

Town of Grand Isle

03-16-2026 Selectboard Meeting

Meeting minutes

Call to Order

Chair Jennifer Morway called the Grand Isle Selectboard meeting to order at 6:00 PM.

Board members present included Jeff Parizo, Ron Bushway, Jennifer Morway, Ellen Howrigan, and Aimee Cochran. There were no board members present via Zoom.

Community members present included Colleen Bushway, Susan Lawrence, Michael Frett, Melissa Boutin, and Sara Santor. Community members present via Zoom included Lynda Morgan Gardner, Karen Allen, Kaitlyn Carney, and Lucille Campbell.

Amend Agenda for Matters NOT Listed

Chair Morway asked if there were any amendments to the agenda for matters not listed. Jeff Parizo mentioned adding an easement signing item, which would be added under Library Updates. The board also discussed removing the second executive session item.

Public Comment

Ellen provided public comment about attending a seminar where a safety team presented on women's safety training. She offered to reach out to them about potentially hosting such training in town, suggesting partnership with the recreation department. Jeff Parizo mentioned that the lodge in South Hero could provide indoor space if needed, as Grand Isle's only option besides the school might be the sheriff's office community room.

Colleen Bushway announced that as a member of the library committee for strategic planning, a SurveyMonkey survey would be coming out via Front Porch Forum in approximately three days. She encouraged everyone to take the 15 minutes to complete it, noting its importance. Chair Morway suggested also sending the link to Sara for posting on the town website for those without Front Porch Forum access. Lawrence confirmed they could also conduct the survey in person.

Sue Lawrence raised questions about service awards, noting that no one had been added to the display since 2018. He suggested considering people like Merritt Vantine and Janice Arnold for recognition. Chair Morway asked if anyone wanted to take on beginning that process. The board discussed having people email ideas to Sara for inclusion on the next meeting agenda. Names mentioned as potential candidates included Merritt, Janice, Art (who is already on there), and Raymond Blow, who worked at the transfer station for many years.

Ron Bushway reported completing his annual fire warden training and receiving full certification.

Review and Approve Minutes

Motion: Jeff Parizo moved to approve the February 28, 2026, March 2, 2026, and March 5, 2026 minutes with corrections. Aimee Cochran seconded. Motion carried unanimously.

Guests

There were no scheduled guests present at the meeting.

Review and Sign Warrants

The board reviewed the warrants, with some clarification needed on the agenda order.

Motion: Ellen Howrigan moved that the chair sign the warrants. Aimee Cochran seconded. Motion carried unanimously.

Financials

No specific financial discussion occurred under this agenda item.

Highway Department Update

Ron Bushway provided the highway department update, noting that Steve had sent his weekly report showing plowing and sanding activities. He highlighted that they had experienced more frozen culverts this year than ever before due to cold weather and thaw cycles building up ice. The crew used hot water, salt, and Austin's ice fishing auger to address the frozen culverts. They had been doing brush cutting and hauling gravel for the new library construction.

Ron reported that the trailer for the excavator had not yet been received, as Ion Excavating was still working on their own trailer before releasing the purchased one. The heat for the garage apron had been completed that afternoon with glycol charging. Ron covered for Kevin at the transfer station on the previous Thursday and Saturday.

Sign Annual financial plan

Ron Bushway explained that both the annual financial plan and town road and bridge standards were required annually for VTRANS grants to start the process. Steve had prepared the annual financial plan after town meeting day following budget passage, and John Wilkins had reviewed it and found everything satisfactory.

Motion: Ron Bushway moved to sign the annual financial plan and the town road and bridge standards. Jeff Parizo seconded. Motion carried unanimously.

Sign Town Road and Bridge Standards

This item was addressed together with the annual financial plan above.

Buildings Facilities Manager Update

Ron Bushway reported that all fire extinguishers in town buildings had been inspected. Several required six-year overhauls involving discharge, disassembly, new O-rings, and recharging. He met with Jennifer and Adam on Friday to discuss MERP grant estimates.

