

CHAPPAQUIDDICK ISLAND ASSOCIATION

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# Report on the Chappaquiddick Ferry

*An Overview of Operations, Governance,  
and Long-Term Considerations*

Prepared by the Chappaquiddick Island Association • April 20, 2026



PURPOSE

# Why This Report?

2025 CIA Member Survey: the future of the Chappy Ferry ranked as the number one community concern by a wide margin.

CIA Response: a Report to serve as a factual basis to help our members, the wider community, and Town government make informed decisions about the ferry's future.

*We make no recommendations — We provide a clear, comprehensive, and objective summary of facts and data.*



THE CHAPPY FERRY

#1

community concern

*CIA end-of-summer 2025-member survey*

# Key Takeaways



**An Indispensable Lifeline**



**Regulatory Framework Not Built for Today's Challenges**



**Ferry Fares Outpacing Inflation**



**Capital Needs Are Pressing**



**Alternatives Studied**



**An Unexplored Option**

# An Indispensable Community Lifeline



200+

years of continuous service

*The sole means of access for Chappaquiddick's growing community — and a critical part of Edgartown's economy and identity.*



Emergency access & evacuation



Access to schools & town services



Year-round & seasonal residents



Tourism and Edgartown's economy



Essential commercial & service traffic

# A Brief History

- 1807** ● Earliest documented ferry service
- 1885** ● Organized operations begin
- 1935** ● First motorized car ferry: City of Chappaquiddick
- 1962** ● Town assumes regulatory authority (special act)
- 1967 & 1975** ● On Time II and On Time III enter service
- 1993** ● Current municipal Ferry License & Ground Lease
- 2007+** ● Committees study governance (PCFC, CFSC)
- 2019+** ● Climate adaptation planning begins
- 2023** ● CFSC Recommends Revised License Terms

*Documented ferry service dates to at least 1807. Regulatory authority passed to Edgartown in 1962.*

# The Regulatory Framework

The Town of Edgartown holds substantial authority over the Chappy Ferry through law and instruments:

## Statutory Authority



Mass. Gen. Laws c. 88 plus 1962 special act transferring county-level powers to the Edgartown Select Board.

## 1993 Ferry License



Auto-renewing; Board approves schedules and maximum fares; may review financials confidentially; nonrenewal for just cause.

## Ground Lease



Town owns landings; broad right to terminate and to purchase improvements, subject to defined cap.

# Authority Exists — Regular Exercise of Authority Does Not

## Town Has Authority To...

- Set and approve maximum fares
- Review financial records confidentially
- Require schedule approval and adjustments
- Decline license renewal for just cause
- Terminate the ground lease
- Take over operations in an emergency

## ...But Is Not Required To (and Does Not)

- Require operational or ridership data
- Mandate publication of financial statements
- Apply objective criteria to fare requests
- Regulate discounted or tiered fare classes
- Conduct periodic performance reviews
- Require a long-term capital plan
- Require 24-hour emergency service

*Protection of the public interest depends on the initiative of individual Select Board members rather than durable institutional structures.*

# The Fleet and the Infrastructure



**On Time II**  
BUILT 1967

**59**  
years old




**On Time III**  
BUILT 1975

**51**  
years old

## Consultant (MCP) finding:

Vessels are **well beyond expected service lives** — the On Time II by 15 years and On Time III by 9 years.

