

Town of Swanzey, New Hampshire
Board of Selectmen
Meeting – December 8, 2021
Whitcomb Hall, Main Street, Swanzey NH
and remotely using Zoom Meeting

Note: Draft Minutes are subject to review, correction and approval by the Board. Review and approval of Minutes generally takes place at the next regularly scheduled meeting of the Board.

CALL TO ORDER

The meeting was called to order by Chair Selectman Sylvester Karasinski at 5:30 pm at Whitcomb Hall, Main Street, Swanzey, NH and remotely using Zoom Meeting. Present at Whitcomb Hall were Selectmen Sylvester Karasinski and W. William Hutwelker. Also present was Town Administrator Michael Branley and Recording Secretary Beverly Bernard. Zoom ID 235 370 4380 or join by phone 1-929-205-6099. Kenneth P. Colby, Jr. joined the meeting at 5:40 pm.

OTHERS PRESENT

Police Chief Joe Gonsalves, Director of Planning and Economic Development Matthew Bachler, Emily Manns and Bob Hayden, President and CTO, with Standard Power, Conservation Commission member Cheri Domina, Planning Board member Mike York, Residents Kyle Croteau, Denise Hood, Dan LeClair, and Barbara Skuly

MINUTES

- The regular meeting Minutes of December 1, 2021 were considered. There was a motion by Hutwelker to approve the meeting Minutes of December 1, 2021. There was a second by Karasinski and no further discussion. All were in favor. ***Motion passed.***
- The non-public meeting Minutes of December 1, 2021 were considered. There was a **motion** by Hutwelker to approve the non-public meeting Minutes of December 1, 2021. There was a second by Karasinski and no further discussion; all were in favor. ***Motion passed.***

CONSENT AGENDA

Motion was made by Hutwelker to approve the Consent Agenda. There was a second by Karasinski. All were in favor. ***Motion passed.***

- Payroll Manifest
- Payables Manifest
- Personnel Action Reports

PUBLIC INPUT

The Chair asked for public input and Mike York spoke regarding State Route 10 speeding. He said the recent Rt. 10 Corridor Study says the average driving speed is 50 MPH when speed limit is 40 MPH and he thinks it should be lowered to 30 MPH. He also suggested crosswalks, and he noted it would be something that would have to be done by the State. He noted large logging trucks doing 60 MPH in that section and that has to be addressed. Hutwelker asked what is being done for enforcement. York said there is a cruiser at Nick's restaurant at times but he rarely sees the State Police monitoring traffic. York said if you lower the speed limit, drivers will slow down. Hutwelker said there is a higher percentage of police on State Route 12. York said State Route 10 is flat and wide and it lends itself to speeding. Bachler spoke about the traffic

study that has been done which included putting in a crosswalk and a median to calm traffic. Changing the design of the road is more effective to lower speeds than just lowering the posted speed limit.

APPOINTMENTS

Police Chief Joe Gonsalves – 2022 Budget

The Chief discussed the proposed budget for the Police Department. He spoke about an officer position to be filled, and the School Resource Officer (SRO). He said the SRO is high priority position. Branley said this has been posted as a part-time position, which is requesting \$53,056.00 funding. Hutwelker said we need two full-time officer positions. Hutwelker asked, “Do we have the resources to take a patrol officer off patrol to send up to the school?” Gonsalves we have to respond either way, and it would be better to have someone who is integrated into the school system so the officer will build relationships with the kids and school officials. A regular officer might be able to develop rapport with the kids. Branley noted the School District is only able to pay based on the original part time budget.

Hutwelker asked what needs to be done to attract full-time officers. He asked if the Resource Office could be a full-time position to attract someone to take the position. Gonsalves said that is possible. Hutwelker asked for ramifications being down two officers. Gonsalves said if we fill the SRO from within we would have to have sufficient bodies for patrol work. He noted there are some folks who are interested in the SRO position. He said it is a benefit to the Town and to police officers to have an SRO.

