

Town of Swanzey, New Hampshire
Board of Selectmen
Meeting – January 15, 2020
Monadnock Regional High School Cafeteria Annex
Old Homestead Highway
Swanzey, NH

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 Selectman and Chair W. William Hutwelker at 5:32 pm at Monadnock Regional High School Cafeteria Annex, Old Homestead Highway, Swanzey, NH. Present were Selectmen Hutwelker, Sylvester Karasinski and Kenneth P. Colby, Jr. Also present was Town Administrator Michael Branley and Recording Secretary Beverly Bernard.

OTHERS PRESENT

Planning Board Chair Glenn Page, Jodi Turner and Cheshire TV folks, Intern Julius Peel, State Representative Jennie Gomarlo, Police Chief De Angelis, Interim Fire Chief Eric Mattson, Code Enforcement Officer Mike Jasmin, Director of Department of Public Works Glenn Smith, Director of Planning and Economic Development Matthew Bachler, Finance Director Theresa Louder, Trustee Steve Bittel, Zoning Board of Adjustment (ZBA) Chair Keith Thibault, Jane & Greg Johnson, Bruce Tatro, Scott Self, Bruno Kosheleff, Samir Habiby and Kathy Habiby, Trustee Richard Scaramelli, Beth Poulin-Smith, Paul Shearing, Jenna Carroll, Joanne Stroshine from Keene, NH, formerly of Swanzey, NH, Joe Smith, Linda Minickiello, Chair of Mt. Caesar Union Library Mary Wood and many members of the public were present.

MINUTES

- The regular meeting Minutes of January 8, 2020 were considered. There was a **motion** by Karasinski to approve the regular meeting Minutes of January 8, 2020. The motion was seconded by Colby and there was no further discussion. All were in favor. ***Motion passed.***
- The Non-public meeting minutes #1, #2, #3, #4 and #5 of January 8, 2020 were considered. There was a **motion** by Karasinski to approve the Non-public meeting Minutes #1, #2, #3, #4 and #5 of January 8, 2020. The motion was seconded by Colby and there was no further discussion. All were in favor. ***Motion passed.***

CONSENT AGENDA

Motion was made by Karasinski to approve the Consent Agenda. There was a second by Colby. There was no further discussion. All were in favor. ***Motion passed.***

- Payroll Manifest
- Payables Manifest
- 2019 Equalization Ratio
- Personnel Action Report(s)

PUBLIC INPUT

Jennie Gomarlo asked the Board to request of the Monadnock Regional School District that it close school for Election Day in November so the vote can be held at the high school. She noted it is dark early at that time of the year and the ground is uneven and it is unsafe for those who are handicapped or elderly.

PUBLIC HEARINGS

2020 Budget Hearing

The Chair opened the public hearing at 6:00 pm.

Branley did a PowerPoint presentation.

- General Announcements – noted committee openings, online transactions, new Town website
- 2019 Tax Rate Breakdown – overall \$25.76 total
 - Town \$5.80 (22.5%)
 - Education \$16.27 (63.2%)
 - County \$3.69 (14.3%)
- Tax Rate Trends – tax rate is fairly steady over several years
- Fund Balance Applied to Tax Rate – Town was applying \$700,000 from fund balance to bring the tax rate down. Fund balance is providing \$150,000 today to keep funds in reserve for future projects. Lowering the amount offsetting the tax rate is how a number of articles are being paid for from the fund balance.
- Warrant Article 2 – Zoning Amendments
- Warrant Article 3 - \$3.5 million bond article for new Fire Station

Branley moved to the **Fire Station Bond Hearing** presentation

Fire Station Bond Hearing

- History was presented including 2019 approval of \$25,000 for design and preparation of plans for a fire station
- 2019 Design Process – meetings with fire department folks and focus groups made up of citizens of the town
- Schematic Design was shown and various elevations, an overhead view of the site and the floor plan was also shown
- The Hot Zone – focused on health and safety of mostly on-call firefighters and EMTs – there is no such dedicated space in the three existing stations
- The Warm Zone – three double deep drive through bays – should meet the Town’s needs for the long term
- The Cold Zone – mostly for training and office space
- Total Cost - \$3.95 million inclusive – noted is a possible grants of up to \$265,000 to extend water line and other fire equipment
- Cost Breakdown - \$3.5 million bond – for \$100,000 of property value cos would be \$40 addition to tax bill given a 3.75% interest rate, which is \$0.40/\$1,000 on the tax rate. For a \$200,000 value would incur \$80 additional tax bill.