The MERP grant would require two estimates for each item, including LED lighting in the current library, potentially a shutoff switch for the fire station boiler, a new refrigerator for the fire station with delivery and installation, plumbing estimates for replacing domestic hot water heaters in both the current library and fire station, replacing bathroom aerators in both buildings, insulating water lines in the current library, and replacing shower heads in the fire station.

Chair Morway noted these would come to the selectboard but would be MERP grant reimbursable, explaining that even functional equipment might be replaced for energy efficiency purposes. There was discussion about potentially using the current functional refrigerator at the transfer station.

Ron confirmed the scale was working well with no problems, though he had not yet obtained a backup estimate.

New Library Update

Jeff Parizo provided the construction update, noting that walls were up with some plywood installed that day. Trusses were being delivered the following day with installation tentatively scheduled for Monday, March 23rd, weather permitting. He emphasized that once trusses were installed, the building's true dimensions would become apparent and construction would progress rapidly.

The contractor planned to bring three additional workers to set all trusses in one day. Following truss installation, plywood sheathing and water barrier installation would occur before the roofing company installed the metal roof. All catch basins were installed, and the stormwater pond was under construction. Some driveway work was planned to create a non-muddy area for truck access and parking.

Jeff noted the project was ahead of schedule and moving rapidly. After roof installation, interior work could begin while remaining dry.

Vermont Electric Coop Easement

Jeff Parizo explained they had received a right-of-way easement request from Vermont Electric Coop for overhead and underground utility access to the vault. The easement was 20 feet in width and standard for accessing the electrical infrastructure.

Motion: Jeff Parizo moved to approve the overhead and underground utility easement for Vermont Electric Coop. Ron Bushway seconded. Motion carried unanimously.

Aimee expressed concern about recent news of a contractor scamming the solid waste district out of \$3 million through fraudulent invoicing, wanting to ensure Grand Isle's protection against such fraud. Jeff explained their multi-layer approval process involving Steve reviewing dirt work, then Jeff reviewing all invoices, followed by Jennifer and Karen's review before submission to Melissa for physical check issuance to W-9 addresses. Chair Morway noted that all invoicing goes through their contractor first, providing additional protection, and that using physical checks to verified addresses should help prevent fraud.

Financial Update

Karen Allen provided financial details on library project spending to date. Architecture and engineering invoicing totaled approximately \$222,000, permits about \$18,000, legal just under \$600, preconstruction \$15,000 through Connor, and construction approximately \$128,000. Two related invoices were in process.

Karen explained she submitted disbursement requests to the state as soon as checks cleared Northfield Savings Bank, with each invoice submitted separately with canceled checks. About 12 disbursement requests were with the state, with approximately \$117,000 in funding hitting the account that day for five invoices. Another five invoices would be funded during the week.

Chair Morway calculated approximately \$1.42 million remaining in unspent grant money based on Karen's spreadsheet showing \$1,680,000 budgeted with \$261,000 drawn to date, leaving about \$1,420,000. This should cover remaining construction costs along with formerly known as ARPA money and the library's \$100,000 contribution, potentially leaving around \$467,000 for the town.

Reimbursement for Town Services

Chair Morway explained that Steve would be reimbursed for mileage at the federal rate of \$0.725 per mile for trucking, based on his detailed spreadsheet showing 6,352 miles totaling \$4,605.20 in reimbursement. Steve had chosen mileage for trucking and fuel costs for equipment as the best approach. These reimbursements would be processed through the library account with due-to/due-from accounting to credit the highway fund appropriately.

Karen Allen confirmed understanding of the process, noting that canceled checks would be on the library account for her submission purposes.

IT Update

Aimee Cochran noted there was no website update as work continued, and Chair Morway confirmed they were all set on G1/G3 license discussion.

New Business

Listers proposal for assessor

Susan Lawrence provided background on the listers' challenges finding qualified part-time personnel, as the position had become more in-depth and detailed, requiring additional certification as of January 1st. Lynda Morgan Gardiner and Susan proposed utilizing Kaitlyn Carney, the new zoning administrator, to fill the part-time listing position.

