

MINUTES

JAIL COMMITTEE MEETING

Courthouse 5th Floor Conference Room

May 14, 2026 – 4:00 PM

A. Call to Order

Chair Jared Hyrkas called the meeting to order at 4:00pm.

B. Roll Call

Chairman Hyrkas announced who was present.

Present were: Jared Hyrkas, Faith Morrison, Valorie Troesch, Andrea Johnson, Sheriff Josh Saaranen, Dan Holcomb, Justin LaCosse, Susanna Peters

Also present were: Doug Dukes (Elevatus Architects), John Pollack (Elevatus Architects), Graham Jaehnig, Lexi Tater, Krissi Sundstrum, Paige Setter-Hallwachs

Present on Microsoft Teams: There were attendees on Teams.

C. Approval of Agenda/Additions

Moved by Valorie Troesch, seconded by Dan Holcomb to approve the agenda as presented; motion passed on a voice vote.

D. Approval of Meeting Minutes of April 6, 2026

Moved by Valorie Troesch, seconded by Dan Holcomb, to approve the meeting minutes of April 6, 2026; motion passed on a voice vote.

E. Public Comments. There were no public comments at this time.

F. Old Business

1. Jail needs subcommittee report- Faith Morrison indicated that the Needs Subcommittee's written report had been submitted to the Committee and the Board of Commissioners, and that no follow up meetings of the

subcommittee had been held. Sheriff Saaranen indicated that the subcommittee could meet if there is a request.

2. Social Media efforts update and next steps

Lexi Tater with UP North Advocacy, a nonprofit based in the Soo, spoke to the committee on her efforts to create materials for social media that help the public to understand issues and potential actions related to the jail. Tater has toured the jail and met with Prosecutor Helmer, Jail Captain Travis Dessellier, and others and made some recordings that she will incorporate into her materials. What she creates will be shared to groups who are willing to share them on their social media outlets. Issues highlighted include overcrowding in food storage areas, food deliveries come through the hallway with cells, the nursing station had exposed wiring and is very cramped, records are stored in the hallways, there is a leaky roof, there are buckets set out to collect water from rainfall.

Committee members expressed appreciation for Tater's work. Sheriff Saaranen thanked Tater and said he would like to review the social media postings before they are released to the public. Dan Holcomb asked about some cost numbers Tater was using, and there was a correction made to her numbers. Troesch commented that the materials Tater is creating are for quick interactions and should not be hard to understand or too detailed.

There was discussion of making a back-of-the-envelope calculation for the public to compare the costs of continuing to operate as we do at the jail and getting a new, more effective jail. Also discussed were the costs of the transition from our current jail to a new one. What is the monthly cost of the current jail given the difficulties? Sheriff Saaranen indicated that his team could work on that number.

Chair Hyrkas thanked Tater and said that he agreed costs were an important topic. Another important issue is the topics Justin LaCosse had highlighted in his social media document. Could Tater work on LaCosse's document and make it more appealing graphically? Perhaps with Canva? LaCosse will be in touch with Tater, and they will work on this suggestion. Another topic that could be a social-media posting is the table of explanations that Justin put together (based on the committee's discussions and decision) describing why the jail should be on Sharon Avenue.

Dan Holcomb said that "money talks" and that there should be a comparison of the cost of a shut-down of the jail compared to building a new one paid for with a 30-year millage.

3. County Website Feedback Form – There was no update. Andrea Johnson volunteered to check with Alex Radke about the feedback form.

G. New Business

1. Elevatus Architecture Presentation. Troesch introduced the visitors from Elevatus. She had been reaching out to her contacts to see how Houghton County could move forward with jail planning and had been put in contact with Elevatus. Elevatus is an architectural firm that designs jails and has an interesting approach called prototyping design. Doug Dukes and John Pollack are both retired sheriffs that have passed jail millages, and they volunteered to come up to this meeting. They work as consultants for Elevatus Architecture.