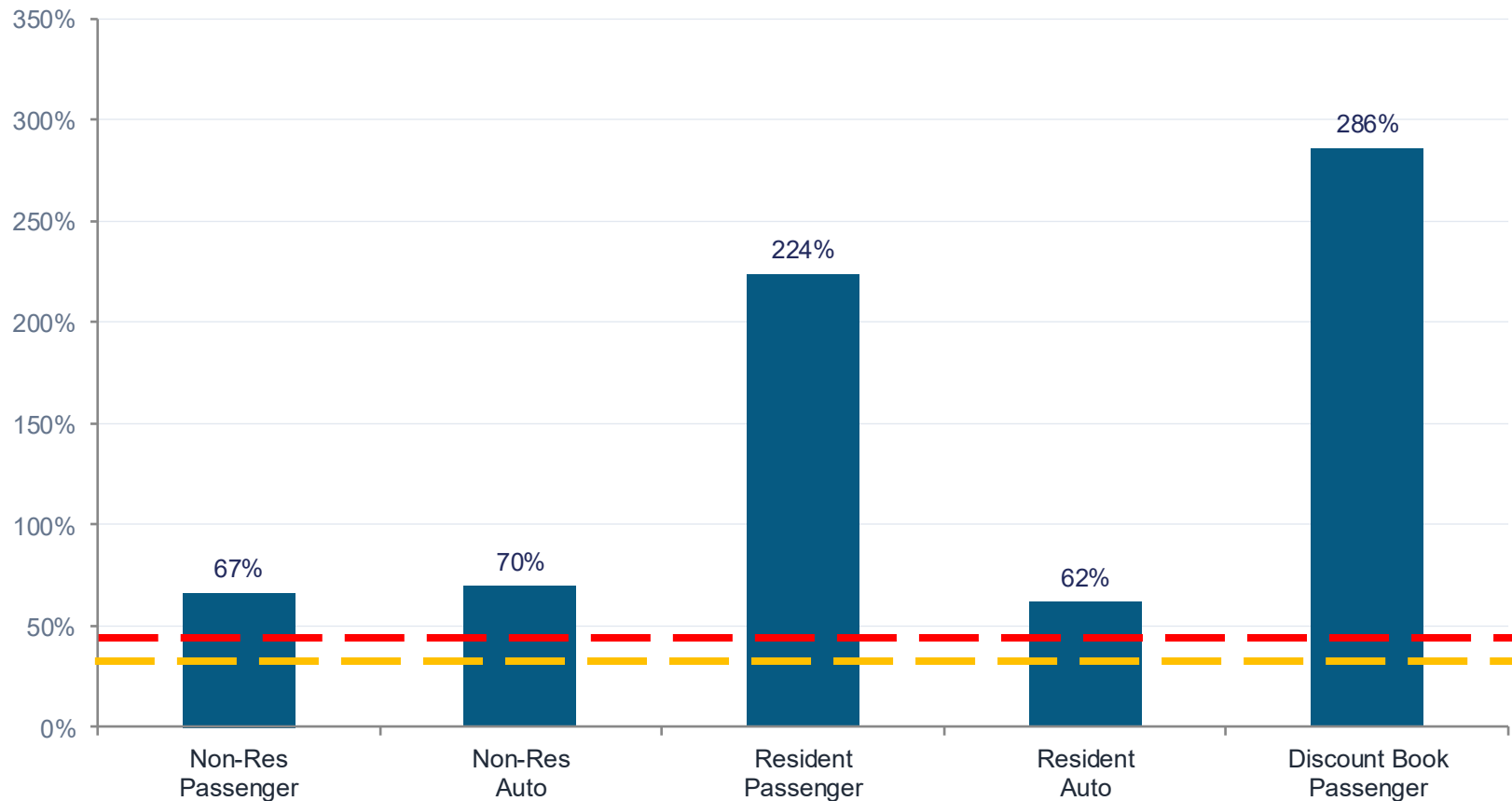
 Capacity (both ferries) ~30 vehicles/hour each way

 Operating hours ~18 hours/day, year-round

 Publicly reported data None — no ridership, no financials

# Fare Increases Have Outpaced Inflation

Cumulative fare increase since 2008, by ticket category — compared with CPI.



