



Woods Hole, Martha's Vineyard and Nantucket Steamship Authority

Posted March 25, 2026 9:40 AM

STEAMSHIP AUTHORITY

Friday, March 27, 2026 – 10:00 AM

VIRTUAL MEETING ONLY

NOTE: This meeting will be virtual only; however, the public may participate virtually in the meeting, including Public Comment, by visiting <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/87417009198> or by going to zoom.us and using meeting ID 874 1700 9198. Participants can also use the same meeting ID and join telephonically by calling one of the following numbers: (305) 224-1968, (309) 205-3325, (646) 931-3860, (929) 436-2866, (301) 715-8592.

AGENDA

Item No. 1. License

- a) **Renewed license request from Helen H Offshore Fishing Corp.**

STAFF SUMMARY

Date: March 26, 2026

File# GM-812



TO:		FOR:		FROM:
X	General Manager	X	Vote	Dept.: General Manager Author: Terence G. Kenneally
X	Board Members		Information	Subject: Request for a Limited Passenger License Agreement with Helen H Offshore Fishing Corp.

PURPOSE:

To request approval of a limited passenger service license with Helen H Offshore Fishing Corp. (“Helen H”), which seeks to operate passenger ferry service between Oak Bluffs and Nantucket for only local island-based schools and their supporters to attend athletic, educational, and community events on either island during periods when Hyannis Harbor Tour, Inc. (“Hy-Line”) is not operating on the interisland route in the fall and spring seasons (typically mid-October to mid-May).

BACKGROUND:

At their meeting on October 23, 2025, the Members approved Helen H’s request for a one (1) day passenger service license operating between Oak Bluffs Marina and Nantucket Boat Basin to transport approximately eighty (80) Martha’s Vineyard residents who wished to attend high school sporting events on Nantucket on Saturday, October 25th. In exchange for the one-day license, Helen H paid a license fee of \$2.00 per passenger for each leg of the voyage. The license fee is consistent with the fees set forth within Hy-Line’s license agreement for its interisland service between Oak Bluffs and Nantucket between late May and mid-October.

In December 2025, Helen H submitted a second license request “to operate a limited inter-island passenger route between Nantucket and Martha’s Vineyard under specific, non-competitive circumstances.” A copy of Helen H’s December 2025 letter is attached hereto as *Exhibit A*.

Following receipt of Helen H’s latest request, the Authority advised Helen H that their request would need to be vetted through the requirements of the Authority’s licensing policy including, but not limited, to publication of its request in local newspapers and conducting a hearing seeking public comments on the proposal. On March 12, 2026 and March 19, 2026, the Authority ran advertisements concerning the proposed service and the scheduling of a public hearing about the service in newspapers published in each of the towns of Falmouth and Nantucket and Dukes County. On Thursday, March 26, 2026 at 4:00 p.m., the Authority conducted a public hearing at its administrative offices in Falmouth concerning Helen H’s license request and received comments from Helen H’s principal, John Huckemeyer. The remaining attendees at the hearing were several of the Authority’s management staff and Nantucket board member, Robert Ranney, who did not comment during the hearing.

Staff have also received comments from the public concerning Helen H’s request including comments in support from the island high schools’ athletic departments. Copies of the comments received to date are attached hereto as *Exhibit B*.

On March 3, 2026, Helen H advised the Authority that the “high schools on Nantucket and Martha’s Vineyard” seek interisland passenger service to events on Saturday, April 4, 2026 and Sunday, May 3, 2026 respectively.¹ More specifically, Helen H seeks to operate the proposed interisland service on Saturday, April 4th and Sunday, May 3rd with two (2) round trips from Martha’s Vineyard and a single return trip to Nantucket between the hours of 7:30 a.m. and 4:00 p.m. Helen H also seeks to operate the proposed limited service beginning next fall in October 2026 into May 2027 during periods when Hy-Line is not operating on the interisland route.

ANALYSIS:

Section 5 of the Authority’s Enabling Legislation states, in part:

...no person shall operate a vessel with a Coast Guard approved capacity rating in excess of forty passengers or a vessel of more than seventy-five gross tons for the carriage of passengers for hire by water between the mainland and the island of Martha's Vineyard or the island of Nantucket or between said islands unless licensed or permitted in writing to do so by the Authority....