Sheriff Doug Dukes (Elevatus) gave information on his background. He is a former Indiana state trooper and elected sheriff. Planning work on the jail he built began in 1996 and the facility was finished in 1999. Elevatus does not build jails, they only design them. They do not have engineers; they are architects.

Sheriff John Pollack introduced himself. He was sheriff of Branch County for 12 years and in law enforcement for 45 years. Branch started with a millage in 2016. Branch county is a little larger than Houghton County (45,000 people; Houghton 37,000) and is on the Indiana border. Their county is agricultural and has a health care industry. Pollack talked about the challenges of building a new jail: (paraphrasing) *“Farmers do not like to pay taxes. If you approach them with a committee and you involve them with the process, eventually they come around to it. Need to know what you want. Getting out to the public is essential. The first step of working with Elevatus is that the sheriff and committee need to take time to come down and see a jail (Pollack saw one from 2017). Our jail was 140 beds. What we saw in that jail, we just wanted to take that jail and bring it to Branch County. You save on a lot if you do that. An existing jail is a tried-and-true design. Like a prototype. Changes the sheriff makes can be made with not too much cost.”* Pollack passed around materials, preliminary numbers, from Tony Vie (Elevatus partner, chief criminal justice architect).

Faith Morrison asked who built your Branch County Jail? Was it a local firm?

Pollack said the construction folks were not local, but they hired local subcontractors.

Dukes spoke of the quality of the Elevatus designs. They are ADA and ACA (American Correctional Association) compliant. Need that standard for the

jail to stand up to challenges in federal court. Their system is prototype, but it is not a “cookie cutter.” An EA team sits down with the sheriff. Redesign is fine, as long as the changes are within the structure.

Dukes said costs depend on what your needs are. Single bed, double bed, four, six, dorm. Dorm is cheap, but it is the most dangerous place in the jail. But if you don't have money, you get a dorm. Depends on your needs. Single cell costs a lot. Everything that your needs are determines the cost.

Dukes spoke about classification: (paraphrasing) *“If you have a violent inmate. Child molester. 8 classifications. We try to plan for 10. The public doesn't understand classification. You have to protect your child molesters because people are going to beat them up. Classification versus bed count. Need to comply with ACA standards. You misclassify, you have no defense in a lawsuit.”*

“Indoor-outdoor recreation (required). Our designs have a great one. One room with a garage door. Up high. It's also an emergency room (bath, shower) in case of overcrowding. Has an emergency door in case of fire.”

“Officer safety is the number 1. The current Houghton County jail's sally port is scary. The medical room for the nurse is not safe for the nurse. Most nurses want to be right at booking in case something happens.”

Faith Morrison asked how does the committee convince the public to support a jail?

Pollack said he made a committee including the nay sayers, but they became the biggest supporters. He also endorsed marketing. They got a member of the committee, a banker, to pay for the marketing firm (\$27,000). *“When concerns popped up, the marketing firm immediately addressed the problem. Send everything through that same firm. That was key. Can't have different people give different answers to the questions. We developed a movie. We brought in the local news and did a tour. Sent them through the jail with a sergeant. She took them to the bad spots of the jail. Point out that “this might be your son” who spends time in this jail. Went to every township meeting, brought that film, and showed them what we were dealing with. How do you repair cast iron pipes in a cement floor? Show a trend of maintenance costs. That building is going to get older and older. Address concerns right away and don't allow the nay-sayers to control the narrative.”*

Dukes said he told Sheriff Saaranen today that the USDA loans money for jails.

Troesch said I'm not convinced that most voters know all the problems with the jail. They think that if it's open it must be ok.

Tator asked, have you considered doing some informational sessions?
Morrison said yes, we did quite a few.

Chair Hyrkas asked to wrap up the discussion. The Committee will share the list provided by Elevatus to the Commissioners (appended to the minutes). We have discussed a marketing firm, but with the commissioners weren't sure how to pay for it.

Holcomb said that the jail advocacy should be run like a political campaign. Knock on doors.

Polack from Elevatus said, yes, it is a lot of work.

