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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 10-26-2026

With the election coming up on November 3, 2026 in a little over a week, there is time for one more press release with additional information to share with the public about the jail.

The LWVCC has posted on YouTube a video entitled “*The Case for the 2026 Houghton County Jail Millage.*” (<https://youtu.be/yHmur1rVSIk>) The PDF of the slides with notes will be distributed with this press release.

This video, made by League co-president Faith Morrison with the help of League Secretary Victoria Bergval, lays out the history of jail millages in Houghton County since 2000 in the hopes of answering the question, “*Why do we struggle to convince voters to replace the Houghton County jail?*”

The answer to this question is, we believe, that the public has strong interest in the jail (where it is, how big it is, when it is replaced), who decides what is done, and in keeping taxes low. The County Boards in 2000, 2010, and 2018 acted with the view that they needed to decide what to do about the jail, but the votes of the public indicated that the public wanted more—the public wanted to *know* more, to be more *involved* in the discussion, and to *influence* the plan.

After the failed 2018 millage, the Board (whose members changed every two years until recently) took a different approach, involving two large groups of county stakeholders, as well as expert consultants, but perhaps not offering the public as much influence on the process as they sought.

Instead of “selling the millage” to the voters as they did in 2025, the Board needed to do what they did in the past year: dig into the voters’ questions and find and share answers. Also, they needed to let the public influence the plan for the solution. The price of the plan was of interest, certainly, but also of interest was the financing, the scope, and what to do with various County properties.

And the Board needed to communicate all this to the public. And to listen to the public’s response.

The 2026 millage effort of the last 12 months has been conducted with this in mind. There have been three board-member-led committees (with open meetings and posted minutes), a sheriff-led subcommittee (also open meetings, also posted minutes), reports to the public by the committees/subcommittee, press releases, press coverage, feedback links, input from local construction firms (Industry Day 7/15/2026), and engagement through social media and website postings. It has been a strong effort.

The results will be known next week.

The League believes that the 2026 Jail Project is the right plan, at the right time, for the right price. In addition, we believe that it is the best price Houghton County is going to get. LWVCC encourages all voters to vote Yes on the 2026 Houghton County jail millage.

Upcoming meetings/events related to the jail project:

10/2026	Coffee with Sheriff Saaranen, Thursdays
11/3/2026	Election Day