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New Isle au Haut wharf steams forward

Plan passes key planning board step, next stop: public hearing
May 28, 2026

BY JACK BEAUDOIN



STONINGTON—Plans to replace the aging Isle au Haut Boat Services Wharf sailed through site plan review at a May 21 planning board meeting. With only a few words of concern from the board's members, the project now moves a full public hearing in June 18.

Captain Garrett Aldrich of Isle au Haut Boat Services said that the wharf is constantly undergoing repairs that hamper operations. The current structure, built on wood pilings and located at the foot of Seabreeze Avenue, has exceeded the end of its expected lifespan and has developed "soft spots." It sustained further damage from the January and March storms in 2024.

Not long after the storms, the wharf received \$1,835,000 for renovations in the Fiscal Year 2024 Agriculture and Rural Development appropriations bill.

"We're squaring it off, making it a little bit wider and potentially expanding the western side by a few feet," said Will Gartley, president and professional engineer with Gartley & Dorsky Engineering & Surveying, which designed the new wharf that features steel pilings and a concrete deck. "The function stays the same. It brings an old structure up to date. And we will elevate it as much as we can."

Speaking for his colleagues, planning board member Craig Simoneau told Gartley that the community's main concern remains ensuring unobstructed access to neighboring Colwell Ramp. Gartley said the latest iteration of the plan actually increases space for the town's boat launch by "flip-flopping" the wharf's floats.

"They're making it better, really," said Code Enforcement Office Brian Billings.

According to Gartley, the plan is to provide information and answer questions at the upcoming public hearing, immediately bid out the work, and award a construction contract by mid-July. Demolition of the existing wharf would begin in the fall of 2026, with new construction completed in the spring of 2027.

Planning Board Member David Ryan asked a series of questions about the construction process and worried about the impact on the Seabreeze Avenue businesses and homes. He noted that the 90-degree corner at the wharf entrance already presented problems for large vehicles, delivery trucks and business parking.

Gartley's colleague, Erika Stewart, said that the bid package specified that construction could not block street traffic or access to Colwell Ramp. She said she expected that any heavy machinery or materials would actually arrive and operate from barges rather than be trucked through downtown Stonington.

"The contractors I've already talked to expect to use two or three barges if selected for this project," Gartley added. "They are all used to working from barges. And it is probably easier for them."

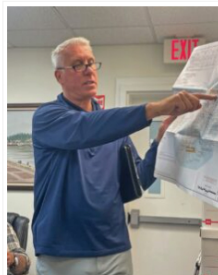
Relocation

The construction will force the Isle au Haut ferry to find a temporary landing in Stonington. Captain Aldrich said he's hopeful he can reach an agreement with Billings Diesel and Marine on Moose Island to load passengers and freight there.

This winter, the ferry made three trips between Isle au Haut and Stonington on Tuesdays and Thursdays, and two trips on Monday, Wednesday, Friday and Saturday. Passage takes about 45 minutes each way.

"We've used Billings once or twice in emergency situations, storm situations," Aldrich said. "But this is going to be a whole new situation. The time for excitement (about the new wharf) has come and gone—now it's the grueling process of bringing it into existence."

Kathleen Billings, Stonington's town manager, urged the engineers to reach out to local businesses and neighbors informally to provide information about the upcoming project. She said they should make clear their plans for pollution containment, traffic, and avoiding working boats and the cable that runs out to Isle au Haut.



Engineer Will Gartley showed how revised plans for a new Isle au Haut Boat Services wharf in Stonington Harbor will better accommodate activities at nearby Colwell Ramp. The plan now goes to a June 18 public hearing. BY JACK BEAUDOIN

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"Make sure you have good answers for these at the public hearing," Simoneau agreed. "Make sure you have a plan in place if people ask."

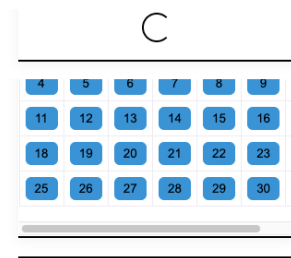
New micro business boom?

Three other applicants sought approval to launch small seasonal ventures from their homes or downtown lots. Abby Barrows of Deer Isle Oyster Company is seeking permission to operate a small retail shop to sell oysters, nonperishable foods, wine and brand-related merchandise from an eight by twelve-foot shed at 11 North Main Street. It would operate 5-6 days a week from noon until 5 p.m.

The original plan called for a mobile, self-contained food trailer and picnic tables at the site, but infrastructure issues have derailed those components for the time being. Barrows told the board that an absence of water and sewer hookups, along with insufficient power connections, presented costly barriers that she's unlikely to overcome this summer. "All those pieces felt like too much," she said. "There's not a great path forward right now."

Barrows said she may use the site for an occasional pop-up event with the trailer, which is permitted because the town has no ordinance governing food trucks. As long as the trailer isn't connected to utilities and isn't operating continuously, it would be treated like any other food truck. So absent that component, the plan met site review criteria and now moves to a public hearing on June 18.

The remaining two applicants were both told that their plans fell within the town's "home occupation" and did not require further site plan review or a change-of-use permit. The owners of a Main Street property adjacent to the fish pier plan to sell their own art from a porch, while Bill Gross and Alicia Condon will be selling flowers and small, hand-crafted gifts from a former workshop at their property on Church Street.



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81°	81°	0	W: Sunny, quite hot with intervals
65°	65°	0	SW: Partly sunny
76°	76°	0	SW: A little sun, dark clouds, wa
87°	87°	0	W: Partly sunny, hot
66°	66°	0	NW: Sun and clouds
64°	64°	0	NNW: Sunny, cooler
65°	65°	0	NE: Sun dimmed by high clouds

Talk about the weather (week of May 28, 2026)



View from Atlantic Avenue (week of May 28, 2026)



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