

08-31-2026 Selectboard Special Meeting

Meeting Minutes

August 31, 2026, 6:00 PM

Grand Isle Selectboard — Notice of Public Hearing & Special Meeting

Monday, August 31, 2026 | 6:00 PM 9 Hyde Rd, Grand Isle, VT | And Via Zoom

I. Open Public Hearing

Selectboard Chair Jennifer Morway opened the public hearing for the Grand Isle Selectboard Notice of Public Hearing for the Adoption of the Town Charter.

Present: Ron Bushway, Jennifer Morway, Aimee Cochran, Jeff Parizo (via Zoom)

Community Members Present: Peter Kirk, Lynn Hansen, Lucille Campbell, Peter Riegelman, Denise Abbott Douglass, Rachael Griggs, Michael Frett, Melissa Boutin, Sara Santor

Community Members via Zoom: Esther Blow, Kaitlyn Carney, Melissa Howes, Matt ?, KC Fantoni

II. Discussion of Warned Article – Adoption of Town Charter

Chair Morway noted that copies of the draft Town of Grand Isle Charter, dated August 17, 2026, were available for anyone who did not have one, and that the Board had reviewed the document extensively over the course of prior meetings. She directed attention to the most recently amended section of the draft, Section 3, Appointed Officers, General Provisions, item 8(e), which reads: "All those serving in appointed positions, either as member of a board or commission or a separate office, may be removed from the office in accordance with the state law, or if state law is silent, in accordance with the town personnel policy."

Chair Morway explained that the impetus for this revision came from a community member who had raised concern that the prior language effectively rendered all appointed officers at-will employees. She elaborated on the example of the town treasurer, for whom state statute provides that a treasurer so appointed may be removed by the legislative body only "for just cause after notice and hearing" — meaning removal cannot be arbitrary, and a noticed public hearing is required. She noted that the delinquent tax collector is governed by the same standard, while the listers' situation differs, as the charter would specifically allow that position to be dissolved once it is no longer viable. The question of the tax assessor's status — whether that position would be at-will — was flagged as still being confirmed.

Treasurer Transition Concern — Melissa Boutin

Town Treasurer Melissa Boutin raised a concern regarding Section 4 of the charter, which provides that elected officers transitioning to appointed positions shall continue serving until the end of their elected term, at which point they may apply to the Selectboard to be appointed. Ms. Boutin acknowledged that it had been communicated to her that the intent was not to eliminate her position, but she expressed that the language felt unsettling. She stated she would feel more reassured if the charter read that the current treasurer would remain in position after the current term until she no longer wished to hold the position, rather than being required to formally apply for reappointment.

Chair Morway responded that she and Vice Chair Cochran had raised that exact concern with the town attorney. She explained that, as a legal matter, in order for an elected position to become an appointed one, the incumbent must formally be appointed to it — there is no mechanism simply to convert the status automatically. She further noted that, given the timeline involved in state legislative approval, it was likely that Ms. Boutin's current term would run to March regardless, and the Board would almost certainly be seeking reappointment of a qualified treasurer at that point. Chair Morway added that if the charter passes, a very specific job description would be developed for the treasurer position — one that would require qualifications such as accounting credentials and municipal experience — so that the position could not be filled arbitrarily. She emphasized this was intended to protect both the town and the position itself. She acknowledged that she could not guarantee the composition of the next Board, but expressed confidence that Ms. Boutin would not face difficulty in that process.

A community member asked who would be responsible for drafting the job description. Chair Morway explained that the Selectboard would lead that process, but noted that the Vermont League of Cities and Towns (VLCT) maintains comprehensive model job descriptions and qualifications for virtually every municipal role, and that the Board would work collaboratively with those currently serving in the relevant positions to tailor the descriptions to Grand Isle's specific needs. She acknowledged that for a tax assessor, since the town does not currently have one, the Board would rely heavily on VLCT resources and the experience of other towns.

Community Comment — General Concerns About the Charter Process

A community member attending his first board meeting stated that while he found the charter's intent sensible on its face, he was troubled by the fact that the process continued following a vote in which the charter had failed. He observed that in other governmental contexts, a vote is dispositive regardless of the margin, and questioned whether the same discussion would be happening if the charter had passed by fifteen votes rather than failing by fifteen. Chair Morway agreed directly: had it passed, there would be no further discussion because the charter would already be in place. She then pivoted to explain that the Board was not simply relitigating a lost vote for its own sake — the town still had a substantive problem to solve, specifically with the Board of Listers, and the charter remained the most legally elegant solution to that problem. She explained that removing the local option tax — the element most cited as the reason for the charter's defeat — was the Board's response to community feedback, and that this revised, narrower version was being brought back to voters accordingly.

