

Regular Meeting
Town Office Meeting Room & via Zoom
Wednesday, June 3, 2026 @ 5:30 PM

MINUTES

Members Present:

Chair Peter Rothschild, Vice Chair Peter Anderson, Stephen Pendleton, Holly Fields,
Dylan Purington

Others Present:

Elana Kehoe, Julie Reidy, John King, Peter Willcox

Others Present via Zoom:

Harriet Bering, Dan Tutor, Amy Mulnix, Elizabeth Hayden, Daniel Frohling, Ted
Pendleton, Kate Misenheimer, Sue Stafford, Kara Masters-Siekman

Call to Order: Chair Peter Rothschild called the meeting to order at 5:30 PM, and a quorum was established.

Minutes of May 20, 2026, Regular Meeting.

MOTION BY H. Fields, seconded by D. Purington, to approve the minutes of May 20, 2026 Regular Meeting, as written. No discussion. Motion passed, 5 yes, 0 no. Unanimous.

VISITOR COMMENTS/PETITIONS

Harriet Bering, Chair of the Energy Committee, stated she circulated the draft letter and application for a Community Action Grant. She asked the Select Board to sign a letter of support for the committee's grant application.

P. Anderson requested that the letter include signatures of all Board members. C. Reed will add the names and print a new version, and scan and send the signed copy to Harriet.

Julie Reidy asked if there will be any more discussion about the proposed excavator.

P. Rothschild read the email from Janet Anderson: "We are now looking at a Sany excavator. The Kubota that was quoted to us last December has gone up to \$72,890 from \$65,190. The 2026 Sany is \$61,889, giving us funds to purchase an appropriate trailer for towing, with brakes and lights, and keeping under 10,000 lbs. When Jordy is back from vacation, we will firm things up, and Tom is investigating the trailer with On the Road, and I'll see him after I return."

Julie stated she's had a couple of conversations with some contractors. She added she's kind of blown away that the Town would go for an excavator, considering the difference between a larger tractor and an excavator. She feels the excavator is limiting the crew. A

Regular Meeting
Town Office Meeting Room & via Zoom
Wednesday, June 3, 2026 @ 5:30 PM

tractor can do more, and will mow the sides of the road. They come with an attachment that can do roadside trimming, and reach past 15 feet.

S. Pendleton stated he had concerns after the last meeting, so had the specs on the excavator sent to him. The concept is the arm attachment, and the mulching tool that will do roadside trimming. That's the right tool for the job. Whatever machine it's attached to is up for discussion.

Discussion about the tools. Julie feels a tractor is a more useful tool overall.

P. Anderson stated he's heard a similar concern from other people. While the excavator can do one of the tasks we want, there are other, presumably, comparably priced pieces of equipment that would allow us to do more. Is there room for conversation?

D. Purington asked about the primary use for the equipment. He's inclined to agree with Julie that a tractor may be a more versatile machine. Maybe we explore this more.

S. Pendleton suggested finding someone with expertise to assist Dave Dyer in finding the right equipment. We authorized the funding, but we're not here to determine what is purchased. The Town Manager and team should. But how do we address the concern?

P. Rothschild stated that Janet, Dave, and other appropriate individuals should get together and consider this alternative proposal. He doesn't know how we are currently doing the tasks that a tractor would do, but we were merely considering this from the point of view of being unable to trim the overhanging vegetation on the sides of the road.

Julie stated the Town literally thought they voted on buying a tractor, not an excavator. It was stated, and not corrected, at Town Meeting.

MOTION BY P. Anderson, seconded by H. Fields, to turn this email back to Janet Anderson and say that the Board has concerns about the purchase of a proper piece of equipment, and would like to research it further. No further discussion. Motion passed, 5 yes, 0 no. Unanimous.

Julie thanked the Board for listening. Tax dollars are critical right now.

Comment in the Zoom chat from Amy Mulnix: If the Town has a list of needs for equipment, then ask someone to match the need with the right piece of equipment. Union Equipment is very helpful...