Branley referred to shift in wages for full-time and part-time staff. Branley asked for a consensus for an SRO. Karasinski said he would like to see the Town hire a part-time SRO with summer off, but offer full time if need be and be flexible. There was consensus to that view.

Conservation Commission member Cheri Domina – Mt. Caesar Trail Names

Domina was present to ask the Board for approval for proposed trail names on Mt. Caesar. Domina spoke about the work being done with trails on Mt. Caesar. She noted a new easy trail was added. She asked the Board if they would agree to the names of the trails chosen:

- Mt. Caesar – Tower Trail
- Upper Mt. Caesar – Elijah Trail – named for Elijah Barrett
- Lower Mt. Caesar – Theresa’s Trail - named for Theresa DiLuzio who often hiked in the area and was a conservationist and active volunteer for the Town
- Short trail – Quarry Trail

Consensus of the Board was agreement with the names chosen.

APPOINTMENTS (continued)

Director of Planning & Economic Development Matthew Bachler – Consideration of RSA 79-E

Branley informed the Board that the Town has been approached by Chinburg Properties, the company purchasing the Homestead Woolen Mill, with a request that Swanze adopt RSA 79-E, the Community Revitalization Tax Relief Incentive. Bachler asked the Board for support for a Warrant Article authorizing RSA 79-E. He spoke about the redevelopment for the property as residences and commercial business. He spoke about the public benefit to be eligible for grant funds. The voters will need to approve this. Bachler spoke about Chinburg Properties and he noted the challenges with the property that the new owner will face. Bachler said this is for rehabilitating the structure. He said he would have to research whether new construction would be eligible for 79-E. Hutwelker said they already have a tax exemption now. Bachler said the current owner will seek approval for the exemption for the Field House portion of the property.

Chinburg investment would increase the assessed value for that portion of the building it inhabits. Branley said exemption for the Field House starts now for 5 years. There was a discussion about the exemption and the Town's upcoming revaluation.

Hutwelker said he understands that the Board is being asked to look at 79-E for the remainder of the building that excludes the Field House portion. Bachler said there might be office space in addition to the residential. Hutwelker asked if the Board has an obligation for granting additional years for the exemption. Branley said he didn't think there was any obligation. There was a general discussion regarding the length and logistics related to exemptions under RSA 79-E.

Break in discussion was taken for Community Power public hearing at 6 pm.

PUBLIC HEARING – opened at 6:00 pm

Public Hearing Pursuant to RSA 53-E regarding draft Community Power Plan developed by the Swanzey Community Power Committee

Discussion: Bachler presented a PowerPoint show for the Swanzey Community Power. Bachler said this is the second public hearing. He noted the members of the Community Power Committee. Standard Power and GoodEnergy were present for the first public hearing and he noted a public survey was conducted. Based on results of the survey from 101 respondents, the committee developed a power plan for Swanzey. The Committee recommends the Board approve the addition of the Community Power in the Warrant to be voted on at Town Meeting in March of 2022.

Emily Manns with Standard Power was present to discuss Community Power. She said this presentation is similar to what was presented at the first public hearing with a bit more additional information specific to Swanzey. She noted there is a cost savings for users and enables users to access green energy sources. Savings come from beating the default service rates. She showed what Swanzey was paying for service, which was lower than default service.

Manns spoke about meeting the community goal to support local renewable energy. She said everyone has a choice when purchasing energy. She noted 3rd party offers, which need to be managed, paying attention to whether or not one is continuing to save money. Community Power is an opt-out program. She said 82% of survey respondents said they would support renewal energy in the electricity supply. Swanzey default would increase renewable energy access and the optional products could be at competitive rates. Therefore there would be options for no increase in renewable energy use, and another option would be increasing renewable energy use. There is no cost to the municipal budget.

Manns passed the presentation to Bob Hayden, President and CTO from Standard Power. Hayden spoke about GoodEnergy having ten years of experience in community power programs. Hayden said savings has been about \$80 million across all of New England.

