

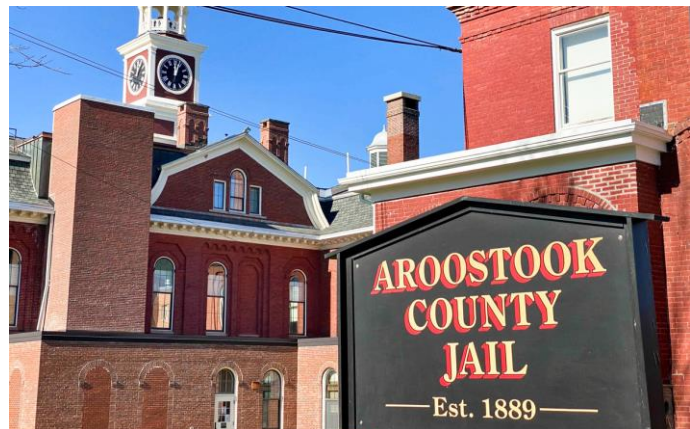
4 members join commission considering new Aroostook jail

by [Melissa Lizotte](#) 16 hours ago 8/20/2024

The Aroostook County Jail pictured in October 2021. Credit: Alexander MacDougall / Houlton Pioneer Times

CARIBOU, Maine – A commission studying options for a potential new county jail are bringing in perspectives from the area’s legal, municipal and social work fields.

On Tuesday, county commissioners unanimously voted to appoint Todd Collins, Aroostook County district attorney; Heidi Rackliffe, director of programs at Aroostook County Action Program; Houlton Town Manager Jeremy Smith; and Caribou City Manager Penny Thompson to the jail commission, established this year. The Aroostook County Jail in Houlton, built in 1889, was last renovated 40 years ago, and now architects with the National Institute of



Corrections are urging county leaders to [consider constructing a new jail](#). Licensed for 117 inmates, the jail is consistently near or at capacity and lacks a large enough space for programs intended to help inmates reenter society, said National Institute of Corrections consultants [in a written report](#). The consultants also recommended that the jail commission [include more members](#) than just those in law enforcement, which led County Administrator Ryan Pelletier to recommend Collins, Rackliffe, Smith and Thompson. On Monday, the jail commission discussed possibly recommending Toby Jandreau, district defender for Maine’s Rural Defender Unit, along with the four that commissioners approved, but ultimately recommended keeping the committee at 13 voting members. Prior to Tuesday’s vote, there were nine members. “We don’t want too much overlap in [community] service areas and we want to have as many regions [of the county] represented as possible,” Pelletier said Tuesday. The jail commission will hold their next meeting in October after its members, jail staff and county commissioners have attended a Planning of New Institutions training session put on by the National Institute of Corrections, which will cover steps the county should take in planning for a new jail. Commission members agreed to not hire an architectural consultant or discuss potential locations for a new jail until after attending that training.