

**HOUGHTON COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS
WORK SESSION
MAY 5, 2025**

The Houghton County Board of Commissioners held a Work Session on Monday, May 5, 2025 at 10:00 a.m. in the 5th Floor Conference Room of the Courthouse, City of Houghton with the public viewing in person and by Microsoft Teams.

Call to Order:

The meeting was called to order by Vice-Chairman Britz at 10:00 a.m.

Pledge of Allegiance:

The Pledge of Allegiance was led by Vice-Chairman Britz.

Roll call:

The following commissioners responded to roll call done by County Clerk, Jennifer Kelly:

Tom Tikkanen, District 1-By Microsoft Teams; Joel Keranen, District 2; Glenn Anderson, District 3; Gretchen Janssen, District 4; Roy Britz, District 5.

Approval of Agenda/Additions:

Vice-Chairman Britz asked that #5 for Clerk's passport camera be added. Commissioner Anderson asked for #6-8 to be added for Tri-County Defender Update, County audit update, and other updates.

A Motion was made by Commissioner Keranen and seconded by Commissioner Anderson to approve the Agenda with the four (4) additions as presented.

The Motion carried by a voice vote. Ayes 4, Nays 0.

Public Comments-Agenda Items only *(3 minute limit):

None in person or by Microsoft Teams.

Houghton County Board of Commissioners Work Session:

1. Justice Center

Commissioner Anderson stated the Jail Committee has met twice. They have a proposed Resolution. A financial recommendation has been made but no fees have been charged or paid by the County. If the bond is passed, then the company will charge a substantial fee to the County.

He discussed an estimated \$30 million for the jail. The Board would have to decide whether to go 20, 25, or 30 years. The estimated true interest cost for 20 years would be 4.39%, for 25 years it would be 4.62% and for 30 years it would be 4.75%. The average mill rate impact would be \$1.85 for 20 years, \$1.64 for 25 years, and \$1.50 for 30 years. The total bond dictates the millage.

Vice-Chairman Britz stated that the Board needs to decide the number of beds for the jail. The minimum number of beds is 60.

Sheriff Saaranen stated he can operate 60 beds now with the staff he has. He commented on the Prosecutor's Office now having three (3) Prosecutors.

Commissioner Anderson stated the estimates are based on next year's construction costs.

Sheriff Saaranen discussed the pods, and how the County jail serves our population, not federal inmates like Dickinson County does.

Vice-Chairman Britz discussed the consultants plans to either use the existing building or to demolish the building. Option #4 would be a one (1) level facility. Option #2 would have to go up levels.

Chairmen Tikkanen stated the consultants feel a 1.75 millage is reasonable for 60 beds.

2. Materials Management scaling

Commissioner Keranen discussed an email from Curt Judson stating the scale needs some work soon. He stated Badger Scale is the outgoing scale for our trucks and that the trucks should stop going over the scale until it is fixed.

Commissioner Anderson felt it was the Administrator's decision.

Commissioner Keranen stated the costs are unknown at this time.

Chairman Tikkanen stated it is unknown if the scales have been maintained, and that Curt Judson should get a quote.

Commissioner Jassen stated she agreed to looking into the scale getting fixed.

3. Materials Management recycling

Commissioner Janssen stated the Materials Management Plan is being assessed through WUPPDR. They have been discussing composting. There is no talk about a one(1) combined facility for all of the Counties.

Commissioner Anderson stated that the County would be obligated to have 3-4 centers based on population. Commissioner Janssen agreed as this will be a mandate.

Commissioner Keranen stated the County is currently losing money on recycling. He questions where the money will come from for the mandate and changes that will have to be made.

Vice-Chairman Britz asked how does a county control the costs?

Commissioner Keranen stated again the County is losing money on recycling and may have to consider raising rates.

Commissioner Anderson stated the County has one (1) more year for the automatic increase for raising rates.

4. County held properties

Commissioner Janssen discussed a property with 40 acres that is landlocked. There has been no movement on the property. She discussed possibly relisting the property and finding out the value of the property.

Commissioner Anderson discussed some wetland properties and some that is contaminated and probably will not sell.

Chairman Tikkanen discussed a Torch Lake property that may be able to be traded with surrounding wetlands.