Bruno Kosheleff of 138 Old Homestead Highway spoke about the connection of cancer with fire-fighting as referred by Branley. Kosheleff said he would like to know why the Town thinks there is a higher incidence among firefighters. Mattson said the State presumes that certain cancers are related to diesel fumes and carcinogens in smoke that firefighters deal with. Branley said there is not proof, but there are correlations between the issues. Bruno said a lot of folks get cancer and there is no certainty as to the cause.

Samir Habiby 24 Sawyer’s Crossing Road spoke about Agent Orange being a source of cancer for people who served in Vietnam and that any presumption of cancer should be considered serious. Kosheleff said he fought in Vietnam and was exposed to Agent Orange and did not get cancer and there was a brief

give and take between Habiby and Kosheleff about whether or not certain chemicals were cancerous before the Branley requested for other questions.

Richard Scaramelli of Aldrich Road said the fire department depends on volunteers and it is important for the town to take care of these volunteers and he presumed that there is a connection between responders and higher incidence of cancer.

Greg Johnson of Sawyers Crossing Road said he was a former member of the fire department and he felt that the time has come to address the need for a new fire station. He said a fire department is very important to the community. He said he studied the plan and the plan is structurally sound enough to put on a second floor if needed in the future.

Hutwelker said the Board is very much in favor of the current proposal and hopes that those in attendance will reach out to neighbors to get this passed. Hutwelker said the Hot Zone will provide the kind of care that is needed to keep contaminants at one end of the building. He said he appreciated the comments of all.

The Chair closed the public hearing on the fire station at 6:30 pm

The Chair opened the public hearing on the remainder of the budget at 6:31 pm

2020 Budget Hearing Continued

- Article 4 – Overall operating budget decrease by -3.1%
 - Major Increases
 - Debt Service for bonds approved by the voters
 - Police staffing
 - Highways – road preservation and winter expense
 - Recycling Center – seasonal full time position for summer
 - Fire – weekend staffing
 - Personnel Admin & Insurance
 - Elections – 4 in 2020 as opposed to 1 in 2019
 - Major decreases
 - Economic Development
 - Revaluations
 - Streetlights – LED transition and reduction in total number
 - Carpenter Home – closed in May 2019
 - Default Budget is \$6,072,735, which is lower than 2020 budget by \$230,150
 - Net amount to be raised by taxes - \$3,158,083, an increase of 6.2%
 - Approximate tax rate impact of this article is \$5.06/\$1,000 in value
- Breakdown in practice
 - Property valued at \$200,000 total tax bill in 2019 of \$5,152
- 2020 Proposed revenue Estimates
 - Being adjusted down, primarily due to the removal of room income from the Carpenter Home

Bruce Tatro Old Richmond Road East Swanzey asked about the use of the Carpenter Home in the future. Beth Poulin-Smith also asked about the types of interest in the Carpenter Home and Scaramelli spoke about the Carpenter Home Committee approaching social service agencies in the county asking for

ideas. He said they approached it as broadly as possible. Branley said there are a number of organization's seriously considering the property and he thinks a tenant is possible soon.

- Article 5 – contributing to Capital Reserve and Expendable Trust Funds – part of six year plan from CIPC – some decreases and impact on tax rate is \$0.236/\$1000

Bruce Tatro asked if how much the Town holds in reserves affects the bond rates. Branley said it does not because we use the NH Municipal Bond Bank so we are grouped with other towns.

- Article 6 – Also contribution to Capital Reserves and Expendable Trust Funds – increases for DPW Equipment and Road Rehabilitation. Tax rate impact is \$0.601/\$1,000
- Article 7 - \$225,000 appropriation for update to Town's tax maps and purchase of a GIS mapping system. This article has no direct tax impact.

Scott Self asked if the GIS will include water and sewer lines and Branley said yes. Branley asked Self if he thought that would be helpful and he said it would be very helpful.

- Article 8 – appropriation of \$800,000 for reconstruction of Christian Hill Road Bridge. Branley said because the state is supporting this project with funds it will be less costly than otherwise. This article has no direct tax impact.

Paul Shearing Ridge Road asked why the project is not expected to be constructed for a few years and Branley said it depends on when the states funds are available; if we went ahead earlier, the Town would have to front the money. Bruce Tatro asked how much of the cost is attributed to registration surcharge. Branley said those funds go into the Capital Reserve Fund for roads and bridges each month and are not included in these articles.

