

Islesboro Housing Committee
Regular Meeting
Tuesday, January 6, 2026
In-Person Meeting at 5:00 PM, Town Office

APPROVED

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2/4/26

MINUTES

1. Call to Order

Chair Michael Nelson called the meeting to order at 5:02 PM.

2. Establishment of a Quorum

Quorum was established with over 3 members present

Members Present: Chair Michael Nelson, Tom Tutor, Lindsey Govoni, Peter Rothschild, Ex Officio

Members Present via Zoom: Cate Blackford

Members Absent: Ginnie Hess, Susan West

Others Present: Zach Conover, Philippe Selendy, Jennifer Selendy, Secretary Carrie Reed

Others Present via Zoom: Daniel Frohling

3. Approval of minutes of November 6, 2025

Motion: To approve Minutes of November 6, 2025, as written, T. Tutor, seconded by L. Govoni. No discussion. Roll Call. Motion passed, 4 yes, 0 no, Unanimous.

4. Housing Survey Update

- Susan was not present to discuss the results of the on-island survey. Michael stated she reported there were 13 – 14 responses.
- The off-island survey still needs to be distributed.
- Cate asked about helping with the survey distribution. Michael will ask Susan.

5. Status of plan for “Marketing the Island”

- Peter reported that he and Cate hadn’t been able to get together on that task.
- Peter stated that Jennifer Selendy, Philippe Selendy, and Daniel Frohling had suggestions on how to market ourselves more broadly. There are things about this island that should be very attractive.
- Cate and Peter will talk and come up with a plan.
- Jennifer stated the School Board just voted to increase the budget to fund a Magnet Program Coordinator. One piece of that effort is marketing the island and the school. If we can do these things not in a siloed way, whoever is chosen for this position can work with this committee or with other people in the town to broaden the effort. Having people live on the island to send their kids to school here is a much better prospect than just getting the high-school kids, but the school is in such a population decline that we are focused on the high-school magnet program for now. Attracting families with school-aged children will require some investment from the town as well.
- Michael agreed and stated we have the Housing Committee, Islesboro Affordable Properties (IAP), Islesboro Economic Sustainability Corporation (IESC), and the school. Each could have a plan. It would make sense to come together as a larger organization to support everything we need.
- Michael stated that the IAP homes that were just completed are now filled with Islesboro families who have children in the school. IAP is trying to fundraise for more housing. A lot has been prepared for a second duplex. IAP may look into buying existing homes to rehab.

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- Jennifer added that many teachers are close to or at retirement age. We need to hire teachers for next year, but it's hard to fill positions with no housing available. The School Board will discuss the possibility of offering a housing subsidy or optionality.
- Daniel stated that this committee has generated many great ideas about how to drive various aspects of sustainable populations, but there needs to be coordination and innovation. He is drafting a proposal to the Select Board, and will ask the Board to appoint a Sustainable Islesboro Campaign Committee and hire a director for that effort. The director would join forces with other groups, come up with ideas, and facilitate work that's already being done.
- Michael explained that the Town is about to go into its annual budget process. The Select Board would like to hear any ideas that will impact budget planning.
- Jennifer stated that Joel Post is connected to the island and works in municipal finance. His group or another could present options to the community for successful municipal finance initiatives in helping communities become more sustainable. It's a heavy burden for Select Board members to think about an investment, even if it's partly funded through private money. If the community is going to invest in something like this, we want to do it with the best thinking, and not reinvent the wheel if other communities have done a municipal finance project of this magnitude.
- Peter stated he supports the initiative. We have a recent history of successful public/private partnerships that were partly funded through municipal finance, such as the Municipal Building Project (Health Center, Up-Island Garage, Public Safety Renovation). Peter added that he feels the piece that's missing is we don't have a handle on what nut we're trying to crack. Dan's suggestion of a sub-committee incorporates all the great ideas. He will bring this to the Select Board. We know about some components: financing, marketing, the curriculum suggestions at the school. We need an umbrella group to coordinate these various activities. Peter thinks it's absurd that the town is not financially supporting the construction of affordable housing. It should be a public/private partnership.
- Cate agreed about better coordination amongst all the stakeholders. She also agreed that having staff to make sure we don't lose momentum would be helpful if we're interested in proposing that to the town. If we were to do some dedicated short-term funding for someone to help coordinate the creation of a strategic plan, that funding stream could change purpose after the planning process and become revenue that we use to dedicate towards the solution.
- Cate explained to the School Board members some of the financing ideas the Housing Committee has explored. We've looked at tax-increment financing, and a number of potential municipal funding streams for housing, but most of them are currently illegal under state law. Cate had a conversation with folks from the Maine Municipal Association (MMA) in December about their housing priorities, and none of them currently include changing state statutes to allow us to raise funds locally. However, there is a process of beginning a new exploration to get ready for 2027. Cate thinks there is room to work with the three representatives from Waldo County on their policy committee, and to work with other municipalities to look at pushing for a statewide campaign if we decide that some of those unallowed funding streams would be helpful for us. We have also been exploring coordination with other municipalities, both for regional projects as well as just learning from other municipalities.
- Cate stated that Michael has shared notes from the Island Institute (II) Islands meeting as well as meetings of the Midcoast Council of Governments (MCOG). The Island Institute has created a survey,