According to their certificates of inspection from the USCG, the M/V CAPTAIN JOHN & SON (O.N. 584638) and the M/V CAPTAIN JOHN & SON II (O.N. 656719) have approved capacities of 149 persons onboard. Copies of the vessels’ certificates of inspection are attached hereto as *Exhibit C*. If Helen H carries more than 100 passengers, then the Embarkation Fee Statute must be applied.²

Under the Authority’s licensing policy, the Members should consider the following:

1. Whether public convenience and necessity require the proposed service.
2. Each request for a license shall be considered by the Authority on a case-by-case basis, although the Authority adopts reasonable policies, principles and standards to guide the exercise of its discretion in appraising the public interest.
3. Before any request for a license is considered by the Members, the management staff shall hold public hearings thereon after due notice is given to all interested parties and shall provide the Members with a comprehensive analysis as to whether, in the staff’s opinion based upon the information received, public convenience and necessity require the proposed service.
4. Each license agreement entered into by the Authority shall specify the routes over which the licensee's vessels may operate, shall contain such terms and conditions as the Authority deems that public convenience and necessity require, shall be subject to

¹ Helen H recently advised that their initial request incorrectly requested service to operate on Monday, May 4th instead of Sunday, May 3rd.

² Section 11 of Chapter 55 of the Acts of 2003 (the "Act"), as amended by Sections 44-47 of Chapter 65 of the Acts of 2004 allows a port town to impose an embarkation fee "upon all passenger ferry trips, based upon the actual number of fee-paying passengers embarking on all departing ferry trips, excluding those ferry boats that are licensed to transport not more than 100 passengers, originating from a port located within such city or town, at a rate of \$.50 per passenger, per fare-paying departing trip."

revocation for cause, and shall be subject to revision at any time to the extent the Authority finds such action to be in the public interest.

Under the terms of Hy-Line's license agreement, it pays license fees to the Authority for its service between Oak Bluffs and Nantucket. A copy of Hy-Line's approved 2026 "inter-island" service schedule is attached hereto as *Exhibit D*. Hy-Line has no objection to Helen H providing offseason interisland service between October and May when it is not operating the service. See Hy-Line's recent email within *Exhibit B*.

It is reasonable to question whether this license request is necessary because students, particularly student athletes, often travel between the islands via the mainland for various activities. It appears that the island residents seek the public convenience of traveling directly between the islands because the Authority and its current licensees do not provide interisland service between mid-October and late-May. Furthermore, during the March 26th public hearing, Mr. Huckemeyer explained that a one-way trip between the islands takes approximately one and one-half (1.5) hours and roundtrips via the mainland route can take upwards of several hours depending on connections and schedules.

Because the Authority and its current licensees cannot accommodate the island residents' requests and the license is limited in its duration to the offseason period before Hy-Line begins its interisland service on May 22, 2026, staff recommends the issuance of a limited license to Helen H so that it can provide passenger ferry service between Oak Bluffs Marina and the Nantucket Town Dock only for local island-based schools and their supporters on April 4th and May 3rd respectively. In consideration of obtaining the license, Helen H should pay a license fee of \$2.00 per passenger for each passenger carried on each leg of the voyage consistent with the fees set forth within Hy-Line's license agreement for its interisland service between Oak Bluffs and Nantucket.

In addition, staff also recommend that Helen H should be licensed to provide the same proposed limited passenger service beginning in October 2026 through May 2027 during periods when Hy-Line is not operating on the interisland route. In exchange, Helen H shall pay a license fee of \$2.00 per passenger for each passenger carried on each leg of the voyage consistent with the fees set forth within Hy-Line's license agreement.

At their meeting on March 10, 2026, the Port Council voted unanimously to recommend that the Members vote to approve Helen H's request for a license to provide offseason interisland service for the scheduled events on April 4th and May 3rd respectively.

At their meeting on March 17, 2026, the Members advised staff to conduct the public hearing on Helen H's license request on Thursday, March 26, 2026 and report on the results of the hearing. Staff conducted the hearing and have incorporated the results of the hearing into this staff summary. If the Members approve Helen H's request for a license, staff will present Helen H with a license agreement substantially like the draft agreement attached hereto as *Exhibit E*.

RECOMMENDATION:

For the reasons set forth above, it is the staff's opinion that that the Members vote to authorize the General Manager to enter into a license agreement with Helen H Offshore Fishing Corp. to allow it to provide interisland passenger service for the islands' high school students and their supporters to the scheduled events on April 4th and May 3rd in exchange for a license fee of \$2.00 per passenger for each leg of the voyages plus any applicable embarkation fees.

Staff further recommend that the Members allow Helen H to provide the same proposed limited passenger service, beginning in October 2026 through May 2027, during periods when Hy-Line is not operating on the interisland route in exchange for a license fee of \$2.00 per passenger for each leg of the voyages plus any applicable embarkation fees, as detailed in this staff summary.



Terence G. Kenneally
General Counsel



APPROVED:

Alexander T. Kryska
General Manager

Attachments