CPI FOR COMPARISON

**~49%**

Boston CPI, 2008–present

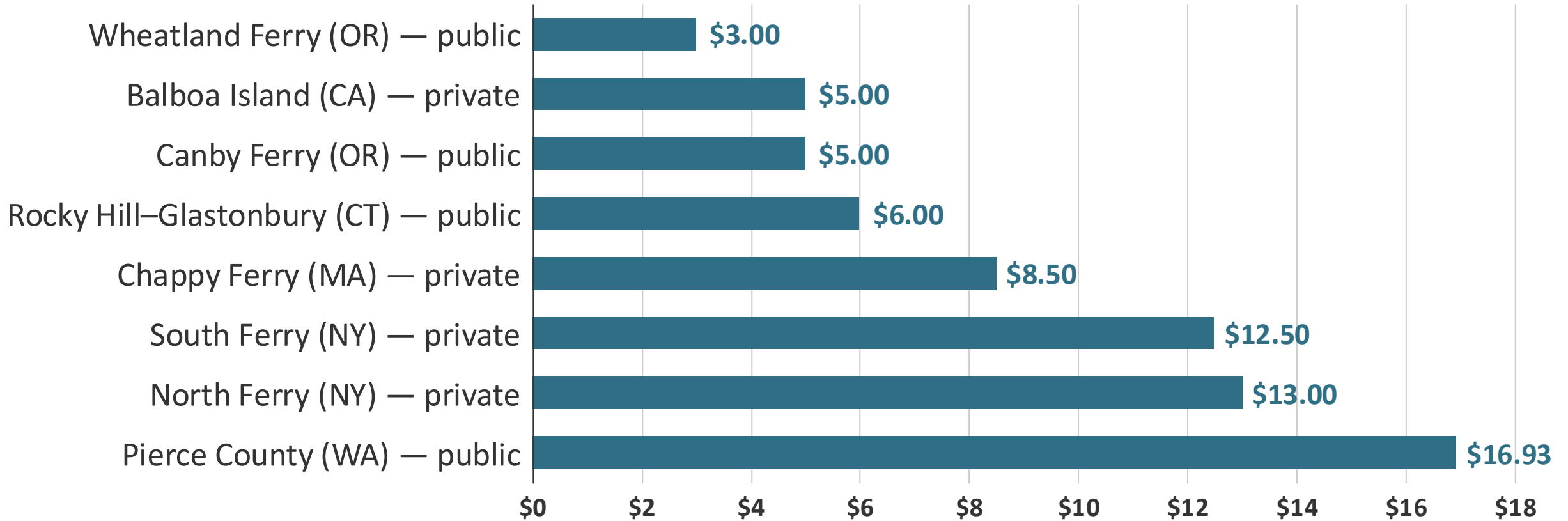
**~39%**

Transportation CPI

*Without financial transparency, rate discussions rest on assumption rather than shared facts.*

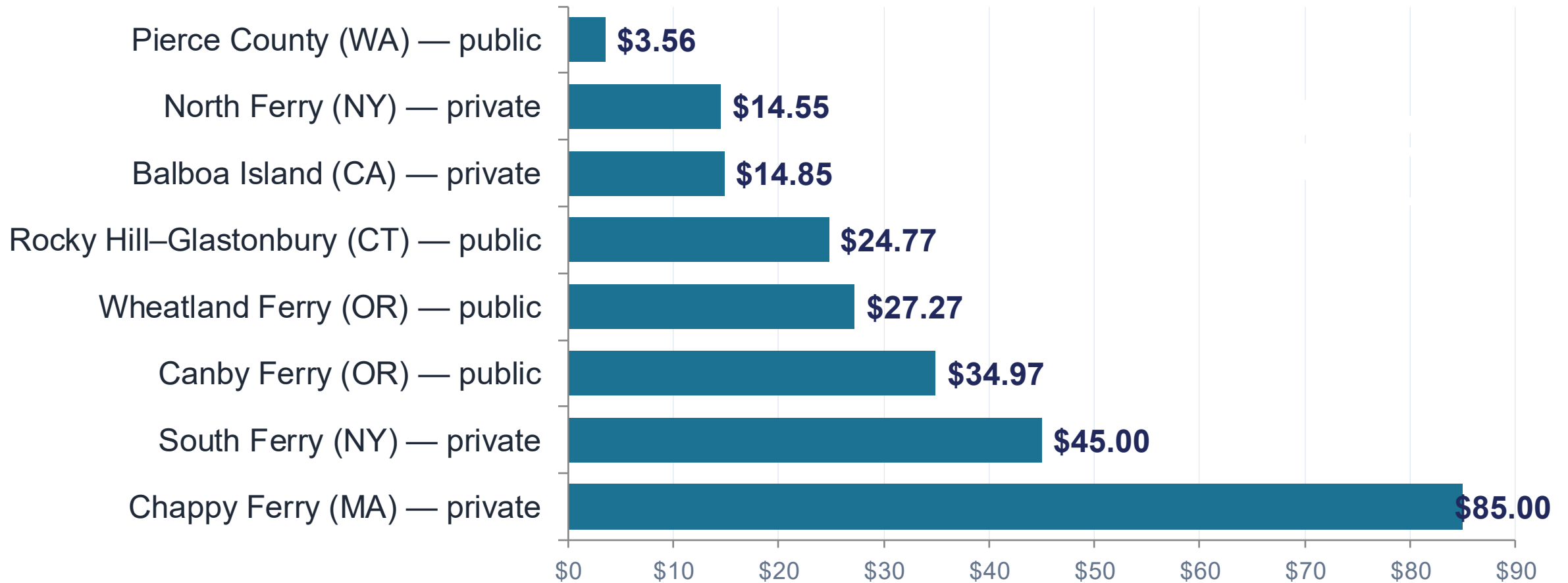
# How Chappy Compares to Other Short Haul Ferries

*One-way passenger-vehicle **cost per trip** (short-distance ferries).*



# How Chappy Compares to Other Short Haul Ferries

One-way passenger-vehicle **cost per mile** (short-distance ferries).



# The Transparency Gap

Publicly owned ferries routinely publish operating data. The Chappy Ferry publishes none.