P. Anderson replied that we would be wise to turn to the people who have done these jobs for us in the past.

PUBLIC HEARINGS FOR VICTUALER RENEWALS

The Slate of Victualer Renewals:

Regular Meeting
Town Office Meeting Room & via Zoom
Wednesday, June 3, 2026 @ 5:30 PM

- Tarratine Golf & Yacht Clubs
- Big Island Grill

MOTION BY S. Pendleton, seconded by P. Anderson, to enter into Public Hearing for Victualer Renewals. No discussion. Motion passed, 5 yes, 0 no. Unanimous.

- P. Rothschild stated he understands that the Tarratine Club is waiting for the state to do a water test, and that we can approve this pending their supplying this test.
- P. Anderson stated that we pushed the Tarratine application to this week because they didn't have their water test results. We would be wise to not approve it now without those same results.
- P. Rothschild stated that the test has to be through the state.
- C. Reed stated that according to Janet's memo, they don't open until June 22nd, and traditionally, the Select Board has approved it this way by making it contingent upon receipt of the water test. We hold the permit at the Town Office until the results are received.
- P. Anderson stated that they are on a public drinking water system, so they are not responsible for drawing their own tests.
- S. Pendleton asked why the Big Island Grill is on today's list. P. Anderson explained that his water test results were missing at the last meeting, but now everything has been submitted.

MOTION BY H. Fields, seconded by D. Purington, to exit Public Hearing for Victualer Renewals. No discussion. Motion passed, 5 yes, 0 no. Unanimous.

MOTION BY S. Pendleton, seconded by H. Fields, to approve the Victualer Renewal for Big Island Grill as is, and the Tarratine Club application pending the completion of the water tests prior to June 22nd. No further discussion. Motion passed, 4 yes, 0 no. P. Anderson abstained.

FERRY SERVICE UPDATE

Peter Willcox reported that he sent the report of the most recent Ferry Service Advisory Board meeting.

SEA LEVEL RISE UPDATE

No update.

MUNICIPAL BUILDING PROJECT: UP-ISLAND PUBLIC SAFETY GARAGE, & PUBLIC SAFETY RENOVATION UPDATE

Regular Meeting
Town Office Meeting Room & via Zoom
Wednesday, June 3, 2026 @ 5:30 PM

Public Safety Renovation: S. Pendleton reported that the wall has been opened up so there's an entry into the future kitchen area. The work is done based on rain days. We haven't had much work lately, but it's moving along.

Up-Island Public Safety Garage: S. Pendleton reported that work advancement has been slow. We have a meeting on Monday with the committee and the architects. The main thing we're trying to get done now is finish up the drywall. The contractor said it will be coming out in the next few days. The electrical needs to be brought in. The septic tank work is moving forward. It's a little broken up and slow. We have a date for the generator to arrive in the next few weeks, so we told them we have to have the electric on the building so CMP can connect that.

P. Anderson asked if we are exploring a clause for failure to provide services. S. Pendleton replied that there is a clause in the contract on performance, but there's no teeth to it.

Elana Kehoe asked why work is only done on rain days. S. Pendleton clarified that this is only for the Public Safety renovation. These two projects have two different contractors.

Julie Reidy asked if the garage doors for the Up-Island Public Safety Garage are available. S. Pendleton replied that they haven't been installed yet. There was discussion about the need for more light. There was going to be a change order to put windows on the side, but that would be expensive. The discussion on Monday was to not do that, but to change out the garage doors for ones that have windows in them.

Amy Mulnix stated that her understanding is that the Gallants are doing the renovation for the Public Safety area. She's wondering if we've anticipated that they've had tragedy, and what that might mean for the schedule for that project. S. Pendleton replied that this was not brought up in Monday's committee meeting.

