

PRESS RELEASE LWVCC, **February 5, 2026**

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Addressing Issues with the Houghton County Jail

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Historical Timeline

11-4-2025	Millage for \$32 million for a new jail/sheriff's office does not pass 44% yes, 54% no.
11-2025	Three Houghton County Jail committees (and one subcommittee) have been active since November 2025. Overall goal: <i>Develop a jail plan that the public can support.</i> Focus is on what the public is saying about why they did not support the 2025 millage and addressing those issues.

Status report 2-5-2026

There were two jail-related discussions held this week:

2/2/26	County Board Work Session, 10am
2/2/26	Jail Committee, 4pm

At the Board work session, three commissioners were present (Chair Tom Tikkanen, Vice-Chair Roy Britz, and Commissioner Gretchen Janssen) and discussed the jail project under agenda item F.4.

1. They discussed setting a **reporting deadline for all three committees** (*Jail Committee, County-Held Properties Committee, and Sharon Avenue and Jail-Use Committee*) to formally report back to the Board. They agreed to put a discussion of an April 14 reporting deadline on the agenda of the next board meeting (Tuesday 2/10/2026).
2. Also discussed was **scheduling a millage to support a new jail/sheriff's office building.** An August election date would require a board resolution to pass by 4pm on May 12, which does not leave very much time to build a plan that the voters could support. By contrast, the November 4 election date would require such a resolution by **August 11 at 4pm.** Absentee ballots are available 40 days before an election, which for the November 4 election would be September 24. The project schedule would then roughly be as shown below.

Tentative Schedule for Board of Commissioners

February	Set deadline for committee reports, choose millage date
March	Committees continue work on their charges
April Board Mtg	Receive reports from three committees. 1. <u>County-Held Property Committee</u> : What are the sale values and retention values to county residents of the properties they have examined. 2. <u>Sharon Avenue and Jail Property-Use Committee</u> : How can the County get the maximum value out of the former church building on Sharon Avenue and the 1963 jail/sheriff's office building. 3. <u>Jail Committee</u> . What are the sizes of the spaces that are needed in a new jail/sheriff's office and what will it take to satisfy the voters so that a majority will support a new facility?
May	Design the jail project in conversation with the public
June	Design the jail project in conversation with the public
July	Pass a resolution for a millage to support the plan that was developed (this is the last regular board meeting that meets deadline for the November 4 th election)
August	Stay in conversation with the public about the jail project
September	Absentee ballots available September 24
October	Stay in conversation with the public about the jail project
November	Election Day is November 4

At the 2/2/26 Jail Committee meeting there was this progress:

1. Volunteers will be setting up a **Jail Committee Facebook account** and all committee members will monitor (as able) and answer questions from the public. There is a need for a history of the jail project; Faith Morrison is working on this.
2. The **feedback form on the County website** needs to be updated—County IT will be approached to do that.
3. The committee is following the steps for asking Congressman Bergman to put a **request into the federal government** for up to \$2 million for engineering plans for the new jail. The earliest that these funds could become available is late in 2027. These kinds of Federal funds are quite difficult to obtain.
4. The *Jail Needs Subcommittee* is working on **space allocations** in the new jail plans. Once we have starting numbers, the jail committee can discuss how to reduce project costs by changing space sizes or redesigning.

Working with an AI tool was suggested to estimate some space allocations and that work is ongoing. The Committee is looking to have a robust discussion based on the Abonmarche/Byce square footages noted in the table below as "Adjusted net square feet," which detail the sizes needed for 5 departments under the Sheriff's office, 6 departments under Corrections, and one support department. The Abonmarche/Byce Adjusted NSF

numbers are based on 51 beds. A 51-bed jail would only just fit our current average daily jail population (ADP) when classification of inmates is properly accounted for. From discussions in 2025, the Sheriff is in favor of at least 60 beds and believes 70 is more prudent.

The NSF numbers by department include internal circulation square footages (hallways for getting from one place to another within the department). These numbers are “grossed up” to include circulation among departments and appear as the “Departmental Gross” square foot (DGSF) numbers in the table. Once the total DGSF numbers are agreed upon, the consultants multiply by 1.1 to account for external walls and other missing factors, arriving at the Building Gross square footage (BGSF).

	Source: Houghton County Master Plan Charette version 2-22-25 page 60 "Existing Space Evaluation Summary"	Current Net Sq Ft (NSF)	Rating (from 1-2 unacceptable to 9-10 appropriate)	Adjusted NSF (how big a 51 inmate jail should be)	Adjusted NSF/Current NSF (how many times larger the current space should be for current ADP with classification)	Adjusted DGSF (Dept Gross) (DGF applied)	Departmental grossing factor, DGF, back-calculated
I. Sheriff's office							
A Public	274	3.0	1,088	4.0	1,251	1,251	1.15
B Exec Admin	1,674	4.9	2,344	1.4	3,047	3,047	1.30
C Road Patrol	2,381	3.0	4,350	1.8	5,655	5,655	1.30
D Investigations	1,138	2.9	2,708	2.4	3,520	3,520	1.30
E Marine/ORV/Snowmobile	2,042	10.0	2,000	1.0	2,200	2,200	1.10
	subtotal	7,509		12,490	1.7	15,673	
	average rating:		4.8				
II. Corrections							
F Administration	216	1.6	933	4.3	1,213	1,213	1.30
G Intake/Booking	653	2.4	2,234	3.4	2,904	2,904	1.30
H Medical	98	1.0	588	6.0	764	764	1.30
I Confinement Housing	2,366	5.2	5,070	2.1	7,098	7,098	1.40
J Program	663	1.2	1,725	2.6	2,415	2,415	1.40
K Kitchen/Laundry	647	2.5	1,410	2.2	1,622	1,622	1.15
	subtotal	4,643		11,960	2.6	16,016	
	average rating:		2.3				
III. Support							
L Support	899	2.6	2,288	2.5	2,517	2,517	1.10
	subtotal	899		2,288	2.5	2,517	
	average rating:		2.6				
	TOTAL Departments sq ft:	13,051		26,738		34,206	
	overall rating (av of avg's)		3.2				
	Building Gross Sq ft (BGSF), +10%			additional 10%:	3,421	37,627	BGSF, adjusted
	Existing BGSF:					16,448	BGSF, existing
	ADP=Average Daily Population						
	<i>Faith Morrison 1/30/2026</i>						

Upcoming meetings:

(Open to the public; locations and credentials for online participation posted on the County's website houghtoncounty.net)

- 2/10/26 County Board Regular Meeting, 6pm (3rd floor)
- 2/11/26 Jail Needs Subcommittee Meeting, 9:30am (5th floor)
- 3/2/26 County Board Work Session, 10am (3rd floor)
- 3/2/26 Jail Committee meeting, 4pm (5th floor)
- 3/5/26 Sharon Avenue and Jail Property-Use Committee, 10am (5th floor)
- 3/10/26 County Board Regular Meeting, 6pm (3rd floor)