## Peer Public Ferries Publish

- Ridership totals (passengers & vehicles)
- On-time performance and reliability
- Annual audited financial statements
- Multi-year capital plans
- Rider-class and equity breakdowns
- Key performance indicators (KPIs)

## Chappy Ferry Publishes

- Schedules
- Fares

***No ridership. No financial statements. No capital plans. No performance metrics.***

*No obligation to collect, maintain, or publish operational or financial data.*

# Pressing Capital and Climate Resilience Needs



**\$8M+**

Estimated vessel + shoreside infrastructure replacement (MCP)



**\$6.5–9.5M**

Ferry-landing climate resilience (Fuss & O'Neill, 40% design)



**~\$15M**

Town Administrator's total estimate, excluding vessels



**These are near-term certainties, not distant contingencies.**

*The Town's own engineers identify the Chappy Ferry landings as its highest-priority climate risk.*

# Public Funding Is Available — For Eligible Sponsors

*Many federal and state programs require a public entity as applicant — even where private operators provide the service.*

Ferry	Route	Recent Award	Program
Rock Island Passenger Ferry (IL/IA)	~1–2 mi	\$8,000,000	FTA (2024) — electric ferry
Islesboro Ferry (ME)	~3 mi	\$16,568,000	FTA (2024) — terminal + electrification
Jamestown–Scotland Ferry (VA)	~2.5 mi	\$5,048,650	FTA (2024) — terminal upgrades
Plaquemines Parish Ferry (LA)	~0.5–1 mi	\$4,732,022	FTA (2024) — landing barges
North Ferry (Shelter Island, NY)	~0.4–0.6 mi	\$3,365,854	FHWA Ferry Boat (2025)
Savannah Belles Ferry (GA)	~0.2–0.5 mi	\$691,000	FTA (2024) — charging infrastructure

*Other short-distance ferries have received substantial public funding — but the sponsor typically must be a public entity.*

# Ownership and Governance Models Evaluated



## **Current: Private For-Profit**

CFI owns vessels & infrastructure, under Town license & ground lease.



## **Private: Community-Owned Consortium**

Keep private operation with group of local owners



## **Vineyard Transit Authority**

Operation / ownership by VTA — access to grants, regional capacity, public accountability.



## **Nonprofit Ownership**

Mission-driven operator; access to grants and donations; community governance.

# How the Options Scored

*A weighted decision matrix across 7 criteria — but MCP's caveat is that no model is financially sustainable without a comprehensive capital funding strategy.*

<b>1</b>	<b>Nonprofit Ownership</b>	<b>3.31</b>
<b>2</b>	<b>Existing Model (Private For-Profit)</b>	<b>2.76</b>
<b>3</b>	<b>Government Ownership</b>	<b>2.72</b>
<b>4</b>	<b>Community Member-Owned Consortium</b>	<b>2.54</b>

# An Unexplored Option: Municipal Enterprise Fund

A financial structure that segregates a service's revenues and expenditures within the Town — preserving public control while unlocking public-sector advantages.



**Access to Grants**



**Lower Borrowing**



**Transparent Books**



**Flexible Operation**



**Climate Resilience  
Planning**



**Public Control**



**PRECEDENT — GRAFTON, IL (January 2026)**

*City took ownership of the Grafton Ferry from its long-time private operator to access state and federal funding. The former operator was contracted to continue running the service.*

# License Revisions Recommended by CFSC

	<b>Purpose Clause:</b> Adds.	<b>Record Keeping:</b> Adds requirements.
	<b>Term:</b> Changes.	<b>Free Passage:</b> Eliminates for all except CFI employees on duty.
	<b>Emergency Service:</b> Adds requirement.	<b>Residency:</b> Adds MA DOR residency standard.
	<b>Fare Increases:</b> Adds two options.	<b>Cut-line:</b> Adds requirement for SB to establish after hearing.
	<b>Operating Ratio</b> (expenses as % of revenue): Adds a standard.	<b>KPIs:</b> Adds requirement Town and Operator to develop and for Operator to meet.

*The Select Board declined, without explanation, to adopt any of the license revisions recommended by the CFSC.*

# Future Challenges



## Capacity

Growing year-round and seasonal population.



## Capital Funding

Aging fleet and shoreside infrastructure.



## Climate & Sea-Level Rise

Ferry landings are the Town's highest-priority climate risk.



## Continuity

Uninterrupted ferry service is essential.

## CONCLUSION

**The Chappy Ferry is, and has always been, more than a ferry.**

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The decisions ahead — on governance, capital funding, and climate resilience — are consequential and complex. They will require candor, goodwill, and sustained engagement.

*The CIA Report is an invitation to collaborate on future planning.*



# Questions & Discussion

Prepared by the Chappaquiddick Island Association

THANK YOU

## For more information

Full report & source materials

[chappycia.org](https://chappycia.org)

Fact-based corrections

[info@ChappyCIA.org](mailto:info@ChappyCIA.org)

Report date

April 20, 2026