Susan explained she had researched having Kaitlyn serve as an assistant or assistant assessor to the listers. The state provides training classes that would be paid for due to education components if someone held an official position with the town.

Chair Morway clarified that due to equal opportunity employment policies, any position would need to be posted publicly for all candidates to apply, rather than simply appointing someone. The discussion revealed that Kaitlyn was not a Grand Isle resident, which would disqualify her from an elected lister position, but she could serve as a clerk.

Lynda Morgan Gardner via Zoom explained this was completely unknown territory for all involved, but they were excited about Kaitlyn's interest regardless of which position structure was ultimately chosen. They emphasized needing help immediately as current staffing was insufficient.

Jeff Parizo asked several clarifying questions about the relationship between listers and assessors, whether listers would remain if an assessor were hired, and how positions would be eliminated. Susan explained other towns had abolished lister boards through voting, though she wasn't certain of the specific mechanism.

The board discussed cost considerations, with Jeff noting concern about affording both listers and an assessor. Susan emphasized the state's increased demands on listers due to property tax revenue concerns, requiring extensive training and knowledge.

Chair Morway suggested the quickest solution might be hiring a lister clerk, which she had found referenced online as similar to a selectboard assistant position. This could be advertised and hired by the listers within their budget authority.

There was extensive discussion about the Catalyst system data entry challenges. Lynda explained they were discovering that their previous CAMA system had not transferred all information to Catalyst's more comprehensive system, requiring manual entry of house designs, floor counts, heating systems, flooring, and roofing information from handwritten forms. This extensive data entry was taking approximately 3 hours to complete 12-15 parcels.

Susan expressed frustration that they hadn't understood this data entry requirement would be their responsibility, feeling somewhat misled during the Catalyst contract discussions. She mentioned multiple Catalyst personnel handling different aspects of the program, creating confusion.

With 1,371 parcels requiring data entry at current rates, the board calculated roughly 100 hours of work needed, which could potentially be completed by a clerk in about 5 weeks working 20 hours per week.

The discussion touched on budget constraints within the lister's existing allocation and ensuring fair compensation relative to the Listers' current wage. The board agreed the listers should develop a job description for a clerk position and advertise it, staying within their budget parameters.

Chair Morway suggested putting the broader assessor discussion on a future agenda after receiving more information from the attorney about legal requirements and options.

Lynda confirmed they would develop a clerk job description and advertise the position, with the understanding that they could conduct interviews and make recommendations to the selectboard for final approval.

Repurpose use of current library space

Jeff Parizo initiated discussion about the future use of the current library building, noting he had recently visited the 900-square-foot space. He described the layout including a main area with bathroom and vault spaces separated by antique sliding pocket doors.

Jeff suggested considering the space for selectboard meetings and as a meeting room, noting it was larger than their current meeting space. However, there were logistical questions about Melissa's access to information during meetings, though she could potentially bring her laptop since everything was cloud-based.

The discussion explored various options including a town clerk office, meeting space for multiple boards, or Historical Society use as a museum. Lucille Campbell via Zoom expressed interest in having winter meeting space for the Historical Society and noted the space would accommodate their winter programs, suggesting it could be shared among groups.

Chair Morway noted the original library plan had included community meeting space that was eliminated due to budget constraints. She suggested the space could serve as an open meeting room for various town boards, with locked storage available in the vault area for materials currently stored in board members' homes.

The building would continue requiring electricity payments regardless, and Jeff noted it couldn't practically be sold due to the small lot size.

The board discussed upcoming MERP

grant work in the building including LED lighting, hot water heater replacement, and aerator installations, along with existing solar panels that should offset electrical costs.

Chair Morway suggested conducting a survey of townspeople for input on the building's future use, but recommended waiting until May to avoid conflicting with the library's strategic planning survey. Aimee Cochran volunteered to create the survey.

The discussion also touched on using potential leftover library construction funds for building maintenance needs throughout town, including insulation improvements to the current municipal building, which Linda noted had poor insulation causing cold conditions during winter.