UPCOMING MEETINGS AND SUBCOMMITTEE REPORTS

- Housing Committee: June 4th, 5:00pm.
- Islesboro Municipal Broadband: June 10th, 3:00pm.
- Sea Level Rise Committee: June 11th, 4:30pm.
- Planning Board: June 15th, 5:00pm.

TOWN MANAGER REPORT

- Packet included Agenda for 6/3/26 and Minutes of 5/20/26 Select Board Regular Meeting.
- Committee Minutes
 - 4/7/26 Energy Committee minutes
 - 5/20/26 Health Center Advisory Board minutes

Regular Meeting
Town Office Meeting Room & via Zoom
Wednesday, June 3, 2026 @ 5:30 PM

- Correspondence
 - 5/24/26 email from Attorney Kristin Collins re: Dylan Purington's election to the Select Board, and her suggestion to "move more formally toward the town manager form of government..." See email along with Title 30-A §2636, Powers and Duties of Town Manager.
- Handouts:
 - Spreadsheets on Town Meeting attendance 9/30/2014 – 5/16/2026.
 - June Public Works vacation schedules
- Manager:
 - J. Anderson on vacation June 1 – 9.
 - Town Offices will be closed Friday, June 19th, in observance of Juneteenth.
- Warrant #25

Julie Reidy asked about the town manager form of government compared to what we're doing currently.

P. Anderson read a section of the attorney's email. It provides that Janet would appoint and oversee department heads and other officials rather than the Select Board doing so.

CORRESPONDENCE

1. Covered in Town Manager Report.

OLD BUSINESS

1. Sign Disbursement Warrant for Wages
2. Approval to Begin Ferry Ticket Program in June due to Donation
 - John King reported that he sent an email to EJ Dupont and Bill Geary at DOT, advising them of the passage of the warrant and giving them a heads-up.
 - The donation has been received. John met with Brian Bohanon.
 - John sent an email to EJ, saying that, pending Select Board approval, we would be prepared to buy approximately 300 vehicle tickets, 350 adult walk-ons, and 300 minor walk-ons, which will bring us very close to the \$25,000 donation.
 - John stated he spoke with Holly Fields, who advised on bulk tickets. If someone loses a ticket, the MSFS doesn't have a way to track it. Holly also stated that the ink on the tickets can fade in the sun. John revised the agreement to include this information. He sent a copy of the agreement to EJ Dupont and Joel Perry, the business manager in the Rockland MSFS office.
 - The revised agreement and overview drafts were circulated to the Select Board. There is also a draft of an announcement for Constant Contact. We

Regular Meeting
Town Office Meeting Room & via Zoom
Wednesday, June 3, 2026 @ 5:30 PM

could send that message out at the beginning of next week and post notices that we're ready to begin selling them on June 15th.

- John stated that he will work with Brian to monitor the sales so we know what the demand is in three categories.
- P. Anderson stated that the Board doesn't know anything about the donation, aside from the amount. He doesn't know if the Board would typically be given some level of information, such as how it originated, and the intention. He sticks firmly to his belief that we voted as a town on this program starting July 1st, and as such, we should not start it earlier with this money. We should use the funds to alleviate the cost to the taxpayers of the program. It seems like a dangerous precedent to vote on one thing, and then change it.
- P. Anderson asked John if the \$54,000 budget was for July through the end of peak season. John replied that it was for a four-month period, including June.
- P. Anderson asked if next year, if the \$54,000 program is put back to the voter, will it really be closer to \$70,000 or \$80,000 because of this donation?
- John King stated it depends on demand. There could be money left over. The limitation that we've placed on the tickets is our attempt to address what we think will be a reasonable program.
- P. Anderson stated that not having much information as a Board is frustrating. How can we vote to start this program based on a sum of money that we know nothing about?
- Daniel Frohling stated it's reasonable to want to know more about the donor. Perhaps that could be in Executive Session. The money is a gift. Unless the Board is going to go back to the Town and ask for a vote to start the program early, he doesn't know why there's a problem accepting it.
- P. Anderson clarified that he has no concern over who the donor is. He wants to know what the donation was destined for. To offset the cost in general, or to start the program early?
- S. Pendleton stated he has changed his opinion on this, based on some reflection and discussions. Now we have money that could be used to start the program early. He'd love for that to decrease the overall program cost, but the donation is there to start the program now. He agrees with Pete's concerns, but the goal is to help the islanders who need help. We can start that and it doesn't cost us anything. He will support that.
- Ted Pendleton stated the Town was going to check with the attorney about the legality of having already had the taxpayers vote on a particular amount of money, and then have more added to that. The question was raised at the last meeting about what would happen to any extra money that's not spent. Putting it in the General Fund is not good, optically and legally. He asked if we've heard back from the attorney.
- No one has seen anything from Janet or the attorney on this question.

