

HOUGHTON COUNTY JAIL ONE-PAGE HANDOUT for the Copper Country League of Women Voters
presented at The Tea Room February 18, 2018

The Copper Country League of
Women Voters JAIL COMMITTEE:

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What is our purpose? Our purpose
is to reexamine the issue of the jail in
terms of what the Houghton County
Commissioners propose to do, and
whether this meets our county's
current and future needs.

HISTORY: (as reported in *Investigation of Houghton County Criminal Justice Facilities: Needs, History, Forecasts and Options*, prepared by MTU students of Dr. George R. Dewey in spring 2011).

1886-1887 HOUGHTON COUNTY COURTHOUSE was designed by Marquette Architect J.B.Sweatt; commissioned in 1886 and dedicated July 28 1887 for \$10,000. The Jail was in the western rear wing until 1961. It had 2 large cells, each with a toilet and shower, and could house up to 20 males per cell.

July 1960 the Circuit Court ordered the jail closed within 7 months due to lack of fire protection and escape routes, lack of segregation of prisoners with different criminal statuses, inadequate female facilities and insufficient ventilation. Two attempts for 1 mil property tax increase failed Nov 8 1960 and Jan 16, 1961.

FEB 20 1961 JAIL CLOSED. (57 years ago). All prisoners were transferred to Marquette and Baraga.

Aug 7 1962 Millage for a new fireproof building, cell capacity of 26 prisoners, a garage, sheriff's and deputy's offices, visitor's room etc. was approved by voters after extensive advertising. This facility, currently in use, opened August 1963.

1974 The Courthouse was declared a State of Michigan Historical Place

1975 It was declared a National Historical Place.

1981 the jail was remodeled to add cell space for females and trustees, plus 2 more beds.

OVERCROWDING was becoming an issue. In 1986 the rear parking structure, and service core in southwest corner with elevator, restrooms, handicapped entrance were added to the Courthouse.

1991 Work Camp opened at Houghton County Airport for prisoners whose crimes were non-violent, to do community service. It was and is, a dorm style facility with beds for 26 males.

Since then there have been two ballot proposals for millage to bring the jail into compliance with state requirements, one in 2000, the most recent in 2010. Both failed.

2017 July 11 Commissioner Palosaari raised the issue of remodeling the jail by presenting a drawing for an addition of 64 beds to the current jail, in the space currently occupied by the parking deck. **July 26** A Special meeting was held to discuss the jail. Members of the public spoke. Will Public input be included?

September 12 A Conceptual Design RFP prepared by County administrator Eric Forsberg and Commissioner Tony Pintar was approved by the Board of Commissioners (5-0) with the District Court as an option.

October 17 Commissioner Ala proposed a “stand alone” jail in a new location near Walmart. Motion failed for lack of a second. (no support).

December 12 The Board accepted the bid from UP Engineers and Architects, with Karin Cooper as project manager (4-1).

January 22 2018 Since it appeared that no public input was going to be solicited regarding location and design of the facility, the CC League of Women Voters took it upon itself to study the issue, and formed a committee which held its first meeting for this purpose.

February 13 2018 Commissioners Palosaari and Koskela and County administrator Eric Forsberg reported on a 3 day workshop they attended to design the addition along with Sheriff McLean and a deputy, and a national expert on County jails (1400 consults to date), Rod Miller. They stated that they found a workable solution to the current crisis, which yields an increase of ca. 60 beds, and meets the other state requirements, currently not met. Karin Cooper also spoke. She anticipates having costs ready by the end of March.

IS the JAIL OVERCROWDED? 2017 DATA

Current jail capacity (not including the Work Camp) 28 beds
RANGE OF NUMBER OF BEDS OCCUPIED on a daily basis : 20 to 50.

Number of days the jail was overcrowded in 2017: 176. The month of February was overcrowded every day. December was overcrowded all but 2 days. January and February both had 14 days showing occupied beds numbering in the 40s. July was only overcrowded one day.

PROS for approval of UPEA plan for Jail addition :

1. This plan meets the basic minimum State of Michigan requirements

With an increase of ca. 60 new beds, it will eliminate overcrowding which violates state law. This reduces the county's liability for lawsuits from inmates for civil rights violations.

It has space for private consultations between inmates and their attorneys, medical space, multipurpose space, and dayrooms for the inmates, all of which are currently lacking.

2) This structure would be able to be built in a minimum amount of time (ca. two years).

3) It likely has the lowest cost. It is located on land that the county currently owns and it will have no transportation costs for inmates to attend arraignments, hearings, trials, etc.

4) Female inmates can be part of the Work Camp.

5) Access will be through secure space via sallyports.

6) Current staff is adequate when Work Camp becomes part of the jail facility.

CONS:

1. Failure to get any public input prior to proposing a design.

2. Failure to consider the broader and long-term picture.

3. Public and Staff Safety, Liability, and Failure to include a District Courtroom in the jail facility

4. Failure to address understaffing in the Sheriff's Department.

5. Difficulty providing access to outdoor exercise

6. Failure to consider programs that keep people from returning to jail

7. Failure to provide for parking for sheriff department vehicles

8. Failure to consider the facility and safety needs of County Courthouse personnel

9. Impact on Houghton County Courthouse – a Michigan State Historic Site and National Register of Historic Places

10. Failure to Use Taxpayer money wisely

11. No harm done by waiting for public input and possible alternative design options