Town of Swanzey, New Hampshire
**Board of Selectmen**
Meeting – February 17, 2026
Whitcomb Hall
17 Main Street, Swanzey, NH

**CALL TO ORDER**

The meeting was called to order by Chair W. William Hutwelker III, at 4:00pm. at Whitcomb Hall, Main Street, Swanzey, NH. Other members present were Selectmen Mark LaBelle and James Tempesta; also present were Town Administrator Lori Rautiola, Administrative Katie Collins, and members of the Whitcomb Hall committee and the Peter Johnson Memorial Fund committee.

There was a discussion regarding the care that is needed for Whitcomb Hall. Tempesta gave an overview of what he believes the procedure for renting the hall should be. It was noted that the application for renting Whitcomb Hall should be revised, specifically regarding the use of the kitchen. It was also noted that there should be enough tables on both floors, so there isn't a need for someone to carry any tables and chairs to either floor.

There was also a discussion about marketing the rental; previously an employee of the Town used social media to market it. Sharon Greatbatch spoke saying the members of the Whitcomb Hall committee and the Peter Johnson Memorial Fund were considering joining the committees since they have a similar mission and many of the same members. They will provide the Board with a mission statement. Members of the committee agreed to fill in on a temporary basis for the rental events and Sharon agreed to be the contact for the Administrative Assistant to notify when there is a rental at Whitcomb Hall until the Town can fill a part-time caretaker position. There was agreement that the committee would handle the setup and takedown of tables and chairs for events for one month. In addition, the town will be responsible for the setup and takedown (when needed) of the tables and chairs on the second floor for town committee meetings. The committee members and staff then toured the building to identify what was available for rentals.

Chair Hutwelker recessed the meeting at 4:50pm.

James Tempesta left the meeting temporarily.

Chair Hutwelker reconvened the meeting at 5:30pm.

**OTHERS PRESENT**

Kai Kraemer with FACT TV, Michael York, Lee Dunham, Scott Self, Jay Ward and Susan Ells, Recording Secretary.

**MINUTES**

The regular meeting minutes of January 23, 2026 and February 11, 2026 were considered. A motion was made by LaBelle to approve the minutes as presented. Hutwelker seconded the motion, and it passed 2-0.

The non-public session minutes of January 26, 2026, and February 11, 2026 sessions #1, 2 & 3 were considered. A motion was made by LaBelle to approve the minutes as presented. Hutwelker seconded the motion, and it passed 2-0.

**CONSENT AGENDA**

A. Payroll Manifest

B. Accounts Payable Manifest
C. Special Events Permit-Keene Sentinel-Autumn Fest-Cheshire Fairgrounds
D. Special Events Permit-Swanzey Snow Fest-Rec Department- Lane Field
E. Open Container Permit -Whitcomb Hall 3/20/26
F. Open Container Permit-Whitcomb Hall-3/21/26

A motion was made by Labelle to approve the Consent Agenda. Hutwelker seconded the motion, and it passed 2-0.

**PUBLIC INPUT**

Scott Self asked for a message to be added to the signs at the Town Hall and at Whitcomb Hall to promote the 'Meet the Candidates' on Saturday, February 28 at 2pm at Whitcomb Hall.

Michael York said that there will also be a 'Swanzey Governance Committee - Public Information Session' on Saturday, March 7th. He also said he went to the State AG office website and found a voter guide for Town Meetings that he thought was a good resource.

Chair Hutwelker called a recess at 5:35pm

James Tempesta returned to the meeting; also present were Ann Heffernon, Jessica Ramsey-Sanchez, Richard Lane, Dan LaClair, and Heather Estrella

Chair Hutwelker reconvened the meeting at 6pm.

