Town of Swanzey, New Hampshire
**Board of Selectmen**
Meeting – November 18, 2025
Whitcomb Hall
17 Main Street, Swanzey, NH

## CALL TO ORDER

The meeting was called to order by Chair W. William Hutwelker III, at 5:30 pm. at Whitcomb Hall, Main Street, Swanzey, NH. Other members present were Selectmen James Tempesta and Mark LaBelle. Also present were Town Administrator Lori Rautiola and Recording Secretary Susan Ells.

## OTHERS PRESENT

Kai Kraemer with FACT TV, Joe DiRusso - Director of DPW, Josh Whipple – Recycling Center Manager, Sally Malay – Keene Housing Kids Collaborative, Jay Ward, Michael York, Mary Wood and Steve Russell from Mt Caesar Library

## MINUTES

The regular meeting minutes of November 12, 2025, were considered. A motion was made by LaBelle to approve the minutes as amended. Tempesta seconded the motion, and it passed 3-0.

The non-public session minutes of November 1, 2025, and November 12, 2025 #1, 2, 3, 4, and 5 were considered. **A motion was made by LaBelle to approve the minutes as presented. Tempesta seconded the motion, and it passed 3-0.**

## CONSENT AGENDA

**A motion was made by Labelle to approve the Consent Agenda. Tempesta seconded the motion, and it passed 3-0.**

## PUBLIC INPUT

None

## APPOINTMENTS

### 1. Joe DiRusso – Request for Authorization for 2026 Paving Contract

DPW Director Joe DiRusso requested to forego the RFP process for 2026 paving because All States Construction has agreed to honor this year's rates for 2026 paving projects.

**A motion was made by LaBelle to forego a request for proposal (RFP) for the 2026 paving projects and to award the 2026 paving contract to All States Construction, Inc., reducing the impact on budget line 01-4312-4312-1-631 by $100,000. Tempesta seconded the motion, and it passed 3-0.**

DiRusso also explained that the Town has been able to save money by having the DPW department do some of the work instead of the contractor. This has saved about $50,000. He requested the Board allow the remaining $50,000 in the 2025 paving line to expend as a deposit for 2026.

**A motion was made by LaBelle to authorize the DPW Director, Joe DiRusso to expend the remaining money in the 2025 Paving budget Line (01-4312-4312-1-631) up to $50,000, to offset the cost of the 2026 paving contract. Tempesta seconded the motion, and it passed 3-0.**

DiRusso gave an update on the current projects. The reconstruction project on California and North Winchester Streets is nearly done. The initial coat of paving on West Street is done; there is some cleanup of the edges that DPW will do as well as line painting. The second coat will be applied next year. The section of Eaton Road is done. The Railroad Street project is complete, and the rail trail project is nearly done. The installation of the guard rail for Webber Hill will begin on Thursday. The back deck at Town hall has been repaired; he is waiting for a quote from the contractor for the renovation of Town Hall.

There was a discussion on speed limit signs and the need for them along California and North Winchester Streets. The consensus of the Board was to have speed limit 30 MPH and No Parking signs installed.

Tempesta expressed his appreciation to DiRusso and stated he has saved the Town a lot of money by utilizing DPW employees whenever possible instead of contractors. Hutwelker mentioned the work the DPW has done on the new Fire Station which also has saved the Town money. DiRusso added the fire station is coming along well and it will be watertight soon and then work on the interior can begin.

Resident Michael York also praised the work DiRusso is doing for the department.

**2. Josh Whipple – Update on Recycling Station Shed**

Recycling Manager Josh Whipple gave an update on the guard shed, adding it is nearly done; just the roof and the flooring need to be installed, which should be done by Friday. He is getting a quote to get the wiring installed for an electric heater. The Board complimented Whipple on the work done.

**3. Sally Malay- Keene Housing Kids Collaborative**

Sally Malay, Executive Director of Keene Housing Kids Collaborative gave a brief overview of the work her program offers. She added, Swanzey has supported this organization for a couple of years and hopes the Town will continue to support them in the coming years. She presented a slide show explaining their mission. Out of over 600 children they serve, 108 children live in Swanzey in assisted living housing. The goal is to provide access to activities that help them succeed in school and beyond. She added their goal is that the kids will not have to rely on assistance in the future. The children benefit from Dolly Parton's Imagination Library to help get them to appropriate reading level. They have access to other organizations such as the YMCA and MoCo which help to integrate them with their peers and remove the stigma which helps the children thrive so they can become engaged members of the community. The organization raises money in many ways. The Board thanked Ms. Malay for her presentation and her work.

**NEW BUSINESS**

**1. Submittal of a Zoning Petition Warrant Article**

Rautiola noted this item was on the agenda because the statute requires the Board of Selectmen to accept it prior to it being submitted to the Planning Board. York stated the Planning Board has it on the agenda for 11/20 and will schedule a public hearing. The Selectboard doesn't recommend that the Planning Board endorse it.

**2. Withdrawal from the Mount Ceasar Union Library ETF**

Mary Wood reported that the library trustees discovered that pigeons got into the bell tower and the third floor where their antiques are kept and have destroyed these areas with bird feces. Members tried to clean it themselves, but it needs to be done professionally. Bergeron Construction will repair the bell tower by repairing or replacing the slats and will install screening to reduce the likelihood of this happening in the future. That cost is $3542; Gold Star Services has charged $3500 to clean the bell tower and $4000 will be due to clean the third floor.

Wood invited the Board to visit the Library on Saturday. They are currently working to get the basement set up to display these antiques.