- Article 9 – Appropriation of \$815,000 to improve 2.9 miles of Ashuelot Rail Trail and 4 miles for Cheshire Rail Trail - \$163,000 is Town share with grants and fundraising paying for the rest.
- Article 10 – funding for school resource officer - \$30,000 for half year cost. This article has no direct tax impact. Primarily funded by the Monadnock Regional School District (MRSD).
- Article 11 – Commercial & Industrial Tax Exemption – new commercial and industrial construction could receive up to a 50% tax exemption. Projects would need to have a public benefit including job creation, increasing tax base, and improving properties in need of rehabilitation. Exemptions to be approved by the Board of Selectmen.
- Article 12 – Discontinue portion of Old Winchester Road – this article has no direct tax impact.
- Article 13 – Housing Standard Ordinance – focused on improving quality and Town's ability to enforce standards on rental properties.
- Article 14 – Waiving motor vehicle registration for Prisoners of War, Purple Heart recipients, and Pearl Harbor survivors.
- Article 15 – Allow the operation of sports book retail locations within the town. No direct tax impact.
- Article 16 – Submitted by petition – Increase tax credits for Service-connected Total Disability from \$2,000 to \$4,000. It is equivalent of \$50,000 expenditure.

Samir Habiby spoke about the American Legion wanting to match what other towns are doing for veterans and it is a good thing to do and he hoped it will be supported.

- Article 17 – increase in veterans credits – from \$250 to \$500 and total cost would be about \$70,000

SUMMARY

Overall funds to be raised by taxes is \$3,880,083

Passing all articles tax rate is \$6.42/\$1,000 and for a \$200,000 house would be increase of \$124.

OTHER BUSINESS

Mt. Caesar Union Library

Richard Scaramelli introduced the Chair of Mt. Caesar Union Library, Mary Wood. Wood said by oversight they did not ask for \$3,000 for the Mt. Caesar Union Library Expendable Trust Fund and she asked the Board if those funds could be restored. Hutwelker said the Board would discuss it and let her know next week.

Golden Rod Grange Hall

Jane Johnson spoke about the need to stabilize the Golden Rod Grange Hall building. She proposed to the Selectmen that they agree to an Article to stabilize the Grange which would cost about \$15,000. She said it is a Town building and the Swanzey Preservation Society will work on raising funds to restore the building. She said it is an important part of the history of the town. She added that the building could be useful to the Town as additional working space. She said the Town should pay attention to it and preserve it.

Hutwelker said this has been a dilemma for the Town as to what to do with the building. He spoke about restoration of Whitcomb Hall because of the volunteers raised a large portion of the cost of renovation. He asked those present to provide feedback because there is a need for a group to raise majority of the funds. Hutwelker said the Board does support stabilization of the building and encourage feedback about this situation.

Jenna Carroll stood and said she supports what Jane Johnson is doing because buildings like the Grange are an important part of Swanzey's identity.

Samir Habiby said he is in favor of supporting the Grange Hall, including having it painted. He said the beauty of the town is shown by the state of the buildings of the town. He said that if the building is preserved the Town could hold meetings in the building.

Hutwelker noted the \$15,000 referred to only will stabilize the building; it does not include painting.

Bruce Tatro asked if the building is on the historical list and Johnson said it is and worth saving.

Joanne Stroshine – Keene NH said she is a member of Swanzey Preservation Society and she said the Grange building could be used by Mt. Caesar students for plays, its proximity to schools is useful. Cub scouts has suggested use. She surmised that the rough estimate to renovate the Grange will be less than the cost for renovating Whitcomb Hall.

Joe Smith – Old Homestead Highway said the Town needs a quote for painting the building and he thought it should be preserved.

Jodi Turner she said she has wondered about the Grange building when driving by and eventually joined the preservation society. She said it is part of the town's history. If it isn't saved, it will be gone forever.

She reviewed what could be done with the \$15,000 like fixing the door which is open at the bottom, and support for the roof among other fixes. She said there is a need for support from the public.

Kathy Habiby said that the Mt. Caesar Union library could use the Grange building for some of their activities. She said that if you apply for grants, they need to know how many people in the community are in support of the project. She spoke how many folks are utilizing the library and the buildings need to be ADA accessible.

Scott Self from West Swanzey spoke in favor of painting and keeping the building.

Linda Minickiello said she is interested in supporting the Grange preservation. She referred to a student who is paying attention to the Grange. She asked the Board to reach out to other departments that might be able to use the building as well.

Hutwelker spoke about scraping and painting of the building. He informed those present that the Board was unable to get any contractors to provide an estimate because they are very busy. He said they are not likely to get an estimate in time for the Deliberative.

The Chair closed the public hearing at 7:38 pm

ADJOURNMENT

Motion to adjourn the meeting was made by Karasinski. The motion was seconded by Colby without further discussion. All were in favor. **Motion passed.** Adjournment occurred at 7:40 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,



Beverly Bernard, Recording Secretary
Approved on January 22, 2020