Vice Chair Cochran reinforced this point, noting that without the charter, the only remaining option would be to put the abolition of the Board of Listers to a town-wide vote in March, at which point the Select Board would have just 45 days to find and hire a qualified tax assessor — right in the middle of an ongoing reappraisal — a timeline she described as "really messy and not ideal." The charter, by contrast, would allow the listers to continue their work through the reappraisal at a pace that made sense, with the transition to a tax assessor managed deliberately and without a hard deadline.

Community Comment — Denise Douglass (Appointed Positions and Democratic Accountability)

Community member Denise Douglass offered what she acknowledged would be a "probably not very popular comment." Drawing an analogy to the U.S. Supreme Court and the reversal of *Roe v. Wade*, Ms. Douglass argued that appointed positions — even when created with good intentions — have demonstrated their capacity to produce outcomes that run contrary to the will of the public over time. She expressed that voters, when they directly elect someone, "own it," and that she believed grassroots democratic participation tended to produce better outcomes. She stated that she thought the charter, while it "sounds really, really good," warranted an "awful lot of caution" and that, in her personal opinion, something this significant "shouldn't be done" quickly — that it should "take a very long time to hammer out" and perhaps "years" to get right. She expressed understanding of the urgency around the lister situation but felt it was "so important to absolutely get it right" given that, practically speaking, the town would have essentially "one shot."

Chair Morway responded that she did not disagree with anything Ms. Douglass said, calling it "a complicated issue" with real pros and cons on both sides. She noted, however, that the charter also includes provisions allowing the public to seek removal of elected officials, including select board

members — a protection that does not currently exist — so that concentrating hiring authority in the Board comes paired with increased accountability mechanisms for the Board itself. She also pointed out that "appointed" does not mean the board can simply call a friend; the process would involve public meetings, published qualifications, and an open process. Ms. Douglass acknowledged the additional perspective but maintained her overall concern, noting that single-issue boards had caused problems in Grand Isle's past history and that concentrated appointed authority can be problematic under such circumstances.

Community Comment — Lucille Campbell (Section 2, Item 6 — Authority to Dissolve Boards)

Community member Lucille Campbell sought clarification on Section 2, Elected Officers, item 6, which provides that the selectboard may appoint or dissolve any authorities, boards, commissions, or committees created by it and under its purview, as authorized by the charter or state statute. She asked what specific authorities, boards, commissions, and committees this language encompassed. Chair Morway explained that the language tracks existing state statute — it does not expand the Select Board's authority beyond what the law already provides. Currently, the Board can appoint members to bodies such as the Development Review Board, the Planning Commission, and the Recreation Committee. This provision mirrors that existing authority and adds one specific new power granted by the charter itself: the ability to dissolve the Board of Listers once circumstances warrant it. Chair Morway emphasized that it was not giving any new general power to disband entities — only what state statute already allows, plus what the charter specifically authorizes.

Community Comment — Melissa Howes (via Zoom — Cost Impact)

Community member Melissa Howes, participating via Zoom, stated that she wished to second the earlier community member's concern about the charter being brought forward again after two failed votes and a survey that she characterized as having decisively reflected opposition. She then raised a specific financial question: she understood that the local option tax had originally been included in the prior charter proposal specifically to help fund the cost increases associated with converting the treasurer to a full-time position and hiring a tax assessor. Now that the local option tax had been removed, she asked whether any impact study, cost projection, or discussion had taken place about how those additional costs — including potential six-figure salaries and adding new employees to town health insurance — would be funded and what the impact to taxpayers would be.

Chair Morway acknowledged the question and noted that the Board had recently participated in a selectboard roundtable with other Franklin and Grand Isle County towns, including Georgia, where the topic of tax assessors was extensively discussed. She reported that many towns of comparable size were sharing tax assessors on a part-time basis — for example, one day per week per town — which she said appeared to be a "much more manageable budget" scenario than a full-time hire. She also indicated that there was promising information suggesting that a qualified tax assessor, depending on their credentials, might be able to conduct the statutorily required reappraisals internally, potentially saving the town significant money on the large outside contracts that the recent reappraisal had required. She cautioned, however, that these were early indications from conversations that occurred just the prior week, and she did not want to make any promises. She confirmed that yes, it would ultimately result in some increase to the tax rate, but that the Board would also be looking at other areas where costs could be reduced to offset the impact. She stated that a clearer cost picture would be presented at the second public hearing, scheduled for October 5th.

