

JAIL COMMITTEE
MEETING-5th Floor-Conference Room
APRIL 6, 2026 – 4:00 PM
MINUTES

A. Call to Order

Faith Morrison called the meeting to order at 4:00 p.m. Chairman Hyrkas let the committee know he would be a little late.

B. Roll Call

Faith Morrison called the roll. Present were: Tom Tikkanen, Gretchen Janssen, Justin LaCosse, Dan Holcomb, Andrea Johnson, Faith Morrison, and Sheriff Josh Saaranen.

By Microsoft Teams: Mike Hamilton

Note that after the meeting it was discovered that the comments of those on MS Teams could not be heard in the meeting room. Thus Mike Hamilton was unable to contribute. This mistake meant a loss of valuable input by a committee member.

Present after roll call: Jared Hyrkas

C. Approval of Agenda/Additions

A Motion was made by Dan Holcomb and seconded by Gretchen Janssen to approve the agenda as presented.

The Motion carried by a voice vote. Ayes 6, Nays 0.

D. Approval of Meeting minutes of February 2, 2026

A Motion was made by Justin LaCosse and seconded by Gretchen Janssen to approve the February 2, 2026 minutes as presented.

The Motion carried by a voice vote. Ayes 6, Nays 0.

E. Public Comments

Thomas Vichich of Hancock asked how many other counties have noncompliant jails. He encouraged the committee to think outside of the box. State law can be changed. He suggested Houghton County share a jail with another county.

F. Old Business / Follow Up on Action Items

Chairman Hyrkas arrived and took over chairing the meeting. Hyrkas said the agenda is long and we hope to get through it.

1. Jail Needs Subcommittee report

Faith Morrison reported on the most recent meeting of the Jail Needs Subcommittee. The short report they are working on could be circulated tomorrow and then reviewed by the subcommittee. After that it could come to the Jail Committee (this committee) as input to the final report.

2. Conceptual Design / Rendering / Block Diagram
 - i. Abonmarche/Byce version online should be usable

Chairman Hyrkas was able to locate the rendering done by the consultants Abonmarch/Byce (AB) in 2025. It does not have a complete floor plan or a schematic design but it suits the purpose of this committee. Faith Morrison noted that it does not have the courtroom or juvenile spaces we want. She also said that the Sheriff has long said that 90% of the inmates are in the jail due to addiction or mental health issues. Sheriff Saaranen agreed and noted that they also need a space for inmates having a mental health crisis.

3. Project Cost

Chairman Hyrkas noted that the missing square footages are a problem in terms of determining project costs. He asked the committee to share their thoughts on this. Do we recommend that the County get a cost estimate or do we acknowledge that it's a concern but not make that recommendation?

Tom Tikkanen pointed out that the AB design looked at spaces for individual departments, but it does not show the arraignment court or youth detention areas.

Faith Morrison said that the square footages may include those purposes, but she never saw them mentioned specifically in the report.

Tom Tikkanen said it would be good to have approximate square footages. He said his big concern is that there are firms out there that feel they can construct the jail for less than \$32 million. The concern of the voters is on cost, not size. We need more operating space. Is it better to approach number of beds rather than number of cells?

Justin LaCrosse suggested that advice from local contractors could come through an RFI (Request for Information) or Industry Day process. At such an event we tell about our need and they tell us what they can do. Often it's a two-way street. The group can change the plan out in the open.

Faith Morrison said we could get the prefab jail cell folks on the line to listen to the views of the local contractors.

Justin LaCrosse pointed out that there may be contractors who think they can build the jail for cheaper, but after hearing what they hear at Industry Day they might see it is harder than they thought.

Chairman Hyrkas asked what about trade secrets? Perhaps interviews would be better. LaCrosse said that too could be done.

Tom Tikkanen asked does this raise the curtain on a lease-back situation for a private development firm to develop the design, subject to review by the County and MDOC (Michigan Department of Corrections)? Such an event would be an opportunity for firms that say "I could build that cheaper," and who's to say they're not right? We don't know if they are right or not. Seems there have been builds like this. Possibly agree on lease terms for 20 years or some TBD duration and then the property reverts to the county. The county would have to scrape together funds for a lease payment but there would be no need for a millage.

Tom Tikkanen said that developers get preferred interest rates. I'm just hitting the positives; there are holes.

Chairman Hyrkas said it merits discussion.

Tikkanen noted that doing engineering plans would cost millions.

Faith Morrison said that to gain the trust of the public it would be good for the County Board to go on the record with what aspects of the plan they have agreed on. Also good to go on the record as to what would happen to the extra funds if the jail costs less than \$32 million.

Chairman Hyrkas said that perhaps the design is something that could use more time and effort. That would support not going for a millage in November.

Tom Tikkanen said it's your committee, but I'm dismayed by that. I'm in the group of people that hear the clock ticking. We don't want to lose momentum. This is a big election coming in November but if we have a special election, I'm not aware of any other countywide issues and the costs are at least \$30,000 to have a special election. Maybe it would not cost the county anything to have the ballot in November.