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asking all of the islands to put in everything they've done around housing. There might be some interesting ideas that come out of that.

- Cate is looking forward to our survey results. We need answers as to what we're trying to solve right now, and what sustainability looks like from our community.
- Cate asked about a timeline for a proposal to the Select Board in terms of a funding request. If we ask the Town to dedicate \$15,000 out of the municipal budget for a planning process that then could become a dedicated revenue stream for housing similar to Stonington's.
- The Select Board budget process begins at the end of February.
- Michael explained that we would need to get funding approved at Town Meeting in May.
- Michael stated that MCOG has drafted a local Short-Term Rental (STR) Ordinance, with fees. Some municipalities are looking at fees for empty homes.
- Michael is concerned that if we're going to look at a public/private solution, some shorter-term aspects are counterproductive, because the town will be taxing the same people that will be potential private donors. It will take someone who can present municipal financing options, from a longer-term viewpoint. The short-term might be the planning piece—someone in charge of bringing it all together and addressing more than just one of the needs. We need a definitive plan.
- Zach asked if anyone has done the math on the number of houses needed to be able to cycle with death & birth rates and have enough people in the school. Tom replied that we had some input from the state level about a year ago. MCOG had done some significant investigations for Knox and Waldo Counties. They have a data analyst on staff. Their findings are on their website. However, for the island, no one knows the magic number. Surveys provide a snapshot. Tom's unsure if there's a way to quantify.
- Zach stated that the target population for ICS is 10 to 12 students per grade, in terms of the junior-high and high-school grades for the magnet program. It should be a little smaller for the younger grades, based on physical space. We're talking about 30 to 40 families.
- Peter stated that the question of what is desirable is almost academic. How do we make a quantum leap, even if it's only 25 students instead of the 50 that we think might be desirable?
- Jennifer agreed and stated we could start what we could fund realistically in the next 3 to 5 years through a public/private effort. Could we add 15 or 20 new homes on the island? It wouldn't get us to our ideal numbers, but we shouldn't get held up trying to figure out those numbers.
- Michael talked about the population of the last 10 years. The population went up, and the average price of a house went up significantly. It's very much like much of Maine, especially on the islands and in coastal communities. It's older folks, and they are coming with cash, buying up the housing stock and driving up prices. We have to come up with a plan for more housing, but it has to be affordable. Unfortunately, the Maine Housing Authority isn't coming up with more money. While IAP was able to build the two houses recently, the funds provided by the Maine Housing Authority covered about 50% of the cost. Some charitable contributions helped, and IAP had to borrow money to complete the houses. That's not sustainable. A modest 3-bedroom, 2-bath house costs about \$500,000. That's a lot of money for a young teacher, plumber, or electrician with children. How can a municipality spread the costs to create the housing stock for that target group? Is rent, or buy? And how do you keep that as an affordable house for future residents?
- Cate stated that one of the goals of the survey was to try to tease out why people are leaving or not moving here, and to understand how much of it is our housing stock and the price of housing versus

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other reasons, such as ferry hassle, ferry rates, lack of nightlife, etc. Understanding will help us prioritize aspects of solutions. If others know of other ways to get that information, we would welcome input.