Community Comment — General Discussion on the Lister Situation and Path Forward

The discussion broadened to the fundamental question of whether the charter was truly necessary. Community member Rachael Griggs observed that the Selectboard already had the legal authority to bring the abolition of the Board of Listers to a townwide vote in March without a charter, and asked why that path was not being pursued instead. Chair Morway confirmed this was accurate, but reiterated the 45-day hiring window problem and the disruptive timing mid-reappraisal. She also acknowledged that

even if someone were lined up in advance, the incoming Selectboard after March would be the one making that decision — not the current Board.

Community member Peter Riegelman stated he was broadly aligned with the Board's rationale but asked a pointed question about whether raising the pay for listers might help attract candidates and avoid the need for a charter altogether. Chair Morway responded that the state had substantially increased the educational and training requirements for listers in recent years, making the role considerably more demanding. She noted that the town currently has only two listers, both of whom are seeking to retire, and that even if someone were willing to serve, they would need to be someone who could be “basically Sue” — meaning someone with the deep knowledge of current lister Sue Lawrence. She expressed her personal view that the state appears to be systematically making the lister role untenable as a means of pushing all municipalities toward professional tax assessors, though she acknowledged that was not yet a formal mandate.

Mr. Riegelman followed up by asking what the ballpark cost comparison looked like — three listers' salaries versus a professional assessor. Chair Morway indicated that early estimates had put a tax assessor at approximately \$100,000 per year, with the lister budget being used to offset that cost. Given the shared-assessor model now being explored, however, she believed the actual cost impact could be considerably less than originally anticipated. She also noted the potential savings on future reappraisal contracts as an additional offsetting factor.

Community member Denise Douglass returned to note that the two sides of the debate were really about the same underlying reality: the state was making the lister path nearly impossible for a small town, and "no matter what happens, we're heading towards an assessor." She said that while she appreciated all the work the Board had put into the charter, this was "a really difficult thing" and the six-year reappraisal mandate from the state was, in her words, "almost impossible" for a small town to sustain. Board Member Ron Bushway agreed, noting that the state's increasing requirements meant the town was likely heading toward a tax assessor regardless, and the only question was how orderly that transition would be.

Community Comment — Esther Blow (via Zoom — State Overreach)

Community member Esther Blow expressed her frustration with the volume of state-imposed mandates on small towns, stating that "it's time somebody starts saying no." Chair Morway responded that she did not disagree and cited a recent incident where the town received notice on approximately June 28th that, effective July 1st, the town's fire warden position was being eliminated by state action and fire chiefs would henceforth assume that responsibility — without any prior notice to the fire chiefs themselves. She described Fire Chief Adam's reaction as one of genuine confusion about logistics. She called it "annoying" and agreed with Ms. Blow's broader point about the state's recent pattern of imposing changes with little notice or consultation.

Closing Remarks and Second Public Hearing

Chair Morway indicated that a second public hearing would be held on October 5th, at which the Board intended to provide cost estimates for the proposed changes and to obtain a definitive answer from the town attorney regarding whether a future townwide vote to repeal the charter would require a return to the state legislature for approval. The current draft charter and all related documents would remain posted on the town's website.

III. Adjournment

A motion to adjourn the public hearing at 6:49 was made by Chair Morway and seconded by Board Member Bushway. The motion carried unanimously.

Grand Isle Selectboard Special Meeting

Monday, August 31, 2026 | Called to Order: 6:49 PM 9 Hyde Rd, Grand Isle, VT | And Via Zoom

I. Call to Order

Chair Morway called the Special Meeting to order at approximately 6:49 PM.

- a. Board Members Present: Ron Bushway, Jennifer Morway, Aimee Cochran
- b. Board Members via Zoom: Jeff Parizo
- c. Community Members Present: Peter Kirk, Lynn Hansen, Lucille Campbell, Peter Riegelman, Denise Abbott Douglass, Michael Frett, Rachael Griggs, Melissa Boutin, Sara Santor
- d. Community Members via Zoom: Kaitlyn Carney, Melissa Howes, Esther Blow, Matt, KC Fantoni

II. Amend Agenda for Matters NOT Listed

Chair Morway noted the need to add a Thrive IT agenda item — specifically, the approval of a change order migrating the town's data backup platform from Dropsuite to AvePoint — to be addressed under the IT Update.

