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LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS OF THE COPPER COUNTRY

Addressing Issues with the Houghton County Jail

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Jail Discussion Update 6-26-2026

The following jail-related discussions have taken place since the 6/24/26 press release:
(some meeting recordings are posted at www.youtube.com/@CountyofHoughton)

6/25/2026 County Board Special Meeting, 11am (5th floor)

Summary appears below.

June 25, 2026 Special Board of Commissioners Meeting (four commissioners present, Joel Keranen absent with a work conflict) The Commissioners discussed the next steps towards placing a jail/sheriff's office millage on the November 3rd ballot. Board Chair Tom Tikkanen said that there had been progress at the 6/23/26 Jail Committee meeting and asked Jail Committee member Faith Morrison to summarize the recommendations of the committee. He also passed out a copy of the summary memo Morrison had sent to the two commissioners on the committee, Tikkanen and Gretchen Janssen.

Morrison's memo is **attached** and contains the information in her summary that she made to the Board. The Jail Committee has suggested holding an "Industry Day," tentatively July 15 at the Franklin Township Hall, to gather local expertise to frame out the costs and process of building a new jail. Further, the Committee recommends that the millage language be clear, so that a voter marking their ballot will be able to see what the voter and the county will get from a "yes" vote on the millage. After Morrison's summary, board members asked questions of Morrison, Tikkanen, and Janssen.

Tikkanen endorsed the committee's suggestion that the Board needs to tell the voters what they're getting from a "yes" vote. The discussion turned to what should be the size of the proposed new jail. Morrison quoted the 70-bed number that was used in the 2025 jail campaign, and Sheriff Josh Saaranen pointed out that it was more meaningful to speak in terms of having the right sizes of spaces to do all that is expected of a jail and sheriff's office. He said the need is for the totality of what the sheriff's department offers: confinement, booking, field services, attorney consultation space, evidence storage, the office of emergency manager, mandatory trainings and many other services. In terms of size, Saaranen is concerned that we not have a full jail as soon as a new one is opened.

Commissioner Glenn Anderson noted that the contractors would want to know the intended square footage of the new jail. As Anderson noted, the Abonemarch/Byce (AB) 2025 consultant's report has departmental space square-footages for a "51-bed" jail. Morrison agreed that the only numbers in the AB report are for that capacity, which is the capacity that we need right now just to accommodate our current average daily population (ADP) and to accommodate classification requirements. The classification issue is the fact that when an individual is to be confined in the jail, there needs to be an appropriate space for them—a female cell if they're a female, a detox cell if they are intoxicated, a mental health holding cell if they have mental health issues, a juvenile holding space (out of sight and sound of any other detained

persons) if the person is a juvenile. If there are empty spaces but not ones that match the person that needs to be housed in the jail, the jail is in a bind. The 51-bed number represents a rock bottom size for a new jail given our ADP numbers and classification. As the county is growing in activity and as we have already in the near past had 60 persons in the jail, the 51-bed square footage number is actually well below rock bottom.

Morrison said that part of the Industry Day event would be discussing the size needs and the Michigan Department of Corrections (MDOC) guidelines for how big various support spaces have to be (kitchen, laundry, booking, etc.) for a certain jail capacity (also **attached**). The desired outcome of Industry Day would be producing a rough order magnitude (ROM) estimate of what the local experts think would be the cost for them to produce a new jail. That number could then guide the Board of Commissioners in drafting the millage language that makes the promise to the voters as to what they will get if they vote yes. The task of creating the request for proposals (RFP) for building a new jail would have to be completed after the November election due to the short amount of time between now and November. A millage question for the jail would need to be voted on by the Board and filed with the State by 4pm on August 11.

Sheriff Saaranen noted that if we built the “70-bed” size jail, Houghton County would still have the smallest jail in the entire state of Michigan. He also noted that cost numbers from the AB consultants in 2025 and a ROM number recently received from another group, Elavatus, both gave basically the same rough cost number for building a new jail, \$32 million. Costs only go up as the project gets pushed to the future.

Morrison noted in her memo (**attached**) that the design/build methodology proposed by local contractors is hoped to reduce the building and financing costs of building a new jail.

There was a motion by Roy Britz, seconded by Glenn Anderson to plan for a mid-July Industry Day for developers and contractors to attend. The motion passed 4-0 on a voice vote.

Participation in the Industry Day will be an open call to all interested developers and contractors, local and nonlocal. The Jail Committee will meet on Monday June 29 at 4pm to begin the process of organizing the county’s Industry Day. As stated in Morrison’s memo of 6/24/26, the Industry Day process would be seeking ROM (rough order magnitude) cost numbers from the contractors. These would be due Wednesday July 29 (tentatively). The Jail Committee/County would be seeking input from participants at Industry Day on how a design/build process might work and how the County might select which firm to partner with. The process for selection of the firm must meet all laws for public bodies contracting with private firms.

Upcoming meetings related to the jail project:

(Open to the public; online credentials at houghtoncounty.net)

6/29/2026	Jail Committee Meeting, 4pm (5 th floor)—work session on Industry Day
7/6/2026	County Board Regular Work Session—Devoted to the jail, 10am (5 th floor)—follow up with Jail Committee on Industry Day plans, content.
7/7/2026	Jail Committee Meeting, 4pm (5 th floor)—Industry Day discussions and planning
7/14/2026	County Board Regular Meeting, 6pm (3 rd floor courtroom)
7/15/2026	(tentatively) Industry Day at Franklin Township Hall (hours TBA)