

Dukes County Commission (DCC)
Special Meeting Minutes
Wednesday, March 3, 2026
4:00 PM
Hybrid Meeting
Held at MV Hebrew Center

Dukes County Commissioners: Christine Todd, Doug Ruskin, Don Leopold, Tristan Israel, Peter Wharton, Juli Vanderhoop

County Staff: Martina Thornton

Other: Ted Gavin, Gail Barmakian, Cameron Naron

In Person Attendees: Sharen Kleinberg, Louisa Huestader, Peter Jeffery, John Cahill, Patricia Alley, Jane MaGuen, Kerry Alley, Mary Beth Naron, Margaret H. Joe, Sollitt.

Zoom Attendees: Simon Shapiro, Suzanne Kuffler, Barbara Baskin, Amy Gavin, Susan Wasserman, Ginger, Dion Alley, June Ameen, N. Trumbull, Elizabeth OConnor, Amy, Sarah, SM Harris, Eunki Seonwoo, Sakiko Isomichi, Sharon Pearson, Richard Toole, *Amy Code (Joined at 5:27)

Christine called the meeting to order at 4:00pm.

This is an AI Summary and was reviewed by the chair before submitting it for approval.

Steamship Authority Board Candidate Interviews

The Dukes County Commission held a meeting to interview candidates for the Steamship Authority Board of Governors. Commissioner Christine Todd, Chair, explained the interview process. Commissioner Don Leopold explained the nominating process, which resulted in three candidates: Gail Barmakian, Ted Gavin, and Cameron Naron being brought forth to be interviewed by the full Commission. Each candidate gave a brief introduction and answered six prepared questions about board dynamics, the Inspector General report, and their approach to oversight, community relations, rate structure, future goals, etc. The commissioners then had the opportunity to ask follow-up questions.

Board Oversight and Public Communication

The meeting focused on the IG report's criticism of the board's unclear roles and lack of questioning management, with agreement on the need for improved oversight and a strategic plan by new manager Kryska. Candidates discussed their commitment to public communication, with Cameron proposing monthly public availability, Gail suggesting regular forums with Port Council, and Ted outlining plans for quarterly town meetings, Zoom listening sessions, and email updates. The candidates emphasized the importance of listening to and representing Dukes County residents while maintaining independence in decision-making.

Island Transportation Needs Balance

The discussion focused on balancing the competing needs of island residents, including commercial traffic, commuters, and seasonal visitors. The participants discussed the potential for raising fares for year-round residents to address financial shortfalls, with a consensus to analyze the budget before implementing such changes. They emphasized the importance of communication and listening to islanders to determine the best course of action. The conversation also touched on the Steamship Authority's mission to ensure safe and reliable transportation, the need for affordable services, and the importance of maintaining financial

sustainability. The participants discussed the transition to a new general manager, emphasizing the need for clear goals, board support, and a focus on long-term needs while avoiding micromanagement.

Steamship Authority Vision Planning

The board discussed the Steamship Authority's vision and future goals, with Cameron and Gail noting the need to update the existing vision statement while emphasizing its role as a public transportation system. Ted outlined his hopes for improved public engagement, reliable service, and sustainable financial practices, while emphasizing the importance of addressing systemic failures and maintaining consistent communication. The candidates agreed on the need for better communication between the line and the public, addressing the Inspector General's report recommendations, and improving staff training and customer experience.

Ferry Yield Management Challenges

The meeting focused on pricing challenges for the ferry service, encompassing freight and passenger capacity optimization. Gail acknowledged the issue of empty boats and suggested exploring options for dedicated freight vessels, though she admitted needing more expertise in this area. Ted Cameron emphasized the importance of leveraging the new reservation system to improve data-driven decision-making, noting that current usage is only a fraction of the system's capabilities. The discussion also touched on the potential for freight operations from New Bedford, with Cameron suggesting that public financing options exist but have not been fully explored by the Steamship Authority.

Leadership Candidates Discussion

candidates discussed their qualifications for a role involving business, maritime, and community leadership experience. Ted highlighted his expertise in managing large organizations, building consensus, and working with diverse constituencies, while Cameron emphasized his experience with public and private maritime customers and his ability to navigate different sectors. Gail shared her background in business, public service, and managing government operations, including overseeing a significant budget and leading a major wastewater management project.

Steamship Authority Board Governance Discussion

The meeting focused on the governance and culture of the Steamship Authority board, with candidates discussing how to navigate the board's unique voting structure and foster change. Cameron emphasized the importance of understanding board history and building relationships, while Gail suggested observing the impact of the Inspector General's report and focusing on island needs. Ted highlighted the need for depersonalizing issues and leveraging the report and new management as opportunities for change, while also noting the potential for legislative reform. The candidates expressed a commitment to communication and collaboration, with all three acknowledging their willingness to serve in this challenging role. All emphasized their role in fully maximizing the value brought to their position through leveraging the expertise of Port Council members Joe Sollitto and John Cahill for communication and decision-making.

The vote will take place at the next county commissioner's meeting tomorrow, Wednesday, March 4th at 4pm.
Remote-only meeting

Meeting ended at 5:35pm

(Full transcript available).

Certified by:


T. George Davis, Clerk of Courts
