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Jail Committees Update

Faith Morrison, *Advocate for Addressing HoCo Jail Issues*

The three Houghton County Jail committees (and one subcommittee) have been active since forming in November 2025. This press release is an update on the committees' actions. All meetings of these committees are in the 5th floor conference room in the Houghton County Courthouse with Microsoft Teams used for virtual attendance. All are open to the public with minutes posted on the County's website, *houghtoncounty.net*. The membership of the committees is indicated in the posted minutes.

The Jail Committee (chaired by Jared Hyrkas from UP Engineers and Architects) has been meeting monthly with a goal of developing strategies to hear what the public has to say about the jail and to address the public's concerns. The committee has drafted some material intended to be used on social media to inform the public about the need for a new jail. A PSA has been recorded and will appear on radio stations encouraging the public to get involved in the jail discussions. [The next meeting of the Jail Committee is Monday, February 2, 2026 at 4pm](#)

The Jail Committee created a subcommittee at the request of Sheriff Josh Saaranen. The *Jail Needs Subcommittee* is sorting through the jail Master Plan developed in 2025 by the consultants Abonmarch/Byce to see what specific design elements are needed in a new jail. The subcommittee is meeting every couple of weeks. Jail Captain Travis Dessellier authored four scenarios that show what it is like to carry out jail processes in the cramped space of the current jail (attached; also posted in the minutes). The subcommittee is looking to create social media posts that will bring these scenarios to life; a video post is under active development. [The next meeting of the subcommittee is Thursday January 29, 2026 at 3pm](#).

The Sharon Avenue Property-Use Committee (chaired by Commissioner Roy Britz) has not met since its vote October 31, 2025 recommending that the existing church on the Sharon Avenue property be demolished. The Board chair Tom Tikkanen has indicated in other meetings that he believes that the committee did not have a wide enough view of the church building when they made that determination. [The next meeting of the committee is Thursday, January 29, 2026 at 10:00 a.m.](#) The posted agenda indicates that they will discuss the current jail building.

The County-Held Properties Committee (chaired by Commissioner Joel Keranen) last met on December 9, 2025 and went over the status of four county-held properties (see minutes for details). **Marina:** Almost \$500,000 in public grants have been invested; \$2.5-3.0 million debt; there are commitments that a new buyer would have to keep for the next 20 years and this would depress sales prices. The opinion was stated that the property is not a viable investment for anyone given these conditions. **Transfer Station:** If privatized, prices will go up; business is growing; not being

able to expand is a problem; construction waste is not accepted. Manager says the county can recycle more and has the room for it. Commissioner Glenn Anderson said the county could get \$3.0- \$3.5 million for the Transfer Station but would have to pay off a \$1 million debt. **Airport:** Two lots left in the business park; sales have been good. Two new hangers were 100% grant funded. No possible sale of the airport was discussed. **Canal View:** State can recapture money given to Canal View since 1968; it is the only VA facility locally; the employees' pensions would have to be taken over by the County; number of beds offered is staffing-limited. No follow-up meeting of this committee has been scheduled.

The Board of Commissioners (chaired by Thomas Tikkannen) has heard reports from all three committees as well as many comments from the public in support of keeping Canal View as a county-owned nursing facility. At the January 13, 2026 meeting the Board approved \$12,800 for a survey of the Marina property (won by UPEA; to be delivered 4-30-2026). They also approved \$5,000 to appraise Canal View (Healthtrust of Sarasota, FL, paid for from the Canal View budget; report to be delivered in 5 weeks of award). The bid documents are in the meeting packet posted online. The next work session of the Board is Monday February 2, 2026 at 10am. The next full meeting of the Board is Tuesday February 10, 2026 at 6pm in the 3rd floor courtroom of the courthouse.

In public comments on January 13, 2026 Faith Morrison asked the Board to set a deadline to receive a report from the County-Held Properties Committee so that the jail design discussion can go forward; Chairman Tikkannen agreed that at the next Board work session they could discuss a possible April 14 deadline for such a report.

Attachments: Four jail process scenarios:

2026 Booking scenario

2026 Inmate brought over to Court Scenario

2026 Sick call with Nurse Scenario

2026 Cell Placement for Intoxicated Inmate Scenario

Please direct any comments or questions about this press release to Faith Morrison (contact information below)