**Public Hearing 6:00 pm**

**Official Ballor Referendum form of Government (SB2) Rescission**

Chair Hutwelker opened the public hearing at 6 pm. The Chair read the article on the ballot regarding this subject: *Shall the Town rescind the provisions of RSA 40:13 (known as SB 2) as adopted by the Town on March 8, 2005, so that the official ballot will no longer be used for voting on all questions, but only for the election of officers and certain other questions for which the official ballot is required by state law?*

Ann Heffernon, Chair of the Governance Committee, explained the Board of Selectmen had formed the Governance committee and appointed Ann Heffernon as chair of the committee. She described the process the committee went through this past year by reviewing all the types of government available to the Town. In the end, they came to the consensus that the open town meeting format would be best suited to the Town since it is the purest form of town government. They felt that holding an open meeting during a Saturday versus a Tuesday night, which was done previously, would draw more voters and allow more education on the articles so the voters would be more informed.

She went on to give an example that last year, many of the articles on the ballots were not voted for by many voters, they feel, because those voters possibly didn't know what they were voting for, so they left those questions unanswered. She said the deliberative session is generally poorly attended; 79 members this year and 70 last year, and even fewer in the years before. The warrant articles can be amended by those few people who attend; more people need to be engaged, involved and knowledgeable.

Scott Self said the deliberative session is like the open town meeting in that the voters can amend the articles, but after all the discussions it then goes on the ballot for voting, which is several weeks later, but those who didn't attend the deliberative session might not have the full knowledge of the ballot. In the open town

meeting, the voters would still be discussing and possibly amending the articles, but then they would be voted on right then, not weeks later.

Tempesta said he's heard the argument about having poor attendance at the Town meeting, and that only the people there would decide the outcome. Scott said he hoped that if people want to be included, they will find a way to be there, that there is plenty of notice when the meeting is. It's the voter's duty to be informed and to vote.

Jessica Ramsey-Sanchez asked about absentee voting for an open town hall meeting. Self said the items on the ballot are fixed questions, such as voting for the officers and zoning amendments, so there could be absentee voting for those items, but since the warrant articles could be changed at the meeting, there is no absentee voting for that.

Ward asked about when the voting would be and was told that Election Day would be on Tuesday; the open town meeting for the warrant articles could be the Saturday before or the Saturday following Election Day.

Lee Dunham said when there were town meetings, they were on Tuesday evening. Polls opened at 3pm for election of officers, zoning articles, etc. then they went into the town meeting at 7pm. If there was a hotly contested item, there might be 300 - 400 at Town meeting. It used to be a community event. He said that last year, there were 1487 who voted but only 70 at deliberative session.

The Chair called a recess at 6:18pm.

At 6:21pm, the meeting was reconvened.

Richard Lane said if this article passes, the Town and the Governance Committee would have a full year to determine how they would do this; there would be multiple informational sessions; he said he would like to see more people involved.

Ann said that since SB2 was introduced, 3 towns have reverted to open town meetings and that several towns have tried but have been unsuccessful by a small margin; many towns would like to go back to Town meetings.

Ann said the committee is bi-partisan and they all agreed this is the best for the Town. York brought a copy of the NH Town meeting voter guide which explains about the differences in the types of government; he said the website location of the document is posted on the Swanzey Facebook page.

Jessica said there was a lot of discussion and the committee considered all the pros and cons but that there were more benefits to the open town meeting, but she said that even if it doesn't pass, they are still committed to informing voters about the issues facing them.

Tempesta asked how the information is going out to voters now; Ann said there will be an open session at Whitcomb Hall on March 7th to explain the subject and a lot has been on Facebook and they had an interview on the radio. Jessica said they are open to suggestions; Tempesta asked if there has been feedback; Ann said she had good discussions at the Trunk or Treat session.

Jay Ward felt the subject would come up at the candidate night and the candidates should be prepared to explain their position.

Chair Hutwelker said they Board is very supportive of the transition to Town Meeting. He thanked the committee for their work.

**ADJOURNMENT**

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

Adjournment occurred at 6:40pm.

Respectfully Submitted,

Susan Ells, Recording Secretary

Approved on February 25, 2026