

Town of Swanzey, New Hampshire
Board of Selectmen
Meeting – October 14, 2020
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 Kenneth P. Colby, Jr. at 5:32 pm at Whitcomb Hall Main Street, Swanzey, NH and remotely using Zoom Meeting. Present at Whitcomb Hall were W. William Hutwelker, Sylvester Karasinski and Kenneth P. Colby, Jr. Also present was Town Administrator Michael Branley. Recording Secretary Beverly Bernard was present via Zoom.

OTHERS PRESENT

Fire Chief Bill Gould, Code Enforcement Officer Mike Jasmin, Sewer Commissioner Glenn Page, Wally Smith, Capital Improvements Program Committee Chair Steven Bittel

MINUTES

- The regular meeting Minutes of October 7, 2020 were considered. There was a **motion** by Hutwelker to approve the regular meeting Minutes of October 7, 2020. The motion was seconded by Karasinski and there was no further discussion. All were in favor. ***Motion passed.***
- The Nonpublic meeting Minutes of October 7, 2020 were considered. There was a **motion** by Hutwelker to approve the Non-public meeting Minutes of October 7, 2020. 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. There was no further discussion. All were in favor by roll call. ***Motion passed.***

- Payroll Manifest
- Payables Manifest
- Appointment papers
- Personnel Action Report(s)

PUBLIC INPUT/COVID-19 Update

The public was able to participate remotely over Zoom by going to www.zoom.us, using Zoom App on a cell phone, or on a landline calling 1 929 205 6099 and entering Meeting ID 858 0886 7238. If the public is unable to access the meeting, they are asked to call 352-7411 ext. 107.

Colby noted an increase in cases and that Swanzey has an active case. Smith said regarding the numbers of cases of COVID there is an uptick in New Hampshire. He said we are not out of the woods yet. He said a friend of his in Pennsylvania got the disease and it was bad. He spoke about social distancing being necessary.

APPOINTMENTS

Sewer Commission 2021 Budget

Page was present to speak about the budget. He noted a 3% raise for two employees. He said the auditors thought they were under-charging some customers. Financial information has been sent off to

Underwood Engineers for a rate study and within 60 days there should be a response. He spoke about the capacity of the system in reference to upgrades. He spoke about having substantial reserves to do any work that needs to be done without changing rates for West Swanzey. There was a discussion about possible expansion. The Board thanked Page and he left the meeting.

Fire Chief Bill Gould – 2021 Budget and Ambulance Operational Review

Gould spoke about the proposed budget. He spoke about the changes being proposed. Some increases in wages to make the steps happen, especially for part-time employees. Vehicle maintenance and repair needs to increase given the vehicles are aging. There is testing required and meters need replacement, and he wants to increase training. He spoke about a virtual training program, which would provide better training record keeping. He said they will be spending all funds budgeted for training this year to cover for weekend shifts. Branley spoke about level funding for training. He noted web-based training is lower in costs.

Physicals were asked about by Hutwelker. Gould said they won't be happening this year but will be happening next year. \$500 per person is the cost. Gould spoke about Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) and ten sets were replaced last year and would like to get at least seven sets replaced next year. Gould noted he is over budget on PPE budget. He said the physical funds and training funds not used this year will help out on the PPE budget. In 2021 the funds for physicals will be used. Weekend shifts and per diem line items need increased funding.

Branley spoke about being over budget in vehicle maintenance since a lot of money was spent right at the beginning of the year on the ladder truck. Colby asked from comments from the rest of the Board. Hutwelker asked what the benefits to the town are for per diem coverage. Gould said the weekends are being covered and there is immediate response. He said call members are less responsive on weekends, especially in the summer. He said when not out on a call the per diem folks do equipment checks, clean ups, and sometimes attend training but they are there to respond to a call. Gould said he has had a few folks who are willing to work those days. Gould spoke about acquiring folks from other towns if we cannot get Swanzey folks to work. Gould said he has some newer members who do not have certification yet. The weekend shifts and details for specialty events are voluntarily worked. Gould said he is willing to do split shifts if it works better for employees.