**LaBelle made a motion to authorize the withdrawal of $11,042** from the **Mount Ceasar Union Library Expendable Trust Fund**. **Tempesta seconded the motion, and it passed 3-0.**

**3. Review of Elderly Exemption Income/Asset & Exemption Qualification Limits**

Rautiola gave an overview of Town's Elderly exemptions. She noted the exemptions were adopted in 2009 and the Town has not adjusted them since. She expressed her concerns about not updating them, especially over the last five years with rising inflation, adding we want the older population to be able to afford to stay in their homes. Updating Swanzey's exemption limits will bring the Town more in line with regional standards and provide equitable relief for qualifying residents. Her recommendations were as follows:

Age 65-74: increase from $25,000 to $50,000 in assessed value
Age 75-79: increase from $35,000 to $75,000 in assessed value
Age 80+: increase from $40,000 to $100,000 in assessed value

Income Limits:
Single: increase from $24,000 to $35,000
Married: increase from $32,000 to $60,000

Asset Limit: Increase from $50,000 to $60,000

Hutwelker asked if there could be a report that shows the likely impact on the tax base. Rautiola mentioned one could determine this by the number of exemptions you receive in the spring as they fluctuate by the tax rate that would be set the following October. LaBelle and Tempesta agreed they needed to be updated. Resident Jay Ward felt this was an equitable solution for the people affected the most and suggested that this should be reviewed every 5 years when there is a reassessment done. The Board tabled the discussion for the Dec 3 meeting.

**4. Avanru Development – Request for support for local/regional Community Development Block Grant funding totaling $500,000.**

Bill Hutwelker recused himself from the Board of Selectmen and took a seat as a of as a representative of Masiello Real Estate regarding the request for support for the local/regional community development block for the Senior housing development Plainview apartment near the airport. He requested a public hearing on December 17. There would be 3 separate hearings at that meeting with people to explain the block grant to the public. The community is allowed to apply for $500,000 per year; the Town would receive the grant and then administer the funds.

**LaBelle made a motion to have a public hearing for the Community Development Block Grant on December 17th at the regular Select Board meeting. Tempesta seconded; Hutwelker recused himself and the motion passed 2-0-1.**

## OLD BUSINESS

### 1. 2026 Budget Discussion

Rautiola reviewed the memo from the Finance Director that highlighted several expenses this year that had not been included in 2025 operating budget. These expenses of $483,372 increases the baseline for 2026.

- Positions and new hires being paid at a higher rate than was budgeted: increase of $227,483.20
- Payroll taxes and retirement related to the increased pay rates: increase of $31,755.50
- Employee changes in health and dental plans: increase of $129,466.93
- Vacant positions removed entirely from the 2025 budget: increase of $75,117.49
- Payroll taxes and retirement related to the vacant positions: increase of $19,549.37

Hutwelker asked for details on these amounts. Rautiola will get the breakdown from the Finance Director and will email the spreadsheet to the Board.

- In addition, $129,833.89 was included for the first year of payments for the Fire Station bond.

Rautiola explained possible reductions in the proposed budget:

- Asphalt line in the Highway budget reduced: decrease of $100,000
- One vacant full-time Police Officer position changed to two part-time positions with a total salary of $50,000: decrease of $9,862.24
- All other vacant positions except Selectmen and Recreation cut 50%: decrease of $171,909.55 (wages, taxes, and retirement)
- Half of the 2-person Health plans for vacant positions were changed to Opt-out plans and one was changed to a Family plan: decrease of $54,062.69

These changes lowered the proposed budget for 2026 by $335,834, bringing the proposed increase to 8.38%. Increased costs for Technology added $24,167. The overall increase to date was 8.67%.

Rautiola requested some guidance from the Board, adding she needed more time to review the budgets with the department heads and finalize the default budget.

### 2. Update Re: Class VI Road Policy

Rautiola presented the Class VI Roads policy which was reviewed and revised by the Town Attorney.

**Labelle made a motion to approve the Class VI Road Policy as drafted**. **Tempesta seconded the motion, and it passed 3-0.**

## ADMINISTRATIVE UPDATE

Rautiola explained the rates for Cheshire County EMS services were as follows: $46/per capita. The contract January through June is $40,774; July – December will be $170,844 for a total budget for 2026 of $211,618. 2027 will be the first full year at a cost of $341,688.

**PUBLIC INPUT**

Resident Jay Ward asked for clarification on the $129,000 for fire bond. He also clarified that the Select Board had signed his appointment to the TIF Advisory Committee so he can go to the Town Clerk to sign the paperwork.

**NON-PUBLIC SESSIONS**

**Non-public session(s) per RSA 91-A:3, II (c) Matters which, if discussed in public, would likely affect adversely the reputation of a person**

**A motion was made by LaBelle to enter a non-public session pursuant to RSA 91-A:3, II (c) which was seconded by Tempesta. All were in favor by Roll Call and the motion passed.** The Board entered the non-public session at 7:21pm. Present were W. William Hutwelker III, James Tempesta and Mark LaBelle. Also present were Town Administrator Lori Rautiola and Recording Secretary Susan Ells.

**A motion was made by LaBelle to come out of the non-public session, seconded by Tempesta. All were in favor by Roll Call and the motion passed. The Non-public session ended at 7:24pm.**

**ADJOURNMENT**

**A motion was made by LaBelle to adjourn the meeting**; **Tempesta seconded the motion, and it passed 3-0.**

Adjournment occurred at 7:24pm.

Respectfully Submitted,

Susan Ells,
Recording Secretary

Approved on December 3, 2025