Regular Meeting
Town Office Meeting Room & via Zoom
Wednesday, June 3, 2026 @ 5:30 PM

- P. Rothschild stated that it seemed the will of the people at Town Meeting to provide relief from higher ferry rates. If someone steps up and wants to subsidize the time between mid-June and early July, providing it does not indicate that we're now going to increase the program cost next year, he doesn't have a problem with this. We're not undermining the will of the people by further subsidizing a program they already approved.

MOTION BY S. Pendleton, seconded by H. Fields, to approve spending of the anonymous funds and begin the program as soon as possible based on a positive response from the attorney. Discussion as below. Motion passed, 4 yes, 1 no (P. Anderson).

- D. Purington stated that as long as the donation is not coming from a nefarious entity, and is not illegal, he doesn't think it's that big of a problem.
- Ted Pendleton reiterated that he has concerns about extra funds going into a General Fund, to then be used for any purpose. It's not fair to the taxpayer.
- Daniel Frohling stated the money could be rolled into the next year or brought back to the voters at next year's Town Meeting. There's no reason not to employ the \$25,000 this year.

The motion carried, with four yes votes and one no vote by P. Anderson

Additional comments:

- Kara Masters-Siekman read from her chat messages and stated that when you decline a generous donor you might lose them for life. She suggested a Special Town Meeting. This is an urgent opportunity. For her, the bigger problem is parking. It costs \$425 for a parking pass in Lincolnville, but they don't guarantee a space. This is an urgent difficulty for commuters.
- P. Rothschild stated that we are only discussing this one proposal to utilize this gift to diminish the impact of ferry tickets during the month of June.
- John King requested that someone from the Board contact the attorney. He is reasonably confident that we will get a green light. He will try to do this under the schedule that he proposed.

NEW BUSINESS

1. Discuss Establishing a Short-Term and Long-Term Community Goal to Make Islesboro an Attractive Community for Families.
 - S. Pendleton introduced his report (attached). He researched island communities and what happens when schools close. The evidence is clear that if the school doesn't continue to be a vibrant aspect of the community, the island becomes a retirement community, and the economics go downhill.

Regular Meeting
Town Office Meeting Room & via Zoom
Wednesday, June 3, 2026 @ 5:30 PM

