PART I: ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS

A. GENERAL QUESTIONS

1A. Why do we need a new Justice Center (sheriff department, court and jail)? What’s wrong with the current court, sheriff’s office and jail?

District Court

- The current District Court is too small to meet current needs and its layout poses serious security threats.

- The court does not meet State guidelines, providing less than one-third of the space that is necessary to operate a safe, secure and efficient court.

- There is not adequate space to provide separation between the parties—defendants, plaintiffs, witnesses, court personnel, police officers, attorneys, counselors, family members of victims and plaintiffs, as well as members of the general public.

- On busy court days, people must stand in the narrow hallway or stand up against the wall in the courtroom due to a lack of seating.

- Areas of the current court are not handicapped accessible.

- There is no prisoner holding area.

- The narrow congested hallways do not allow for safe passage between witnesses/defendants/staff and the public

- Citizens who are in court for non-criminal proceedings such as small claims, landlord/tenant disputes, and wedding ceremonies are not able to be separated from persons involved with criminal proceedings.

- There are no barriers to protect witnesses, staff and the public from hostile and dangerous defendants.

- There is no escape route in the event of a violent encounter or other emergency in the court’s hallway.

- There are no provisions for security screening measures for weapons—persons are asked not to possess weapons by signs posted within the courthouse.

- There are no victim or witness rooms.

- There are no separate attorney/client rooms.

- District Court offices are currently located on two floors, reducing efficiency.

- Employee work areas are small and congested, reducing efficiency.

- The judicial office does not allow for secure separation of defendants and plaintiffs.
Sheriff's Office

The current Sheriff's Office was originally built as the personal residence for the sheriff and his/her family. At that time, there were very few employees. Jail staffing has increased to achieve compliance with mandatory standards. Road patrol was expanded to provide 24-hour coverage, a full-time detective was added.

- Administrative and support spaces are inadequate for the number of employees who must use them.
- The building lacks adequate working space for employees.
- The "conference room" also serves as the training room, interview room, storage room, lunch room, armory, field services report room and mail room.
- The facility is not easily accessible for the public and professionals who have business there. There are many reasons for persons to visit the facility, including filing complaints, obtaining dog licenses and gun permits, and visiting inmates.
- Handicapped access is on the far side of the Courthouse-- more than 200 feet from main entry which is non-handicapped access, etc.
- The increased number of employees, and the number of female employees, exceeds the capacity of available locker room space.

2A. Why do we need a new jail?

The 46-year-old jail has long outlived its usefulness. It does not comply with current mandatory jail standards in many areas. Because jails are occupied 24 hours a day, 365 days per year, they "age" faster than other buildings. It is difficult to keep the current jail in working condition.

The jail and work release center at the airport have been cited by the State Department of Corrections for serious safety violations.

The jail and work release center do not comply with many of the Michigan DOC guidelines and inspections.

Conditions of confinement expose the county to serious liability.

Other facility deficiencies include:

- Lack of activity space
- No clearly defined security perimeter
- No secure control center
- Insufficient work space
- Insufficient storage
Lack of space to deliver programs and services

Working conditions are neither healthy nor safe for employees.

The jail does not provide the number and types of beds needed to safely house current and future inmate populations.

Segregation of inmates according to classification is increasingly compromised as the number of inmates approaches rated design capacity.

The jail is increasingly difficult to maintain:

- There are chronic sewer and plumbing problems
- Electrical and heating systems are failing
- Repairs are most often more expensive than replacement
- Parts for the cell doors and locking systems are no longer available. In the past, the County has had to bring in a repair person from Texas to fix the cell doors.

The outmoded design inhibits effective and efficient supervision of inmates

26 dormitory beds are provided in a makeshift work release center at the airport. These low security beds provide no effective separation of inmates. Of the 54 total beds available to house Houghton County inmates, nearly half are at the airport facility.

None of the housing units in the Houghton County Jail are provided with a "dayroom" that is immediately adjacent to the cells. Dayrooms are required by jail standards.

The jail has no area that is suitable for inmate activities, services, or programs. There is a small, substandard outdoor exercise yard.

Visitors presently enter the jail facility through the Sheriff's Department lobby. Because visitors must walk through the Sheriff's Department and booking areas to go to the visitation space, this arrangement is very staff-intensive.

3A. What are the advantages of building a single facility for the new court, sheriff's department and jail?

Daily operations of all three criminal justice functions will be more efficient if they are housed in the same building. Staffing demands will be eased in the proposed facility, compared to operating separate facilities.

Inmate movement to the District Court will be much safer and will not require inmates to leave the building.

Sheriff's personnel will be able to provide backup and support for each division, as is currently the case in the jail. Court security will be greatly enhanced by its co-location with the sheriff's law enforcement functions.
C. COST AND BUDGET QUESTIONS

1C. How much will the proposed project cost taxpayers?

The $15 million project will require 1.3 mills for debt retirement in the first year. This is based on a 30 year schedule. After the first year, the mill rate would decrease each year as the result of the increase in county assessed valuation.

2C. What will the impact be on my tax bill?

Based on the average value of a Houghton County residential property, the average annual bill in the first year would be $33.40. A home worth $100,000 would cost $44.40 in the first year. These amounts would decrease in each subsequent year.

3C. What is the average value of a home in Houghton County?

An average value of a home in Houghton County is $75,412.

9C. Are there savings by combining the work camp and the jail in one facility?

Having both operations in the same facility will increase the overall efficiency of the complex. While actual savings will not be realized, total staffing costs will be decreased.