

# Island Ad-Vantages



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## Stonington playground to get \$41,000 upgrade

June 04, 2026

BY JACK BEAUDOIN



STONINGTON—Veterans' Memorial Playground on School Street, across from the town's new Connectivity Hub and the Island Community Center, will appeal to a broader cross-section of kids when a \$41,012 "Phase 2" addition is completed later this summer.

Local resident Jeff Olson, who operated a playground installation business for many years and who helped design and install the facility in 2023, outlined plans for a climbing wall, more swings, and an overhead climbing ladder at the June 1 Stonington select board meeting.

"The first phase was done for younger kids, maybe up to age seven," Olson said. "But it's been 2-3 years now and they've mastered it all. They're looking for new challenges."

Based on plans presented at the board meeting, they'll get them. The new wall features hand holds and toe holds, and while it's not particularly high, it will provide the island's children a safe, climbing experience. Olson, a member of the American Legion Rodney Stinson Post 102, said the overhead ladder will look "a little like the one I had at Parris Island," a joking reference to the legendary U.S. Marine Corps boot camp facility in South Carolina.

But the expansion also includes more equipment for the youngest kids. The additional swings include some seats specifically designed for toddlers, while the installation will also include a small ship's bow with bench and wheel for journeys of the imagination.

Although detailed estimates are still coming in, Olson said he had firm quotes in hand. He said he would be requesting that the American Legion make another \$20,000 donation to the town for the expansion, following on the original \$20,000 contribution the Legion made to build the playground three years ago.

Town Manager Kathleen Billings said the town had about \$25,000 available in its reserve fund for the playground and field following the recent March Town Meeting. The select board voted 5-0 to designate those funds to match the Legion's donation and any overage.

While he doesn't have firm dates in hand, Olson said the installation would take about 3-4 days to complete. Equipment, surfacing (engineered wood fiber chips) and concrete will represent about 75% of the total cost, while labor and 14 new border timbers represent the remaining 25%.

"The playground turned out very nicely," board member Evelyn Duncan said. "It's a real asset for the town."

"You've done a great job," Billings agreed. "I'm very grateful to you and to the American Legion for all you've done."

Olson hinted that there might be a Phase 3 in the future. "Someday, we might want to add a walking trail with exercise equipment," he said, having fielded a number of suggestions from town residents about what stations might be included.

"When you see a playground like this one full of kids, you know you've done something right," he said.

**To Zoom or not to Zoom**



The Stonington Select Board reviewed plans for a "Phase 2" upgrade to the town's School Street playground. Presenter Jeff Olson said the additional equipment and installation would broaden the park's appeal and cost about \$41,000, with nearly half of it coming from a \$20,000 donation from the American Legion. (By Jack Beaudoin)

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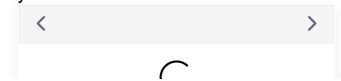
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## TO ZOOM OR NOT TO ZOOM

In other business, the board also forwarded a final draft of a proposed meeting broadcast policy to its attorney for final review. According to an earlier draft that had been circulated for feedback, the policy enables people to attend certain town meetings by Zoom, although they will not be able to participate in the public comment portion of the agenda or interact with officials as in-person attendees often do.

Even if adopted, the policy empowers officials to end the virtual attendance option if it is not being used. Although Select Board Chair Travis Fifield said there was no specific threshold, he said there was no sense in continuing the offering if no one was attending online.

The board also confirmed plans to undertake a revaluation of Stonington's property base in 2027.

As for 2026 tax rates, Select Board member Evelyn Duncan estimated that property owners would pay between "\$75-\$105 per thousand" if the 2026-2027 CSD 13 School Budget is approved in a June 9 referendum.

"Our taxes are flat," Duncan told her colleagues, describing her analysis as preliminary. But adding in the increase for the schools and for Hancock County government, the total tax burden for Stonington residents "is an additional quarter of a million dollars higher than last year."

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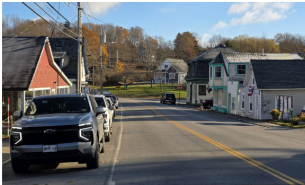
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