III. Public Comment

Lucille Campbell — Library Fund Concern

Community member Lucille Campbell stated that she had attended the most recent Library Trustees meeting and wished the Board to clarify why the Selectboard had requested \$100,000 from the library's fund — funds she understood to be designated for interior library furnishings. Chair Morway clarified that this was not a new request from the Selectboard; rather, the library had committed \$100,000 toward the building project from the very beginning of the library construction planning process. The email that had gone out was simply requesting payment of that long-standing commitment, not initiating a new obligation.

Ms. Campbell acknowledged this framing but expressed that from the conversation at the trustees meeting, it had not sounded that way, and that she had never previously heard the \$100,000 mentioned in the context of overall project funding discussions. Colleen Bushway also raised a related concern: the library had been asked to cover the cost of the architect and half the engineering fees, with the understanding that those expenses would be reimbursed once a bond was approved. She asked whether the library would be receiving that money back now that the project was not going to a bond. Chair Morway confirmed that Melissa Boutin, Town Treasurer, was already working on determining that dollar amount and that it would need to come before the Selectboard for formal approval, as the bond route was not being pursued. She stated she did not foresee any reason the Board would not approve it, but confirmed the formal step was still required.

Board Member Jeff Parizo (via Zoom) added that the \$100,000 had been factored into the project budget from day one, and that since the prior trustees meeting, the library board chair — who had not been on the board when the original commitments were made — had been briefed by current board members and had sent an email confirming his understanding and agreement with the obligation. Board Member Parizo indicated that the information Ms. Campbell had received from the trustees meeting reflected a misunderstanding that had since been resolved.

Denise Douglass — Speeding on Donaldson Road and East Shore South

Community member Denise Douglass reported an ongoing and serious speeding problem on Donaldson Road and East Shore South. She described the road surface as barely visible due to tire marks, noted a recent incident where a vehicle struck a telephone pole with passengers inside and continued driving, and described a separate near-miss in which her husband, operating a tractor on the front lawn, came close to being struck. She stated these incidents were not isolated and asked the Board to take a drive down Donaldson Road to see conditions firsthand.

Chair Morway stated she would contact Sheriff Ray Allen first thing the following morning and would request that Donaldson Road be added to patrol areas. She noted that in her recent conversation with Ray regarding Lovers Lane, he had indicated he would not have known there was a problem there without being told, and she urged all residents experiencing speeding issues to call the sheriff's department directly and, importantly, to be specific about peak times of day when the problem is worst. Ms. Douglass identified early morning commute hours and evening hours as the worst periods on Donaldson Road.

Board Member Bushway noted that he had been following up with VLCT regarding the speed limit on Lovers Lane, as Ray had indicated 25 mph is the minimum permissible speed limit. He indicated that a speed study may or may not be required depending on what VLCT confirms, and that an additional speed limit sign at the south end of the road had been recommended by Ray.

Esther Blow (via Zoom) — Specific Noise Complaint, West Shore

Community member Esther Blow identified a specific individual operating a motorcycle in a loud and disruptive manner in the area near her home, describing repeated high-speed runs that had frightened a neighbor. Chair Morway acknowledged the situation and strongly encouraged Ms. Blow and any other residents experiencing similar issues to call the sheriff's department immediately when incidents occur, rather than engaging directly with the individuals involved, noting that direct neighbor confrontations are not productive and that law enforcement is the appropriate channel.

IV. Review and Approve Minutes

a. 08/17/26 Minutes

A motion to approve the minutes of August 17, 2026, with corrections, was made by Board Member Parizo and seconded by Board Member Bushway. The motion carried unanimously.

V. Guests

No guests were present.

VI. Review and Sign Warrants

A motion that the chair sign the warrants, with the exception of one lawn care invoice to be held pending follow-up by Board Member Bushway with the relevant party, and that whatever determination Board Member Bushway reaches be approved by the Selectboard, was made by Board Member Bushway and seconded by Vice Chair Cochran. The motion carried, with Select Board Member Parizo abstaining as he had not reviewed the warrants.

VII. Financials

No discussion.