Hayden spoke about developing a plan, which needs to be approved at Town Meeting. He spoke about an average \$0.02 per KWH delta in savings between Eversource default rate and the rate that Community Power can provide. He noted a plan must be submitted to NH Public Utilities Commission for approval. He spoke about rates scheduled to go up in February but he projects that Community Power will have lower rates. He said once the project is approved, the user can choose to stay with Eversource by opting out of

Community Power. Hayden spoke about savings that Somerville, MA was able to achieve. It costs about \$0.03 more to pay per kilowatt hour for renewable energy. Saving 5-10% is anticipated for users.

Hutwelker asked what the Board can do to improve response from users. He asked if there are handouts to give out. Hayden said they can provide flyers. They can also stand at the Recycling Center to reach folks. They can do press releases. Interested residents or businesses can send out email blasts to their contact lists.

Denise Hood from East Swanzey asked about taking money from Eversource and who is going to repair lines when trees come down. Hayden said that the supply is what changes, but transmission stays with the utility. They will still do tree cutting and maintenance of the poles. Utilities do not make profit on supply. They make it on transmission and distribution. It should not change things at all in regard to maintenance. Hayden said they all are relatively supportive of this program. They want distribution to remain the same. They do not Standard Power to read meters. Bachler pointed out the utility bill will still come from Eversource and if power goes out, users are still calling Eversource. Hayden pointed out that on the utility bill, the 3rd page names the supplier and that is the only thing that changes.

Hood said they have solar panels and how will that be integrated into this program. Will energy generated by Hood go to Eversource? Hood added that she does make more power than they use. They do not get a payment. Hayden said for people who are receiving assistance, not sure how to deal with that. Kyle Croteau from Eaton Road asked about choice for cheapest option, and Hayden said that would be available.

Hood asked about the green choices – where does the extra money go. The dollars will be used to purchase renewable energy said Hayden. He said the green attribute can be purchased independently. He referred to a business that can register renewable energy credits. Hayden said the intent is to buy energy from local projects like solar arrays or building a hydro facility within the county. That would enable a cash stream confirmed for local new plans. They want the credits to go to local projects. Barbara Skuly asked to define “local”. Hayden said we are part of New England Independent System Operators (ISO) and want to purchase New England energy. The neighborhood, the County and the State are part of “local”. Dan LeClair asked about joining the program and if he wanted to get out of it how long would it take to get out of the program. Hayden said LeClair would have to notify Standard Power of his wish to be taken out, and based on when his meter was read, could be as long as a month, but it would probably be sooner.

Hayden asked for questions from Zoom participants. Branley said no hands were up. Hayden said he is available for questions. He thanked the Board for their time.

Public hearing closed at 6:46 pm.

APPOINTMENTS (continued)

RSA 79-E Discussion continued

Bachler said upon further reading of RSA 79-E, the Selectmen has discretion about the number of years to grant the exemption. Hutwelker said eleven years is a long time; do the Selectmen have a chance to review a pro forma to determine that is a good decision, based on the financial information. Bachler said we are foregoing the additional taxes in order to receive additional assessed value. Branley said they do have to apply for the exemption. Hutwelker wanted to know if it makes sense to have eleven years exemption. The Board agreed by consensus to move forward with RSA 79-E.

NOMINATIONS

Cynthia Kordys – Rail Trail Advisory Committee Alternate

The Board considered the nomination of Cindy Kordys to the Rail Trail Advisory Committee as an Alternate.

Colby **moved** to appoint Cynthia Kordys as an alternate to the Rail Trail Advisory Committee for a term ending Town Meeting 2024. There was a second to the motion by Hutwelker and no further discussion. All were in favor. ***Motion passed.***

NEW BUSINESS

Consideration of Commercial Solar Development Payment in Lieu of Taxes

The Board discussed two options: a flat \$3,500 per year per megawatt or \$2,800, increasing 2% per year. Branley suggested the \$3,500 per megawatt per year option be approved. There was a discussion about a bonded project.

