Town of Swanzey, New Hampshire
Board of Selectmen
Meeting – April 15, 2026
Whitcomb Hall
17 Main Street, Swanzey, NH

CALL TO ORDER

The meeting was called to order by Chair James Tempesta at 5:32pm. at Whitcomb Hall, Main Street, Swanzey, NH. Other members present were Selectmen Mark LaBelle, W William Hutwelker, James Ward and Alan Gross. Also present were Town Administrator Lori Rautiola and Recording Secretary Susan Ells.

OTHERS PRESENT

Kai Kraemer with FACT TV, Dorrie Masten, Ashlee Crosby (Recreation Director), Eric Mattson (Fire Chief), Bruce Bohannon, Charlene and Tyler McLaughlin, Connie Schubert, Randy and Brianna Blodgett, Mick Sanchez (Assistant Fire Chief), Cathy Bergstrom, Jessica Sanchez, Kevin Westcott

MINUTES

The regular meeting minutes of April 8, 2026, and April 10, 2026, were considered. A motion was made by Mark LaBelle to approve the minutes as amended. Jay Ward seconded the motion, and it passed 5-0.

The non-public session minutes of April 8, 2026, sessions 1-4 and April 10, 2026, sessions 1-2 were considered. A motion was made by Mark LaBelle to approve the minutes as presented. Jay Ward seconded the motion, and it passed 5-0.

CONSENT AGENDA

A. Payroll Manifest
B. Accounts Payable Manifest
C. Raffle Permit- Monadnock Regional School
D. Special Events Permit-Motorcycle Swap
E. Special Events Permit- Monadnock Humane Society
F. Intent to Cut – M/243 L/55
G. Gravel Tax Levy – M/240 L/48
H. Yield Tax Levy – M/243 L/55

A motion was made by Mark LaBelle to approve the Consent Agenda. Jay Ward seconded the motion, and it passed 5-0.

PUBLIC INPUT

Chair Tempesta opened the public input session with instruction on how to proceed.

Dorrie Masten, resident at 326 Matthews Road, was notified by a neighbor on April 10th that her house was on fire; she added she arrived and noticed it was not her house, but a large brush fire at the neighbor's home at 316 Matthews Road. Additionally, Ms. Masten noted in her opinion the fire was out of control, that there were calls made to 911 but was told by dispatch Fire personnel was on scene already. She stated she did not know how to proceed so she called Selectman, Jimmy Tempesta and upon his arrival, she stated Tempesta walked over to the site. She stated she believed the Assistant Fire Chief interfered with the multiple calls to 911 and she is demanding a full investigation.

Bruce Bohannon of 315 Matthews Road stated he witnessed someone throwing accelerants on the fire and heard a big boom which rattled his windows and upset his dogs, adding, he talked with a neighbor who heard the loud boom as well. Mr. Bohannon stated he had called Fire/Mutual Aid and was told that the fire department was on the scene but did not witness any flashing lights or any sign of the Fire Department being on scene.

Tyler McLauglin of 343 Matthews Road reported around 8pm he heard an explosion; adding, he went outside and saw flames and was present to better understand the events that occurred.

Charlene McLauglin, also of 343 Matthews Road, explained at 7:50pm she heard the explosion; she thought it was Ms. Masten's house, but as she ran toward it to attempt to rescue the pets, she saw it was the brush fire at the Blodgett's house. She stated she checked on those present at the scene, and was met with laughter, adding a nearby resident reported having called 911 and was awaiting a response, noting that flames appeared to extend above the roofline. She stated at approximately 10:45 p.m., individuals had returned to their homes but saw no emergency personnel on scene. She expressed concern that given the potential risk of an explosion, nearby residents should have been notified of the burn

Connie Schubert of 336 Matthews Road stated she and her husband heard the loud boom and had walked over to see what was going on. She continued adding she was told by neighbors that 911 was called. She stated the fire was building and smoke and ashes were in her yard; and wanted to know what was in the fire to make the boom.

Chair Tempesta explained that the Board was gathering information and that the fire department had provided a timeline of the events and offered copies to those present.

Assistant Fire Chief, Mick Sanchez spoke to the comments made and further explained it was within his job duties to report to Dispatch because he was a fire officer, and was on the scene, that the fire was permitted, under control and that there was no need to put an apparatus on the road at that time. Assistant Chief Sanchez stated he spoke to Mr. Tempesta and stopped feeding the fire as Mr. Tempesta had requested. He also stated at no time was the fire out of control, and if it was, he would not have canceled the call. Assistant Chief Sanchez vehemently disputed the claims made by the neighbors regarding the use of accelerants, adding that prohibited materials were not in the fire, suggesting the noise they heard was a loud woosh noise from the dry materials igniting, not a sonic boom or explosion. He reported he and the Chief met with the NH Fish & Lands Fire Marshal and showed him the site.

Brianna and Randy Blodgett informed the Board they had a legally permitted burn and that the burn was legal. They met on Monday with Captain Matson with NH Division of Forest & Lands and he confirmed to them that everything was handled properly. Mr. Blodgett stated he would provide them with a report that supports this. Ms. Blodgett was distressed that no neighbors attempted to contact them directly to understand what happened.