- S. Pendleton stated that he just wants to introduce the idea today. The ICC has a committee that is creating a five-year plan. Our different organizations and committees were built to provide a specific benefit to the town. We're at a tipping point and the need for all the committees to continue what they're doing well, but then to have a centralized goal to work towards is critical.
- If we're able to express to Mainers that are not on the island that this is a place where you can have children grow up in a safe environment through high school, that's a powerful message.
- If we come up with a big goal, it would include housing, the magnet program, the elementary, the preschool, etc. If we can have everybody incorporated whatever that message into their plan, would that allow us to be much more effective in the town? Two or three families make a difference.
- P. Anderson stated he fails to see the need for this. Our Looking Ahead document pretty much says all this. He believes we already do that. These sorts of pushes seem like the indication or the concern is more for attracting new people than it is for sustaining the community we already have. He struggles with idea of marketing the island, when the reality is that it's difficult for working families to afford the price of things on the island. We need to focus on what we can do for the people who are here now. Apart from peace and quiet, we don't have a lot to make life attractive and sustainable for those of us who are already here, so that we're not losing folks. According to the Housing Committee surveys, people don't want to live here. When people ask about living on the island, he tells them not to come, because of the lack of housing, jobs, and resources.
- Daniel Frohling stated it's complex. Attracting people to the island is one of many topics. What Steve is proposing is an important part. He plans to come to the Board with a proposal that the Board take the 2018 Comprehensive Plan and convene a committee to do a jumpstart comprehensive plan for 2026, with the sustainability focus. The committee would come up with a recommendation for an action plan.
- Kate Misenheimer stated that it often feels like there's a lot of focus on bringing in new people, specifically families. She understands that the school is important for a community, but the island needs young people in general, not just families. It's off-putting that that most things are focused on families. Those who are single or childless have a lot of value. A community is made up of a lot of different ages.
- Ted Pendleton stated that we are focused so much on bringing in new people, that the cultural change has been dramatic. We do need some kind of guiding light to get behind, like bringing back the old plan, but making it digestible for people. He suggested we need to stop being negative. Language is important.
- P. Rothschild stated there's a proposal to continue this discussion at the next meeting. He referred to the school population dropping and the housing

Regular Meeting
Town Office Meeting Room & via Zoom
Wednesday, June 3, 2026 @ 5:30 PM

demand. The magnet program needs to be re-energized. These things are not mutually exclusive.

- D. Purington stated that if we work on ourselves, the island will become more attractive. People keep moving out here, and then it sucks, then they leave, and they sell their house for \$200,000 more or Airbnb it. That's not solvable by us. Some of it is bigger than us.
- Elana Kehoe stated we've been seeing the school population drop and talking about it for eight years. She added that single people cannot afford a house out here on their own. People need help now for places to stay this summer. Summer people buy houses and then they're off the market for anyone who might be able to afford it. Let's tax second and third homes. The year-round people deserve some relief.
- S. Pendleton stated he is pleased with the discussion. He feels the Islesboro Looking Ahead document is too broad. He hears the anxiousness of people talking. We have to narrow down what we can address, not what we can't address. His suggestion is to develop a primary goal that we all agree on and all committees are working towards. It's the responsibility of the Select Board to set a strategic direction. We have to listen and represent everyone. It's hard to hear two people on the Board say that living here sucks.
- Dan Tutor stated he's been listening and reporting on this for a while. We're looking for tangible, actionable solutions. Elana made a good point about taxing second and third homes. It raises revenue and also discourages people from buying up homes they don't need. However, there are currently legal obstacles to this approach. Working class wages haven't kept up with the cost of living. It's more acute here. Working as a town cooperatively to address that issue, addresses almost all the issues discussed.
- P. Anderson clarified that he doesn't think the island sucks. He feels coming out here is not attainable or sustainable for many people, only for those who are living very comfortably. We have a lot of room for improvement. He agrees that as a Board, we need to get a grip on things. The first place to start is making sure what we vote on is what we do. He is happy to support anything that puts the Town first. The people who don't live here yet are not part of the Town.
- Amy Mulnix stated that this is a difficult conversation, but it's also exciting to see so many people have such a passion for Islesboro, and to be thinking about how we're going to address our challenges. She thanked Steve for bringing this forward.
- D. Purington clarified that he is also not saying Islesboro sucks. People move here without having the full picture of what they're getting into, and they end up leaving. If we develop what we have, that is better.