Chairman Hyrkas asked are you confident of the \$32 million number? Tikkanen said I'm confident it will be no more than that. We have a lot of major construction firms here who can build the jail. We could offer the public as much assurances as reasonable that this will be a local project. They will likely have to contract with specialized purveyors of jail housing components for those parts.

Sheriff Saaranen said he believes the Delta County jail was built by local contractors.

Chairman Hyrkas asked if that could legally be implemented? The county may have to consult their attorney.

Tikkanen said it might have to be an open bid but local contractors could bid.

Chairman Hyrkas said that all projects have budgets, and you have to build to it. Some things are out of our control but if we take a reasonable perspective and make some judgement calls and set the bottom line for the county, perhaps we can say we think the jail can be built for \$29 million, or some lower number that is determined by further planning, before going out to the voters.

Justin LaCosse said we could have a contract with "cost as an independent variable"; that's what it's called.

Tom Tikkanen said, just being the devil's advocate, does that create more questions with the public? If we cannot say what the components are of this jail?

Chairman Hyrkas agreed; and said the plan is already quite generic, so it allows for some flexibility.

Tikkanen said some of the most negative comments are from folks who will vote no on any plan. We have to be persistent. It's just a matter of time before we're shut down. We have been shut down in the 1960s.

Dan Holcomb asked could we use the RFI to get to an RFP (Request for Proposals)? Justin LaCosse said, absolutely.

Chair Hyrkas said we cannot get a biddable set of documents until a couple of million is spent.

Dan Holcomb said in my realm of contracting it's all on you. If you go over budget, that's all on you. Hyrkas agreed and said that's how this works too... if they have a set of documents to build to and a contract, they need to build it to that standard and any cost overruns are their responsibility.

Tom Tikkanen asked how well developed of a design do you need to do an RFQ (Request for Qualifications)? Chairman Hyrkas said any amount of information is possible. It's more of a selection based on the qualifications of the contractor than on price and the final price is negotiated after selection, before signing the final contract. A price can be part of the RFQ package to get in the ballpark, but its often finalized once some design is done.

Faith Morrison said less information is more risky.

Tom Tikkanen said the community has guardrails, MDOC, who has to review the plans.

Dan Holcomb suggested "bid with exception" would be one way for a contractor to bid even without full information.

Chairman Hyrkas said maybe we don't make a recommendation to the board?

Faith Morrison suggested that we summarize our discussion in our report.

Andrea Johnson said she had been leaning towards delay of the millage, but maybe this discussion is convincing that it costs us nothing to have a millage. I'm not sure how robust the selling of the plan was last time but maybe we could do better? We have more information on diversion programs that could help.

The discussion turned to a number of building possibilities: Design-Bid-Build, Design-Build, Cost plus incentive fee, others mentioned above.

The Committee heard input from a member of the public, Jim Chizek from Lake Linden/Schoolcraft Township. Mr. Chizek's idea is to replace a conventional jail with specialized housing for people who have acted irresponsibly. His plan is based on used trailers (recreational vehicles), and groups of them, fenced in, that increase in comfort and amenities as these are earned by the detainees. His plan would invite local churches to do water and food distribution on a volunteer basis. It would be extremely low cost. Compliance rules could be addressed by making it an experimental program. He asked the committee to consider it seriously.

4. Report contents and responsibilities. Who will assemble it and review it?

Faith Morrison volunteered to assemble a first draft of the report for the committee to review. A first draft will be to the committee by noon on April 8 for immediate input from the committee. All responses to be into Morrison by midnight on Thursday April 9th with a near final draft out on Friday April 10 for Chairman Hyrkas to review and submit.

5. Social Media efforts update and next steps

i. Possible postings (not discussed)

1. Links to info from Abonmarche's report
2. FAQs
3. Reasons current jail is not sufficient
4. Short conclusion summary of why we think a new jail is needed
5. Consequences of doing nothing
6. Location decision
7. List of spaces required in a new jail

- 8. Size, features
- 9. Total Cost
- 10. Taxpayer cost
- 6. County Website Feedback Form
 - i. Responses? (not discussed)
- 7. Vendors that produce the jail equipment – does the sheriff have information for them? (not discussed)
- 8. Other action items - none
- G. New Business
 - 1. Next meeting date and time. The next meeting of the Jail Committee will be May 7, 2026 at 4pm.
- H. Public Comments

Tom Vichich spoke to the committee. The problem as he sees it is that the current jail is out of compliance. Are the compliance rules logical? If not, change them. He objected to spending his tax money on a new jail. He is skeptical that the public can be convinced.

The Sheriff thanked him for his comments and gave a run down on what the jail is facing.

Jim Chizek spoke to the committee. He noted that his plan of trailers would eliminate some problems of mixing inmates in the jail (classification).

Dan Holcomb noted that at Copper Country Republican Party meetings there is always support for using county-owned assets to subsidize the cost of a new jail. Tom Tikkanen said that Commissioner Joel Keranen’s committee is looking into that.

I. Adjournment

Moved by Faith Morrison, supported by Gretchen Janssen the committee voted unanimously to adjourned the meeting at 5:45pm.

JARED HYRKAS

JENNIFER KELLY
 COUNTY CLERK/REGISTER OF DEEDS

APPROVED: _____
 JK