Hutwelker asked if the Fire Department CIP Committee is working with the Capital Improvements Program Committee (CIPC) and Gould said yes. Gould asked the Board to reconsider making EMS Coordinator Brandon West a full-time employee. Gould said West serves a vital role in the department. He said West works nearly full-time hours now. He is needed on calls because his skills are valuable. Branley said West is now funded via the part-time line item. Branley said the health insurance and other benefits are an expense to the Town over and above the salary. Branley noted the Board had previously discussed possibly funding that position through a SAFER grant.

Steven Bittel was present and said he wholly supports hiring West as a full-time employee.

Hutwelker asked Gould for an analysis of the numbers, what would it cost to make West full-time.

Discussion was held about the ambulance. Mutual aid, dispatch services were discussed. Gould said the mutual aid budget is still a placeholder because they are waiting for their new insurance rates for 2021. Branley said the increase is likely to be similar to what the Town is seeing for others.

Gould said the ambulance has served the community. They have done five transports over the last six months. Billing process gets complicated said Gould. He said you can bill for certain calls. He said if another ambulance is not available, without a Town ambulance we could not transport patients. He said there are dedicated people who provide care for whatever the occupant needs. He said Swanzey is busy and there is not a lot of ambulance service like in the Manchester area. And if an ambulance is available, it may be coming from far away which takes more time to reach the call. Gould said we have little to lose and a lot to gain by keeping the ambulance and he would like to move forward with the ambulance service. We are not looking to make a profit but reimbursement will add to funding when we can charge for transport services. Gould said 14 personnel in at the City of Keene Fire Department are funded through ambulance reimbursements. Hutwelker asked about billing for transports made this year. Gould said they did not bill.

Discussion occurred regarding how to bill for ambulance transport. Branley said there is a Medicaid aspect and a Medicare aspect. Branley said billing could be as much as \$400- \$500 per call but you have to reduce revenue by the cost of billing. He estimated a net loss of \$600 for five transports if we had been billing. He said that hiring the billing company expenses over six months would have been \$2,900, which includes \$1,000 start-up costs. Hutwelker asked why we cannot provide billing service internal to the Town. Branley said ambulance billing is very technical and most communities that he is aware of with a small number of calls use a billing company. There were five situations where no other ambulance was available. There was a discussion about the transfer business versus transport business. Transfer is a more like a commercial service without a medical emergency said Gould. On the calls the ambulance wen on but there was no transport, Hutwelker asked what role did the Swanzey ambulance play. Branley said when a medical call comes in, it is not known if DiLuzio is available so if the ambulance is available it may be used. Gould said the patient care comes first. Gould spoke about the DiLuzio contract and updating the terms. Gould said if DiLuzio shut down tomorrow, what would the Town do without an ambulance service. Hutwelker asked about when we would engage a billing company. Branley said it is \$1,000 to start up and a minimum of \$250 per month to engage a billing company. Branley said break-even point is about one call per month. It was noted that is dependent on receiving payment. Gould provided data from the City of Keene Fire Department. Hutwelker asked Gould to run some numbers to try to determine what could be revenue after expenses and considering delinquent payments.

Gould spoke about funding for a utility vehicle GMC 2500 and asked for approval to purchase that vehicle. Karasinski asked if the new brush truck is in service and Gould said not yet, the radio will come out of the brush truck. The vehicle has not been delivered yet to Fairfields but is in process. He said \$50,000 should be sufficient. Hutwelker asked about the replaced vehicle and Gould said he would like to hold onto it; he said he can use it as a back-up vehicle. West said the vehicle is somewhat useful.

Motion was made by Hutwelker to approve an expenditure of not-to-exceed \$50,000 for a 2021 GMC 2500 for the Fire Department to replace Squad 3 and to be used by Deputy Chief Mattson and to be funded from the Fire Trucks Capital Reserve Fund and to authorize the Fire Chief to enter in contract. There was a second by Karasinski and no further discussion. All were in favor
Motion passed.

There was a further discussion about the ambulance and Colby said many factors are going on with COVID-19 such that the Board should leave things as they are for now.