- Jennifer stated that, for people who already live here, one of the issues is social infrastructure. People want a restaurant and social connectivity. That is also worth investing in. A year-round gathering spot that serves food needs to be subsidized. That's not the usual market model, but there's demand for it.
- Tom explained that Islesboro Economic Sustainability Corp. (IESC) is owned by the Town of Islesboro. We move at the beck and call of the Select Board and the community. If the community via the Select Board can see that vision clearly enough and command us to follow through with that, we are in a position to build something, and own and operate something. The IESC board has had a hard time trying to reconcile the fact that we don't want to step on the toes of the IAP, a non-profit in the business of housing, so IESC has tried to restrict ourselves in offering our aid to local businesses, but we can do other things. IESC can accept gifts, and can use that as the Town sees fit.
- Peter spoke about the importance of social infrastructure. He stated that there's a long history of trying to create restaurants on Islesboro. The Community Center was a huge effort of private support to build that facility, and there's no reason why the café couldn't be expanded rather than starting from scratch.
- Peter asked about the \$15,000 position that the School Board has created. Jennifer explained that it's the Magnet Coordinator. We're reviving a position that existed pre-Covid, with an expanded mandate around more aggressive marketing across communities on the mainland.
- Daniel stated that all of the things that have been said are the arguments for why we need a committee to quarterback all of these activities, and we need a director who's a full-time paid person who has experience in community development, and will bring the administrative piece, doing on-the-ground work. Part of Daniel's proposal to the Select Board is community involvement. When the 2018 plan was created, there were some workshops done with the community. We could start this new process with professionally facilitated community workshops. Then the vision and goals can be identified and a roadmap developed, with specifics such as initiatives, strategy, action items, deadlines, evaluation metrics, etc. On the housing front, the committee can explore if the community can pass an ordinance giving the Town the right of first refusal to buy properties that go on the market, which can then be brought into the affordable housing cycle. By having the community involved and invested from the start, Daniel hopes the people will be energized about this, and will sign up to do some of the work.
- Michael stated that he's identified two big things from the discussion: the need to study municipal financing options, and coming up with a plan that is focused on effectively looking at the issues discussed today and providing a recommendation of a solution to the Town. We need to bring concrete, actionable items to the table. Michael offered to look at Daniel's proposal and work with him to get it in front of the interested parties and the Select Board. Michael would also like to look into consulting with the municipal finance expert, Joel Post, who was mentioned.
- Peter stated that the Town has a panoply of committees studying different parts of this problem already. Rather than starting from scratch, convening the existing committees and their representatives to think creatively about the future is a more immediate approach. How do we make the new committee and administrative director feasible, as soon as possible?
- Jennifer asked if the Town would be open to funding a professionally facilitated strategic plan.
- Philippe suggested there may be two ways to do this in parallel. One is the strategic planning, oversight committee, long-duration identification of projects and the like, and the other may be to identify right

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now, for the May Town Meeting, three or four things that we have enough consensus on to move forward. We know we want 20 to 40 more homes, some kind of expansion of a social/entertainment center, and expansion of the school in certain ways. If we limit ourselves to three or four things, and have consensus on them, we could say to the Town that shaping the future of Islesboro is complicated and will take time, but here are three things we know we need if there's going to be a future for this town, before the school collapses, and before the prospect of attracting young people to this community disappears. He stated Joel said his team could come and talk about the ways to do this. Then continue with broader development.

- Jennifer added that to be the school that attracts more magnet students, we're going to have to go through a period of investment. Teachers that could be offering electives and deepening our Pathways Program are teaching middle school. That is not a recipe for getting kids to come here on the ferry every day. This is one of the immediate things.
- Carrie pointed out that anything that will be presented at Town Meeting in May needs to go through the Select Board during the budget process in March.
- Jennifer asked about the possibility of IAP building more homes in the coming year. Michael replied that it is prohibitively expensive. They may continue to develop the second duplex, which already has septic and water. The first one cost a little over \$400,000, and it was a new build on donated land. The 3-bedroom houses were over \$500,000 each. Finding a builder is also a challenge. Maine Housing Authority doesn't have any more funds we can go after.
- Jennifer suggested that if there were a public/private effort, we could ask the Town to provide a third of the cost after raising two thirds privately. We can easily find renters.

6. Next Steps

- Michael stated that we have a lot to think about, and we have the support. Barbara from IAP is on board with working with other groups. IESC and the Housing Committee are here. Having the school be part of it is critical.
- Peter suggested that we take a representative from each group and have a separate meeting to discuss identifying the three or four items we can move forward with right away.
- Group agreed on Monday, January 12th at 5:00, at the Town Office.
- Peter and Cate will talk about drafting the pitch for the off-island survey.

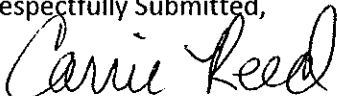
7. Next Housing Committee meeting date

- Next meeting Wednesday, February 4th, 5:00 PM.

8. Adjourn

Motion by T. Tutor, seconded by L. Govoni, to adjourn at 6:31 PM. Motion passed, 4 yes, 0 no, Unanimous.

Respectfully Submitted,



Carrie Reed, Secretary