Regular Meeting
Town Office Meeting Room & via Zoom
Wednesday, June 3, 2026 @ 5:30 PM

- P. Rothschild stated IAP has built multi-family housing that is appropriate for single people. He would like the Town to support the development of more of that, and develop a diversity of housing.
2. Discuss Pay-for-Parking Spots at Grindle Point/Ferry Road around Watt's Corner.
- P. Rothschild stated that about a year ago, the Select Board asked him to study how to expand the parking on Ferry Road. The Board approved a tentative plan. We met with DOT, who controls the roadway, and developed a plan to add a significant number of parking spaces. We discussed having some reserved spaces for campers on Warren Island, and for islanders who need a place to park. Currently, the majority of the parking is by contractors based on the mainland, who are taking whatever costs they incur and charging their clients for it. We proposed a fee of \$300 for parking seasonally on Ferry Road, with a much lower fee for resident parking, coordinated with the parking that occurs at the ferry landing now. We are waiting for a refinement of the drawings, and putting this into the budget for paving this summer.
 - S. Pendleton stated that the budget is done. P. Rothschild clarified that there is an amount in the budget for general paving. It's not determined, and it's not clear what that covers. It could cover this.
 - P. Rothschild added that there is the task of paving the area that is now dirt, and also the option to require permits for the spaces along the guardrail. The State has ceded that authority to us.
 - We have an estimate of around \$50,000 to pave and stripe the dirt area. If we can't afford it this year, we will go into next year.
 - S. Pendleton suggested that we can still set up parking there and charge for it.
 - P. Rothschild stated that it needs to be stiped in order to charge a fee.
 - Elana Kehoe asked if the resident parking would be guaranteed reserved spots or first-come. P. Rothschild replied that this hasn't been determined. Elana stated that if anyone is paying, they should get a reserved, guaranteed spot.
 - P. Anderson stated it would be a worthwhile conversation to have as a Board regarding the selling of passes, and perhaps figure out a way to number spots when we stripe them. We should strive to be better than the DOT.
 - Ted Pendleton asked if this is a done deal. P. Rothschild replied that the rate schedule and the question of numbering spaces is still up for discussion.
 - Ted asked about the end goal. It wouldn't be a big source of revenue. We're paving paradise and fueling the engine that makes houses cost more.
 - P. Rothschild stated the spirit of the initiative was not to generate vast amounts of revenue. The problem is that the demand exceeds the supply in Lincolnville, and contractors are parking over here for free.
 - S. Pendleton added that people were parking on private property, all over the place, and illegally. The idea was to expand the amount of parking.
 - Discussion about some of the pros and cons.

Regular Meeting
Town Office Meeting Room & via Zoom
Wednesday, June 3, 2026 @ 5:30 PM

- P. Anderson added that the property owner had put the property on the market and approached the Town to discuss whether we'd be interested in purchasing it. It was a prohibitive price, but this was a good compromise to reach, in cooperation with DOT, to ensure a way for us to retain parking availability in that area, in the case of a new owner creating obstacles. This was our solution to retain parking and then to offset the cost of construction by charging fees, in a similar format to what we already do.
- Kara Masters-Siekman stated we need to look at macroeconomics. We keep going over micro issues. That parking lot is going to be under water in a few years. We should have bought high ground that was on the corner. Other towns in our area are increasing their emergency operations funds. Everyone will be trapped when we can't get off island. Kara stated she can't find the plan. We keep dumping money into putting fill at the Narrows that gets washed away. We can't waste time with what you are talking about.
- P. Rothschild stated we have a Sea Level Rise Committee that has worked for months trying to get grants to address the problem at the Narrows in a durable way. It's very expensive, but we are working on that. That committee is really embracing the larger issue of how we make Islesboro sustainable in the face of sea-level rise and climate change.

OTHER BUSINESS

1. None

APPROVE WARRANT: FY26 #25

MOTION BY P. Anderson, seconded by S. Pendleton, to approve Warrant FY26 #25. No discussion. Motion passed, 5 yes, 0 no. Unanimous.

MOTION BY P. Anderson, seconded by H. Fields, to approve Wage Warrant. No discussion. Motion passed, 5 yes, 0 no. Unanimous.

