

Town of Grand Isle
03-02-2026 Selectboard Meeting
Meeting minutes

Call to Order

The Grand Isle Selectboard meeting was called to order at 6:00 PM on Monday, March 2, 2026, by the chair. Board members present were Aimee Cochran, Ron Bushway, Jeff Parizo, Ellen Howrigan, and Jennifer Morway. Community members participating in person included Colleen Bushway, Steve More, Desiree More, Melissa Boutin and Sara Santor. Lynda Morgan-Gardiner attended via Zoom.

Amend Agenda for Matters NOT Listed

Aimee Cochran added updates to the Apparel Box and Speed study under Old Business.

Public Comment

There was discussion about road conditions on Route 314, with concerns raised about frost heaves making driving hazardous. Board members noted that Barclay Morris from Northwest Regional Planning Commission, who serves on the transportation committee, has previously complained about the road conditions. The suggestion was made to contact Pat Brennan or Joe Flynn directly about the issues.

There was also discussion about upcoming tree clearing operations and the need to send letters to homeowners. The attorney has prepared a letter that needs to be sent at least 15 days prior to work beginning, notifying property owners about the plan and asking them to indicate if they want to keep the wood from their property.

Lynda Morgan-Gardiner raised a question about how wood from tree clearing would be distributed if homeowners don't want it. She expressed concern that there might be neighbors that could use free wood who aren't aware that it might be available. The board discussed potentially posting notices at the food shelf and advertising through Grand Isle News in the Islander to reach people who might benefit from free firewood. They noted that ash trees would need to stay on the island due to regulations, but other wood could be more widely distributed.

Review and Approve Minutes

Minutes from the February 16, 2026 meeting were presented for approval.

Motion: Ellen Howrigan moved to approve the minutes from the 2/16/26 meeting.
Ron Bushway seconded. Motion passed unanimously.

Guests

No specific guests were noted during this portion of the meeting.

Review and Sign Warrants

The board reviewed the warrants for payment. There was discussion about MVP billing issues, with Melissa explaining that the insurance company is still billing at the old premium rates despite changes, and she has to adjust the billing each time. The billing process was criticized for not providing clear information about who is being billed or for how many people.

Motion: Ellen Howrigan moved to approve the warrants with corrections. Aimee Cochran seconded. Motion passed unanimously.

Financials

Melissa provided a financial update, explaining that any unbalance noted with "FB" refers to fund balance, which would be added to the balance from fiscal year 2025. She clarified that only three items have not yet been funded: capital equipment (\$50,000) and reappraisal (\$10,000), plus preservation of records funds which are typically allocated at year-end.

There was concern expressed about the cost of reappraisals, which are mandated by the state every six years. The board noted it has been since 2008 since the last reappraisal.

Discussion also covered the school budget and tuition payments. There was confusion about how the town's portion is calculated versus what Isle La Motte and North Hero pay. Melissa explained that invoices come from the state showing Grand Isle's specific obligation, which is separate from the other towns' payments. The board requested more detailed information about payment history and links to public information for future reference.

The tax rate setting process was also discussed, noting it typically occurs in late August or early September after the school budget is approved, listers complete their work by April 1st, and assessments are finalized by July 15th.

Highway Department Update

Steve provided updates on highway department activities. Bernie Gage started work on the apron project that should finish this week. The department has been doing significant hauling for the library construction and ran out of truck fuel, requiring a delivery the next day. They went through about 1,000 gallons of fuel in two weeks and are spending approximately \$100 per week on DEF (diesel exhaust fluid), an emissions additive.

Steve planned to post the roads the following week, as required by March 15th, due to frost conditions becoming problematic. He noted particular issues with frost heaves in certain areas.

Discussion of construction trailer

Steve presented a proposal to purchase a construction trailer from Island Excavating Company. The trailer is a 2016 27-ton biaxial tilt bed trailer being offered for \$24,000. He explained that a new trailer would cost \$50,000-\$60,000, and the town currently has to borrow trailers from South Hero or rent when they need to transport the 19-ton excavator.

The excavating company's mechanic confirmed that new brakes were installed on the trailer two years ago.

Motion: Jeff Parizo moved to approve the construction trailer purchase up to \$24,000, with authority to negotiate a lower price if possible, to be paid from the Highway department capital equipment fund. Ron Bushway seconded. Motion passed unanimously.

Steve also discussed disposing of old plows and equipment behind the garage, suggesting they be scrapped for the metal value. There was brief discussion about whether other towns might want the equipment, but it was determined the items were too old and deteriorated to be useful.

Buildings Facilities Manager Update

Ron reported on issues with the transfer station scales. The scales went down on a Thursday, and after troubleshooting with Don and a Fairbanks Scales technician named Charlie, they discovered a mouse had chewed through one of the load cell cables, which caused the digital readout board to fry from overheating. The repair required a new digital readout (over \$600) and a replacement cable (\$210), with total costs expected to reach at least \$2,000 including labor from the Middlebury-based technician.