Commissioner Janssen will provide a map to the Board to show the County held properties.

Commissioner Keranen discussed the County properties and asked what the Board will do if the jail does not pass in August. He stated selling properties may need to be an opinion, and for the Board to look at the pros and cons.

Adam Laplander and Ed Jenich from Canal View were in attendance. Adam asked why the County put money into upgrades if they intend to sell. He commented on a \$12 million project that was done at Canal View without going to the taxpayers. He questioned what the County did with the interest income and where did the \$3 million go? He stated the County Treasurer reinvests the money that could have been used for a down payment or something for the jail. He further stated that Canal View has more projects in place for the future, and questions now if they will if the County Board wants to sell.

Commissioner Anderson stated the Board has not said they intend to sell.

Adam stated 77% of their residents are on Medicaid.

Commissioner Keranen commented on Canal View having 50 beds offline.

Adam stated every six (6) months a new plan is put in place. If a new plan is for 50 beds to be offline, they are offline for two (2) years. He said the goal is to get back to 197 beds and get students to get their CNA and LPN's. There are approximately 177 on the waiting list.

Vice-Chairman Britz asked Adam if the MTU Nursing program help with staffing issues. Adam stated that two (2) people came from MTU.

Ryan Heinonen, CEO Portage, discussed an email he sent to the Commissioners that there are not enough beds to discharge patients to nursing homes. About 72% are Medicaid patients. Currently they have 12 nurses and 60 CNAs. Canal View's numbers have been down for some time and sending Portage Hospital is sending patients to other counties. Flint was an example. They are considering purchasing beds from other facilities or building 10 beds at a time for up to 30 beds.

Commissioner Anderson stated if the County were to sell Canal View, and cash has been paid on the millage, how does the County deal with the money legally. He stated it was just something to think about.

Adam Laplander stated that the language was to be to the County Clerk by the end of the week. It has been reduced four (4) times since 2003 and felt it may be reduced again.

Commissioner Anderson felt the residents of Houghton County need nursing homes in Houghton County and the Board needs to figure out how to get more beds.

County Clerk-passport camera system:

Vice-Chairman Britz asked Clerk Kelly to explain what she has found out. Clerk Kelly explained some colleagues do not do passport photos, but two (2) colleagues have the system Clerk Kelly forwarded to VC3, and VC3 recommended Houghton County purchase it. Vice-Chairman Britz stated the Board could use ARPA money and discuss this at the next meeting. Clerk Kelly asked what money is available in the passport fund. Clerk Kelly will work with Administrator Rheault to find out the fund balance.

Tri-County Defender update:

Commissioner Anderson discussed Administrator Rheault working on a contract for legal counsel. He discussed a 90-day notice to cancel the contract with the Tri-County Defenders and to discuss a formal letter requesting records. This will be discussed at the May meeting. He questioned what the County should ask for and discuss this with the Attorney.

Chairman Tikkanen stated the new Attorney's contract will be on the Agenda for the next meeting and it has expenditures.

County Audit update:

Administrator Rheault stated on March 31st she requested an extension. On April 30th, the audit is pending per the auditors. The audit should be completed 14 days from this past Friday's date.

Other updates:

Commissioner Anderson stated the Board will need to decide when to put the jail, senior meals and Canal View on the ballot in either August or November at the next meeting.

Public Comment-*(3 minute limit):

Faith Morrison discussed the jail millage, and discussed how it would benefit voters to see how all County monies flow.

Chairman Tikkanen stated the community needs to be educated on Canal View and what a wonderful facility it is. He would like to see Canal View get to full bed capacity.

Announcements:

Vice-Chairman Britz reminded everyone that the next meeting is on May 13, 2025, at 10:00 am. He asked Clerk Kelly if everything was posted on the website. Clerk Kelly confirmed everything is done.

Commissioner Anderson stated the Board will have to pay attention to the 75% Central Air Service cut.

Adjournment:

A Motion was made by Commissioner Keranen and seconded by Commissioner Anderson to adjourn at 11:15 a.m.

The Motion carried by a voice vote. Ayes 4, Nays 0.

Tom Tikkanen, Chairman

Jennifer Kelly, County Clerk