APPOINTMENTS:

1. None

CHAIR COMMENTS

P. Rothschild: No comments.

VICE-CHAIR COMMENTS

P. Anderson: Given everything I've said about attracting new people to the island and affordability and such, I would like to clarify that my vocalized opinions are my own and not reflective of my employer.

Regular Meeting
Town Office Meeting Room & via Zoom
Wednesday, June 3, 2026 @ 5:30 PM

INDIVIDUAL SELECT BOARD MEMBER COMMENTS

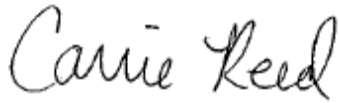
D. Purington: No comments.

H. Fields: No comments.

S. Pendleton: Welcome to the new members. I appreciate everybody participating in these meetings, because that's what it's about. It's going to be a little rough here for a while, but having this type of dialogue is critical for our future.

MOTION BY H. Field, seconded by D. Purington to adjourn meeting at 7:25 PM. No discussion. Motion passed, 5 yes, 0 no. Unanimous.

Respectfully Submitted,



Carrie Reed
Secretary

Data Supporting the Reason for Select Board Action

The greatest threat to Islesboro is not any single issue. It is the cumulative effect of year-round demographic aging, expensive ferry fares, housing constraints, and other factors. The solution is to agree on a unified vision, then incorporate the goal into each committee and organization's charter, leveraging their combined power to ensure our island remains a vibrant, growing, year-round community for generations to come.

Potential Tagline:

More Families. More Opportunity. More Islesboro

Should the Select Board Develop the Goal?

Should committees include this goal in their charter?

- School & Magnet Program = attracts families
- Housing = enables families
- Broadband = supports opportunity
- Ferry = supports opportunity
- Health Center = supports families
- Recreation = improves quality of life
- Community Center = Improves quality of life

Island and Coastal Community School's Impact on Sustainability

In Maine's island communities, the local school is often far more than an educational institution. It is frequently the anchor that determines whether young families stay, whether businesses can recruit workers, and whether a year-round community survives.

While relatively few Maine islands have lost their schools entirely, extensive research shows that when a school closes, the economic and demographic consequences are significant.

Why Schools Matter So Much on Maine Islands

Maine has 15 year-round unbridged island communities with a combined population of only about 4,400 residents. Many already face:

- Aging populations
- Declining school enrolment
- Limited employment opportunities
- High housing costs
- Dependence on fishing and seasonal tourism

On small islands, even the loss of a handful of school-age children can trigger a downward spiral:

1. School enrolment declines.
2. Families leave or stop moving to the island.
3. School closure becomes likely.
4. Young families avoid relocating there.
5. Housing converts to seasonal use.
6. Workforce shortages worsen.
7. Businesses struggle to survive.

Population Statistics Showing the Challenge

Several island communities have experienced substantial population decline:

Island	Population Change (2010-2020)
Frenchboro	-50%+ (61 residents to fewer than 30)
Matinicus	-28% (loss of 21 residents)
Monhegan	-7%
North Haven	+17.5%
Chebeague	+16%
Islesboro	+3%

The communities showing growth generally maintained strong schools and year-round family populations.

Economic Impact of School Closure Research

A doctoral study at the University of Southern Maine examined rural Maine communities following school closures and found measurable impacts on community economic health indicators. The study specifically investigated changes in:

- Property values
- Business activity
- Civic participation
- Population stability
- Community attractiveness to new residents
- Local economic vitality

The research concluded that schools serve as a critical economic asset in rural communities, not merely an educational service.

National research on rural school closures similarly found:

- Declining property values
- Reduced business activity
- Lower civic engagement
- Difficulty attracting employers and workers

Real Examples from Maine Islands

Monhegan

The school had only seven students in 2005, yet the community continued to support it because residents viewed it as essential to maintaining a year-round population. High school students must already attend the mainland.

Matinicus

Population losses have created recurring concerns about maintaining enough children to support educational services and long-term community viability. The population declined by more than one-quarter during the last decade.