The Board thanked Gould and he left the meeting.

NEW BUSINESS

321 Old Homestead Highway Demolition Update

The Board reviewed a memo regarding the asbestos abatement at 321 Old Homestead Highway provided by Code Enforcement Officer Mike Jasmin. Jasmin said more asbestos has been found in the building and therefore there will be further costs to remove it. Four Brothers Environmental has been hired to do the testing and analysis of the materials found. Jasmin said there will be further analyzing costs starting tomorrow and he hopes to have those costs as soon as possible. Jasmin spoke about the structure and how well it was built, but not easily convertible to other use. Jasmin spoke about the responsiveness of Peniel Environmental, who is doing the abatement. Colby asked about when the Fire Department burn would occur and Jasmin said it could be done by end of November. Colby said he was under the impression that the vendor originally hired was supposed to find all the asbestos from the beginning. Branley said he didn't realize more testing would need to be done when the additional materials were found. Jasmin spoke about odd material found in the building that needs to be tested and evaluated. Jasmin said he expects to have information for the Board by next Wednesday. Removal would be a few weeks after that. Jasmin said the hope is to be on the schedule for removal the week before Thanksgiving.

There was a brief discussion about the Grace Ford property. Jasmin spoke about the clean up of the property and recommended that no structures would be permitted on the property if purchased. The Board agreed by consensus to move forward with accepting the tax deed and selling it using Municibid. Jasmin spoke about having heard from five parties interested in the property and selling to the highest bidder.

There was also a brief discussion about the pump house by the Thompson covered bridge.

The Board thanked Jasmin and he left the meeting.

Job Description Tax Collector/Bookkeeper

Branley provided the Board with proposed minor revisions of the job description for the Tax Collector/Bookkeeper. Karasinski asked if we still need the bookkeeping function. Branley said he thought so since what was three full time positions is now down to two positions. Karasinski said since Carpenter Home closed he thought there might be less work. The Board agreed by consensus on the job description as presented.

Nomination to Cheshire TV Board of Directors

The Board considered nomination to the Cheshire TV Board of Directors. Colby's name was discussed, and he agreed to serve.

Motion was made by Hutwelker to nominate Ken Colby to serve as the Swanzey representative on the Cheshire TV Board of Directors. There was a second to the motion by Karasinski and no further discussion. All were in favor. ***Motion passed.***

2021 Health Insurance Renewal Information

Branley informed the Board that the Town's rate increase for health insurance from HealthTrust is 6.4% (slightly above the 5% placeholder budgeted). He noted that there is an incentive to employees to move to a lower premium plan with a deductible and the goal is to hopefully move all employees to a plan with a deductible by 2022. He noted that there will continue to be progress toward that goal by attrition. Branley said there are savings for both employee and employer. There is also a flexible spending account offered to employees. Karasinski said he once saw a per hour figure for expenditures

for employee benefits and asked Branley for a current figure. Branley said he does not have that information. Colby said the Town owes the taxpayers fiscal frugality with the cost of benefits. There was a discussion about the plan for 2022 and that was agreed upon by consensus.

Motion was made by Hutwelker to authorize the Town Administrator to sign renewal documents with HealthTrust for 2021. There was a second to the motion by Karasinski and no further discussion. All were in favor. **Motion passed.**

Concerts at Fairgrounds

Hutwelker spoke about the complaint he received regarding the outdoor concerts at the Fairgrounds. He said the complainant did not have an issue with the time specified for the concerts but that the volume level is no longer tolerable. Branley noted the noise ordinance and said it is questionable as to how to measure volume. Hutwelker asked that organizer of the Fairground concerts be informed so that the volume could be determined, if possible. Branley said he would have some correspondence with the organizers about the volume. Karasinski said the Fairground concert organizers should be considerate of the neighbors.

ADJOURNMENT

Motion to adjourn the meeting was made by Hutwelker. The motion was seconded by Karasinski without further discussion. All were in favor. **Motion passed.** Adjournment occurred at 7:15 pm.

Respectfully Submitted,



Beverly Bernard, Recording Secretary

Approved on October 21, 2020