Dukes said that construction costs are increasing 5% annually. That's taxpayer's money.

Sheriff Saaranen said we had a great talk with Elevatus walking through the facility. These two have a great wealth of knowledge.

Troesch asked what is your recommendation to us as our next step.

Dukes said you're doing the right thing; you need to convince the public. Are you adding a courtroom?

Morrison said yes. No trials but public for arraignment.

Dukes said if public comes to a judge, you'd need security. Next time we'll have others with us, and they can get down into the weeds with you.

Pollack said I'll send you our video that we developed.

Dukes said that comparing two jail campaigns he knows, the one that hired a PR firm won. The one that did not hire, lost.

Chair Hyrkas said I'm not convinced a PR firm couldn't be paid for by the county.

2. Next Steps

Morrison said that she thinks the next step is for the County to hold a big meeting giving a report of what the three committees have done since last November.

3. Goals for/before next meeting(s)

Chair Hyrkas informed the committee that he is stepping down as chair and leaving the committee. The work on the Jail Committee has been a lot more work than I expected. Hoping to continue from a different angle, my career perspective. See if I can come to the county with some of my ideas. Don't want a conflict of interest. Anyone interested in chairing tell Commissioners Tom Tikkanen and Gretchen Janssen or tell them if you know anyone else who might be interested.

4. Next meeting date and time.

Mondays at 4 had been our regular time. The next meeting was set for June 1 4pm in the 5th floor conference room in the courthouse.

H. Public Comments.

Graham Jaehnig from the Daily Mining Gazette newspaper encouraged the committee and the county to reach out to the Gazette to promote the jail effort.

Andrea Johnson agreed that the press is an important element. There's momentum from the publicity that's been given to joining the regional community corrections board. This could bring funds to us such as for pre-trial assessment; there are a lot of benefits to this.

Sheriff Saaranen addressed Chair Hyrkas and thanked him for all his work on the Jail Committee.

I. Adjournment. Holcomb moved, and Troesch seconded a motion to adjourn. Motion to adjourn passed by voice vote at 5:42 pm.

ELEVATUS ARCHITECTS COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT DOCUMENT

Shared with the Houghton County Jail Committee May 14, 2026

1. Take Photographs of the problems of why you need a new facility. If possible, include dollar amounts for upkeep and repairs. Possibly go back a few years.
2. Political Involvement, Commissioners, Prosecutor, all Judges, your US and State Senators/ Representatives.
3. Engage all churches in your county. Ministers are a huge asset if they understand the problems. Talk to them about inmate mental health issues and rehabilitation.
4. Discuss with all Police Chiefs/ Town Marshalls. Give them a resent tour. Show them the problems as well as the facts on why you need a new facility.
5. Involve all fire departments/districts and EMS staff. Give them a tour also. Explain to them the advantages of large sallyport doors which firetrucks and ambulances can drive into. Explain oversized inmate entrance doors in which a gurney / stretcher can easily go through.
6. Engage Influential Community Leaders. Large property owners, Bankers, lawyers, Business owners etc.
7. County Service clubs, speak to as many as possible. AARP, American Legion, VFW, Lions, Rotary, Elks, Masonic Lodges etc. Attend teacher meetings, hospital meetings, and if you have them, union meetings. Show them the problems.
8. Discuss with your Insurance Company. How costly will the old sheriff's office/ jail be in the future and what's the benefit with a new facility?
9. Form a small committee. Maybe One Judge, Prosecutor, Business Owner, Minister and respected landowner.
10. Huge, Social Media. Assign a person (PIO) to report the problems, they keep the public/ news agencies updated. TRANSPARENCY is the KEY.....
11. With all the above discussions, please discuss improved STAFF and INMATE safety with a new facility.
12. Use your local newspaper, Radio Station and whatever TV Stations that cover your county.
13. It's just like an election, only you are getting a new justice complex elected.

JARED HYRKAS

JENNIFER KELLY
COUNTY CLERK/REGISTER OF DEEDS

APPROVED: _____
JK