VIII. Highway Department Update

Board Member Bushway reported on behalf of Highway Foreman Steve More:

- Highway staff met with Ashley Anderson and secured an \$8,000 grant for ditching work on North, to be carried out next year in the area of the Pomykala Farm. This is expected to help reduce erosion in that area.
- Crews have been performing extensive roadside work on Hyde Road, including edge cleanup, seeding, and mulching, which is now complete.
- Staff continued work at the library construction site, hauling topsoil and gravel and leveling the ground.
- A snowplow turnaround was constructed at Hodgekins Place.
- Free Metal Day was held on Saturday and was very well received. The collection filled a bin and a half, with the bin packed full. Community members commented positively on the event, with the condition of some items indicating they had been stored on properties for a considerable length of time.
- Roadside mowing is nearly complete for the season.
- Two ash trees that had been identified as dead and hazardous were removed; the cost was covered by the town's ash tree fund.

IX. Buildings Facilities Manager Update

Board Member Bushway reported that the town's new refrigerator for the fire department had been successfully delivered and installed following an initial delivery rejection due to damage. He noted that coordinating the delivery window with the vendor had been frustrating but was ultimately resolved.

X. Library Update

Library financial matters were addressed under Public Comment. No additional library update was presented.

XI. IT Update: Town of Grand Isle is on Facebook!

Sara Santor reported that work is ongoing to gain access to the town's GoDaddy account in order to link the domain to the new town website. Once that step is completed, minor tidying work remains before the new website can go live.

Ms. Santor also confirmed that the Grand Isle Town Facebook page is active again. She encouraged community members to follow the page. She noted that once the new website is live, the Facebook page will be linked from it. Going forward, the Facebook page will be used to post timely public information such as road closures; Board Member Bushway and others were encouraged to contact Ms. Santor directly with items to be posted.

Regarding the Thrive IT matter added to the agenda, Chair Morway explained that Thrive, the town's IT provider, is migrating from its legacy backup platform (Dropsuite, used under the prior SNS contract) to a new platform called AvePoint. There is no additional cost to the town; the change order is required solely for documentation purposes.

A motion to approve the signature of the change order requested by Thrive, migrating the town's data backup service from Dropsuite to AvePoint, was made by Vice Chair Cochran and seconded by Board Member Bushway. The motion carried unanimously.

XII. New Business

No new business was presented.

XIII. Old Business

a. Corrected Municipal Tax Rate

Town Treasurer Melissa Boutin reported that upon review, she had identified a reduction in the amount required to be raised for education, stemming from the veteran exemption. She explained that some years ago, voters had approved raising the exemption threshold above the state's base \$10,000 to \$40,000, and this additional exemption had not been fully accounted for in the previously approved rate. As a result, the municipal rate decreased by \$0.0009, from the prior rate to a corrected figure of \$0.4304.

The corrected combined rates are as follows:

- Homestead rate: \$2.4189
- Non-residential rate: \$2.3962

A question was raised from the community regarding why the non-residential rate is lower than the homestead rate. Treasurer Boutin confirmed that this rate is set directly by the state of Vermont as part of the statewide education rate calculation and that the town has no control over or input into how that figure is derived. She noted it has been the pattern in recent years for the non-residential rate to be lower than homestead, though historically it has also been higher.

A motion to approve the corrected municipal tax rate of \$0.4304 for the FY 2026–2027 tax year was made by Chair Morway and seconded by Vice Chair Cochran. The motion carried unanimously.

XIV. Executive Session

A motion to enter executive session at 7:13 PM to discuss a personnel matter, citing 1 V.S.A. § 313(a)(2), that premature general public knowledge would clearly place the public body or a person involved at a substantial disadvantage, was made by Chair Morway and seconded by Select Board Member Cochran. The motion carried unanimously.

The Board entered executive session. Community members and remote participants not needed for the session were excused.

Upon returning from executive session at 7:29 PM:

A motion to come out of executive session at 7:29 PM and to amend the zoning administrator's job description to allow for some work-from-home hours, with the specific details to be published within the next couple of weeks, was made by Chair Morway and seconded by Board Member Bushway. The motion carried unanimously.

XV. Administrative Check-In

No administrative check-in items were discussed.

XVI. Adjournment

A motion to adjourn was made by Vice Chair Cochran and seconded by Board Member Bushway. The motion carried unanimously. The meeting was adjourned at approximately 7:30 PM.