Open meeting / Code of Ethics

Chair Morway reminded everyone that the code of ethics training was valid for three years for those who completed it the previous year. However, new board members would need to complete the training. She requested an email be sent to all board chairs about getting their new members trained.

The open meeting training remained an annual requirement, and they were waiting for updated information from VLCT or Northwest Regional Planning Commission to distribute to all board members.

Scheduling Fraud Risk Audit

The board discussed scheduling the required fraud risk audit, determining that Melissa and Terri should attend due to potential discussions about separating town clerk and town treasurer positions to address internal control conflicts.

Chair Morway explained that current internal controls assumed separate people in these roles, but modifications had been made when the positions were combined. The independent accounting firm had been satisfied with current procedures, but documentation needed updating to reflect actual practices.

The board determined attendees should include Ron Bushway for highway and transfer station, Karen Allen for library issues, and Steve More for highway department.

Town Attorney Discussion

Ron Bushway raised concerns about town attorney procedures and costs. He explained that historically, only the selectboard chair could contact the town attorney without permission from other board members, but this had changed over time. He suggested requiring at least notification to other board members before attorney contact.

Ron recommended using VLCT resources and Secretary of State office when possible, particularly for election-related questions. He cited a recent example where the town attorney provided incomplete information about write-in candidate requirements, while the Secretary of State provided complete statutory information within two hours at no cost.

Ron proposed putting the town attorney position out to bid, noting they had used the same firm since 2003 (over 23 years) while putting other services out to bid per their procurement policy. He suggested this would provide transparency about available options and rates.

Jeff Parizo supported the idea while noting that Stitzel Page & Fletcher specialized in municipal law, unlike general attorneys who might need to research municipal issues. However, he agreed there was no harm in exploring options.

The board discussed finding RFP templates from VLCT or other towns and agreed Ron would research available options and return with information for the next meeting.

Chair Morway clarified that current policy allowed any board member to contact the town attorney while copying the chair, which seemed to work well with proper communication.

Old Business

Job descriptions

The board reviewed current job descriptions, with Jeff Parizo providing a comprehensive list of what existed versus what was needed. Current job descriptions included DRB, DRB clerk, cemetery commission, planning commission, lister, zoning administrator, road foreman, selectboard, and selectboard admin.

Missing or outdated descriptions included highway crew, facilities maintenance worker, assistant town clerk, town clerk, moderator, justice of peace, health officer, constable, fire warden, animal control officer, emergency management coordinator, recreation committee members, and library board members.

The board noted most existing job descriptions dated to 2009 and needed updating. They discussed having Sara organize the current descriptions and reach out to appropriate boards for updates, with many positions being able to reference online examples from other towns.

CIUUSD Funds Advance request

Melissa reported that after reaching out to the school district about their funds advance request and expressing the selectboard's desire for representatives to attend with answers to questions, the business manager simply stated they had figured out their cash flow issue and no longer needed the advance.

Melissa noted this occurred after she saw warrants exceeding \$1 million come through, questioning how they resolved what had been presented as a significant cash flow problem. The board expressed confusion about the district apparently finding substantial funds after claiming financial difficulties.

Jeff Parizo noted concerns about the district's financial statements showing deficits while claiming reserve funds, but acknowledged he was not an accounting professional and would need closer review to understand their financial position.

Executive Session

Motion: Jeff Parizo moved to enter executive session to discuss confidential attorney-client communications made for the purpose of providing professional legal services to the selectboard pending per 1 VSA state statute 313(a)(1) that premature general public knowledge would clearly place the public body or person involved at substantial disadvantage. Aimee Cochran seconded. Motion carried unanimously.

The board entered executive session at approximately 7:30 PM, with arrangements made to call Kaitlyn Carney by cell phone to include her in the confidential discussion.

Motion: Jeff Parizo moved to come out of executive session at 8:18 PM. Ellen Howrigan seconded. Motion carried unanimously.

Chair Morway noted that no decisions were made during executive session.

Adjournment

Motion: Jeff Parizo moved to adjourn at 8:18 PM. Ron Bushway seconded. Motion carried unanimously.

The meeting adjourned at 8:18 PM.