The transfer station remained operational using backup weights and a calculation chart that Don used to estimate actual weights, since a 20-pound test weight was reading as 18 pounds on the compromised system.

Ron also indicated he would get pricing on a backup barrel scale (estimated around \$1,300) that could be stored in the recycling center and wheeled out when needed to avoid future shutdowns.

IT Update

Jennifer reported no IT issues or updates.

There was mention that Comcast would be performing work in the South Hero area on Wednesday that could affect service, potentially impacting Grand Isle's connectivity as well based on previous similar incidents.

New Business

Rabies vaccine update

Ron reported that as health officer, he had received hepatitis and rabies shots when he took the position. During a recent physical, blood tests showed his rabies titer had dropped below the recommended 0.5 level to 0.2, meaning doctors strongly recommended he get rabies vaccine boosters. He expected his insurance would not cover the preventive vaccines and recalled that the town had previously paid for Bob Thompson's vaccines when he served in a similar role. Ron planned to contact urgent care facilities for scheduling.

The board also discussed whether Trever Boutin, who is the Animal Control Officer, should also receive the vaccines.

Motion: Jennifer Morway moved to approve paying for rabies vaccines for Ron and Trevor if insurance does not cover the cost. Ellen Howrigan seconded. Motion passed unanimously.

Old Business

New library update

Jeff reported that the Contractor hoped to start framing the following week, weather permitting. Trusses had been ordered and were expected to arrive the week after next, with walls potentially going up by late the following week. A groundbreaking ceremony was scheduled for April 13th at 1:00 PM, with formal invitations to be sent out via email. If weather was poor, the ceremony would be held at the fire station instead.

The board discussed implementing monthly financial presentations on the library project, with Jennifer and Karen to coordinate the schedule. There was debate about which meeting each month should include the presentation to balance meeting lengths.

Franzoni resolution

Aimee led discussion of a resolution she had drafted regarding constitutional protections and due process. The resolution followed similar measures adopted by 25 other towns and expressed support for constitutional rights and due process protections.

Jennifer expressed agreement with the resolution's content but raised concerns about the political implications. She noted her Facebook feed had been filled with various "call to action" resolutions recently, making her nervous about setting a precedent for the board to take positions on politically charged issues. She worried that approving this resolution might obligate the board to consider other resolutions that could be more controversial when politics were involved.

Jennifer suggested putting the resolution on the ballot for townspeople to vote on instead, believing it would carry more weight if approved by citizens rather than just the five board members. She felt the resolution would likely pass if put to a public vote and noted that November's midterm elections would provide high voter turnout.

Aimee explained that she had researched other towns' resolutions and found that many communities without their own police forces had adopted similar measures, though they typically omitted paragraphs specifically urging local law enforcement to sign on since they relied on state police or sheriff's departments.

Ellen expressed support for the resolution's principles but shared Jennifer's concerns about unintended consequences and potentially being obligated to consider other political resolutions in the future.

After extensive discussion about the merits of board action versus public voting, and consideration of timing for either the August primary or November general election, the board agreed to pursue putting the resolution on the November ballot. Aimee agreed to revise the resolution's language for ballot presentation and work on gathering the required signatures (approximately 100, representing 5% of registered voters) to petition for its inclusion.

The board noted that November's election would have higher turnout than August's primary, giving the measure more legitimacy, and that there would be sufficient time to collect signatures and properly prepare the ballot question.

Executive Session

No executive session was held.

Administrative Check-In

The board noted several follow-up items: Jennifer would email Pat Brennan about Route 314 road conditions and contact Trevor about rabies vaccines. Aimee to check with Josie about wood distribution signage at the food shelf.

There was discussion about Melissa successfully securing a ballot tabulator from the Town of Franklin for the upcoming school election, which would make vote counting much easier. The board suggested that in future budget discussions, they should encourage the school to purchase their own tabulator rather than relying on borrowed equipment.

Questions were raised about outstanding rental payments owed to the town, with Melissa confirming a \$2,500 cumulative balance. There was discussion about the school district's ongoing financial management problems, including issues with their audit findings related to lack of internal controls, duplicate invoices, and improper payment procedures.

The board also discussed the Northwest Regional Planning Commission's updated maps, noting that the maps were difficult to read and zoom into for proper review. Amy agreed to follow up with NRPC about providing clearer, more detailed maps before their adoption vote on March 25th, expressing concerns that the maps were being created by people who don't live in the affected communities and may not accurately reflect local conditions like wetlands along the railroad tracks.

Adjournment

Motion: Ellen Howrigan made a motion was made to adjourn the meeting at 7:00 PM. Ron Bushway seconded. Motion passed unanimously.