There is limited room to store materials required to complete task required by the jail nurse. Medical records of current and past inmates are stored in cabinets outside of the nurse office in the hallway. There is a chair set up outside of the nurse office for corrections staff to use when the nurse is seeing inmates.

JOSH SAARANEN
Sheriff

JENNIFER KELLY
COUNTY CLERK/REGISTER OF DEEDS

APPROVED: _____
JK