PENOBSCOT COUNTY

A New Correctional Facility

The plan to replace an aging county jail, and how the decision will be made

Prepared for the Board of Commissioners · September 2026

THE SITUATION TODAY

An aging jail, past its service life

1869
The year the current facility was built

66
People held in other counties for lack of space

$2.5M
Spent each year boarding detainees out of county

$814,100
Urgent life-safety repairs identified

What the county is facing

- The county jail was built in 1869 and is past its service life. Keeping it running safely now requires $814,100 in urgent life-safety repairs, triaged from $3.84M in identified needs.
- It regularly holds more people than it was built for. To manage the overflow, the county boards roughly 66 detainees in other counties, at a cost of about $2.5M a year.
- Boarding people out of county also moves them away from local courts, programs, and families, and leaves the county dependent on space it does not control.

WHY ACT NOW

Three pressures are converging on the jail

Condition and safety

An 1869 building that needs urgent life-safety work just to keep operating. Deferred maintenance compounds every year it stays open.

Capacity and boarding

The facility holds more people than it was designed for, so the county pays to house detainees elsewhere and loses local control over that space.

Cost

The cost of running and patching the old jail, plus boarding, rises faster than the county assessment can, and lands on the levy.

THE DECISION

Four options, and why the county chose to build

Close the jail	Board the entire population out of county. Estimated $7.8M to $11.7M a year, with a total loss of local control. Not workable.	Rejected
Status quo	Keep operating and patching the 1869 building. Lowest cost today, highest cost over time as repairs and boarding compound.	Most costly long-run
Build new	Replace the facility. Higher near-term cost, lowest long-run cost, and it ends boarding out of county. This is the chosen path.	Chosen
Wait five years	Delay the build. A larger bond in inflated dollars plus five more years of status-quo cost. Materially more expensive than building now.	Costlier

THE LONG-RUN CASE

Building new is the lowest cost over time

Total county cost over 35 years, by path



The bottom line: doing nothing is the expensive option. Keeping the old jail running costs an estimated $1.22B over 35 years as repairs and boarding compound. Building a new facility costs about $850M over the same period, roughly $370M less.

THE PLAN

More than beds: what the new facility provides

The new facility is not just cells. It brings capacity and services in-county that the 1869 building cannot support, and that is where much of the long-run savings and the better outcomes come from.

Local capacity restored

Room to bring home the 66 people now held in other counties, ending boarding out and restoring local control.

On-site medical care

A proper medical wing, so routine care happens in the facility instead of through costly hospital transports and outside watches.

Mental health and treatment

Space for mental health care and medication-assisted treatment the current building cannot house, meeting state standards.

Reentry and programming

Room for education, substance-use, and reentry programming that supports treatment and diversion rather than competing with it.

Direct-supervision housing

Modern pods that let staff safely separate populations and supervise more efficiently, improving safety for staff and detainees.

Right-sized and efficient

An energy-efficient building sized for today's population, with lower long-run operating cost.

WHY RELOCATE, AND WHY A VOTE

Moving to a new site, decided by the voters

Why build at a new site

- The current jail, built in 1869, is at the end of its useful life and cannot be modernized or expanded on its existing site.
- A jail cannot be safely torn down and rebuilt while it is still housing people, so rebuilding it in place is not practical.
- Building at a new, more suitable site lets the county construct a modern, right-sized facility while the current jail keeps running, then move in once it is ready.
- A purpose-built facility also makes room for on-site medical, mental health, and treatment programming the current building physically cannot house.

Why it goes to the voters

- Relocating the county jail requires voter approval under Maine law, so the decision goes to the ballot rather than being made by the commissioners alone. It is also a generational commitment the public should weigh in on directly.
- Keeping the move as its own question, separate from the financing, lets voters weigh the direction this year and the cost next year, each on its own merits.
- A yes vote in November 2026 authorizes the relocation. It does not commit any money.

A DELIBERATE, TWO-STEP DECISION

Voters decide the direction first, then the financing

STEP ONE

November 3, 2026

Authorize relocating and replacing the jail

- This is the question in front of voters now.
- It decides direction only: should the county replace the failing jail.
- No financing is committed at this step.

STEP TWO

November 2027

Authorize the bond to finance it

- A separate vote, one year later.
- It decides the financing, with full cost detail presented to voters.
- Splitting the two keeps each decision clear and on its own merits.

HOW IT WILL BE PAID FOR

Financed by a bond, separate from the operating budget

The financing

- A general obligation bond of about $78.2M, repaid over 30 years.
- Issued through the Maine Municipal Bond Bank, which gives Maine counties access to strong bond ratings and low rates.
- The final amount is confirmed at issuance, after construction pricing in 2027.

Why it does not squeeze services

- Voter-approved debt service is exempt from the county assessment cap under Title 30-A, Section 701, subsection 2-C.
- It is assessed as a separate, dedicated line, not taken from the operating budget, so it does not compete with day-to-day county services.
- It is an additional cost, and it is still far less than the cost of keeping the old jail running.

The bond works out to about $4.8M a year in debt service. What that means for a household is on the next page.

WHAT IT COSTS, IN CONTEXT

The bond in everyday terms

$78.2M bond leads to **about $4.8M a year in debt service** which is what taxpayers share.

	Per year	Per month	Per day
Per resident	**$31.55**	**$2.63**	**$0.09**
Per $100,000 of property value	**$23.73**	**$1.98**	**$0.07**

For a typical home

$150,000 home

$36 / year

$250,000 home

$59 / year

$350,000 home

$83 / year

Based on the county's 2026 state valuation of about $20.2B and 152,199 residents. Debt service is apportioned by state valuation, so the exact amount varies somewhat by municipality.

THE TIMELINE

From decision to open doors

Nov 2026	**Move vote**	Voters authorize relocating and replacing the jail.
Nov 2027	**Bond vote**	Voters authorize the financing, with full cost detail.
2028 to 2030	**Construction**	The new facility is built.
About 2031	**Doors open**	Boarding out of county ends as the facility opens.

Timeline figures are estimates and will firm up as design and construction pricing are completed.

WHAT HAPPENS NEXT

The decision in front of voters

On November 3, 2026

Voters decide whether to authorize relocating and replacing the county jail. A yes vote sets the direction. It does not commit any financing, which comes to voters as a separate question in November 2027.

Questions

Questions about the plan can be directed to the Penobscot County Commissioners' Office.