Colby **moved** to approve a payment in lieu of taxes for the commercial solar development at map 71 lot 13-2 for a term of 20 years with a value of \$3,500 per year per megawatt and authorize the Town Administrator to sign the agreement. There was a second to the motion by Hutwelker and no further discussion. All were in favor. ***Motion passed.***

Audit Firm Selection

The Board reviewed a memo from Finance Director Louder which recommended selecting Vachon, Clukay, and Co. for auditing. Branley said at some point it is good to change firms. He noted this firm has changed the audit team a few times. Hutwelker asked Branley to see if he can get a reduced rate and Branley said he would do so.

Colby **moved** to select Vachon, Clukay, and Co as the Town's auditing firm for FY 2021 and authorize the Town Administrator to sign contract documents with contract extensions through FY 2025. There was a second to the motion by Hutwelker and no further discussion. All were in favor. ***Motion passed.***

OLD BUSINESS

2022 Town Meeting Warrant and Budget Preparations

Branley asked if the Board wanted to review Insurance, Reappraisal, Executive, and Legal and Professional Services. The Board moved ahead for review. Branley said the change in Health Insurance is a reduction in cost with a savings of \$145,300 but added \$20,000 for Reimbursement accounts. He noted Liability Insurance is up about 9%. Executive was reviewed. Branley said he bumped up *Swanzy Uncovered* since it will be over budget this year. Total increase is 3.42%. Reappraisal category is up 4.16%. Branley noted the Contract Assessor line item has been increased. The Board found the budgets acceptable by consensus.

NON-PUBLIC SESSION(S)

Non-public session(s) per RSA 91-A:3II(a) the dismissal, promotion, or compensation of any public employee or the disciplining of such employee

Motion was made by Colby to enter Non-public session pursuant to RSA 91-A:3II(a) the dismissal, promotion, or compensation of any public employee or the disciplining of such employee. The motion was seconded by Hutwelker. The Selectmen voted unanimously by roll call to go into non-public session at 7:08 p.m. ***Motion passed.*** Present was Kenneth P. Colby, Jr., W. William Hutwelker

III, and Sylvester Karasinski. Also present was Town Administrator Michael Branley and Recording Secretary Beverly Bernard.

Motion was made by Colby to leave non-public session and return to public session. The motion was seconded by Hutwelker, with all in favor. **Motion passed.** Non-pubic session ended at 7:15 p.m.

Motion was made by Colby to seal the minutes of the non-public session. The motion was seconded by Hutwelker. The Selectmen voted unanimously by roll call to seal the minutes. **Motion passed.**

Non-public session(s) per RSA 91-A:3II(b) The Hiring of Public Employee(s)

Motion was made by Colby to enter Non-public session pursuant to RSA 91-A:3II(b) the Hiring of Public Employee(s). The motion was seconded by Hutwelker. The Selectmen voted unanimously by roll call to go into non-public session at 7:16 p.m. **Motion passed.** Present was Kenneth P. Colby, Jr., W. William Hutwelker III, and Sylvester Karasinski. Also present was Town Administrator Michael Branley and Recording Secretary Beverly Bernard.

Motion was made by Colby to leave non-public session and return to public session. The motion was seconded by Hutwelker with all in favor. **Motion passed.** Non-pubic session ended at 7:20 p.m.

Motion was made by Colby to seal the minutes of the non-public session. The motion was seconded by Hutwelker. The Selectmen voted unanimously by roll call to seal the minutes. **Motion passed.**

ADJOURNMENT

Motion to adjourn the meeting was made by Colby. The motion was seconded by Hutwelker without further discussion. All were in favor. **Motion passed.** Adjournment occurred at 7:20 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,



Beverly Bernard, Recording Secretary
Approved on December 15, 2021