The Most Important Statistic

Island development organizations such as the Island Institute often refer to schools as one of the primary indicators of community sustainability. Across Maine's islands, maintaining a viable school is viewed as synonymous with maintaining a viable year-round community. Once a school closes, attracting young families becomes dramatically harder, which accelerates demographic and economic decline.

Relevance to Islesboro

For a community like Islesboro, the school is arguably one of the most important economic development assets on the island. Its continued operation helps:

- Retain young families
- Support year-round housing demand
- Attract teachers and professionals
- Sustain volunteer fire, EMS, and civic organizations
- Preserve local businesses
- Maintain property values

Many Maine island leaders would argue that once an island loses its school, it begins to transition from a living, year-round community to a seasonal one, making school preservation one of the most important long-term economic strategies available.

Examples of coastal towns where school closures directly preceded population decline and economic contraction

1. Criehaven (Ragged Island), Maine

Criehaven was once a year-round fishing community. As the population declined, the school eventually closed in 1941. Following the closure, the island rapidly lost additional year-round families, then its general store and post office. Today, it exists primarily as a seasonal community with little permanent population. Historians note that family departures accelerated after the school closed.

2. Monhegan Island, Maine

Monhegan nearly lost its school multiple times due to declining enrolments. Island leaders repeatedly describe the school as essential to the community.

A history of Maine island schools, published by the Island Institute, notes that island residents widely recognize that the closure of an island school "portends the eventual end of a year-round community's sustainability." This statement emerged from concerns over Monhegan's school enrolment falling to critically low levels.

The community has invested heavily in keeping young families on the island because losing even one or two families can threaten school viability.

3. Cliff Island, Maine

Cliff Island's school remains open today, but ongoing debates over its possible closure illustrate why island residents fight so hard to preserve it. Residents argued that eliminating the school would make it significantly harder to attract and retain young families. The school population is expected to grow, and advocates contend that the island's long-term viability depends on maintaining local educational services.

4. Islesboro, Maine (The Positive Example)

Islesboro is often cited as the opposite outcome.

Rather than allowing enrolment to decline unchecked, the community developed innovative approaches, including a magnet program that brings mainland students to the island. The result is a school that remains a major attraction for families and an important contributor to year-round community stability. Many island development experts point to Islesboro as evidence that investing in schools can help preserve a working, year-round island economy.

5. Danforth, Maine (Rural Coastal Region Lesson)

Although not an island, Danforth provides one of Maine's best-documented economic analyses.

A study found that closure of the local K-12 school would eliminate 43 jobs in a town where the school was the second-largest employer. Researchers concluded that the school served not only an educational function but also as an economic engine and community hub. They projected that families and employees would relocate if the school closed. This finding is especially relevant to islands, where alternative schools are even farther away and relocation pressures are stronger.

Broader New England Trend

The Federal Reserve Bank of Boston found that every county in Maine, New Hampshire, and Vermont experienced declines in the school-age population between 2000 and 2017, and that 14% of Northern New England schools open in 2000 have since closed.

The report specifically links declining enrolment, school closures, and long-term sustainability challenges facing rural communities.

A Powerful Statistic

Among Maine's year-round islands, a movement of only one or two families can determine whether a school survives. Island education leaders frequently note that the school is often the first institution at risk and the last line of defense against becoming primarily a seasonal community.

Conclusion

When a community loses its school, it does not immediately lose its future. But it becomes dramatically harder to attract young families, recruit workers, sustain businesses, maintain volunteer organizations, and preserve a year-round economy. The history of Maine islands suggests that schools are not merely educational assets; they are among the most important economic development assets a community possesses.

For Islesboro specifically, I suggest the school is as important to long-term economic sustainability as ferry service, broadband, affordable housing, and healthcare access.

The communities that preserved all of those elements generally remained viable.

The communities that lost them struggled to maintain year-round populations.