Tyler McLaughlin stated they don't want problems in the neighborhood but thought Assistant Chief Sanchez could have gone to the neighbors to let them know what was happening.

Dorrie Masten commented that she went to neighbors out of genuine concern to learn who had called 911 and who heard the boom.

Brianna Blodgett invited the Board to view the property to see for themselves the area that was burned. She stated that they did not get fined because nothing was illegal.

Chair Tempesta stated this was a tough situation; both sides might have made mistakes and that both parties could have done things differently. He urged residents to consider both sides, adding the Board will consider the information given and wait for the report from the NH Division of Forest & Lands. The Board will also investigate how this could be avoided in the future.

Brianna Blodgett said they were not required to inform the neighbors about the class 3 fire permit. Jay Ward suggested that perhaps in the future they should inform them as a courtesy.

Bill Hutwelker stated there had been a discussion in the past about notifying neighbors but since the State doesn't require it, and because permits can be obtained online, sometimes the Fire Department doesn't necessarily know about potential brush fires.

Fire Chief Eric Mattson explained the various classifications of fires, permits and inspections.

Public input session ended at 7:22pm

APPOINTMENTS

A. Ashlee Crosby, Rec Director – Request for Fencing, Dog Waste Stations and Invoice Approval for Brush Removal (at Richardson Park)

At the previous meeting, the Board asked Ashlee Crosby to get more quotes for the proposed fence/backstop project at the South Road field. She informed the Board she called 5 different fence companies without success; Monadnock Fence was still available to quote and install by opening day on April 25th. Since this company has done all the fence work at the ball fields, she feels confident hiring them for this project. She reviewed her proposed plan with Neil Jendron who feels this solution is not adequate and won't stop the stray balls landing in his yard; she pointed out that this has only happened twice in many years. The Board discussed the project and decided to hold off on a decision and to take the opportunity to review this with Joe DiRusso, DPW Director.

The Board discussed the purchase of the dog waste stations and determined the cost will come from the department's budget.

The group also discussed the payment of $12,000 for the invoice for the brush removal at Richardson Park. Lori Rautiola will need to review where the funds will come from since there was a difference of opinion as to whether the funds can come from the Nettie Stone Pavillion Fund.

NEW BUSINESS

A. Assessing – Veteran's, Elderly & Solar Tax Credit/Exemption

a. M/220 L/156
b. M/239 L/6
c. M/220 L/186
d. M/246 L/16
e. M/239 L/31
f. M/243 L/55
g. M/106 L/49

Mark LaBelle made a motion to approve the slate of Elderly and Veteran Tax Exemptions as recommended by the Town's contracted assessor, Bernaiche Consultants. Jay Ward seconded the motion, and it passed 5-0.

B. Assessing- Tax Abatement

a. M/254 L/1

Jay Ward requested more information – this was tabled until a future meeting.

C. Consideration of Adoption of Right-to-Know Request Policy Implementation

Mark LaBelle made a motion to approve the Right-to-Know Request Policy as presented and recommended by the Town Administrator. Jay Ward seconded the motion, and it passed 5-0.

D. Consideration of Post Traumatic Stress Policy

Mark LaBelle made a motion to approve the Post Traumatic Stress Policy as presented and recommended by NH Primex and the Human Resource Coordinator. Jay Ward seconded the motion, and it passed 5-0.

Bill Hutwelker clarified this policy was drafted by Primex. Lori Rautiola replied that Primex has a template, but this also was reviewed by Upton and Hatfield as well.

OLD BUSINESS

A. Consideration of Revised Whitcomb Hall Rental Agreement

Mark LaBelle made a motion to approve the Whitcomb Hall Rental Agreement/Application as updated. Jay Ward seconded the motion, Bill Hutwelker asked if the cleaning fee was clear with the Town staff as well as the insurance requirement; Lori Rautiola confirmed the process ~~it~~ was clear**. With no further discussion, it passed 5-0.**

B. 2026 BOS Schedule of Meetings

Chair Tempesta asked the Board for feedback on the proposed schedule of meetings. Bill Hutwelker expressed concern about having fewer meetings in May, stating there was so much that it is going on, adding the schedule should also be reviewed in August to determine whether weekly meetings will be necessary in September versus October for budgeting purposes. The Board members all agreed to be available if special meetings are needed but opted to move to the proposed schedule of every other week starting after the May 6th meeting.

ADMINISTRATIVE UPDATE

Lori Rautiola reported the Town had received a request to change a road name due to 911 purposes; she will contact the Fire Chief/building Inspector for assistance and will report back to the Board.

Lori Rautiola asked what the past practice had been regarding a Cost-of-Living Increase for Select Board members. Bill Hutwelker responded that the COLA had been given in the past; the Board agreed by consensus to proceed with the COLA increase for Selectboard members.

Lori Rautiola mentioned that last fall the Board awarded the Swanzey Lake Dam project to Fuss & O'Neil for engineering, but the funding was not mentioned in the motion. She asked the Board to entertain a motion to

authorize the funding from the Dams Capital Reserve fund in the amount of $140,400 as stated in the proposal.

Mark LaBelle made a motion to authorize up to $140,400 from the Town-Owned Dams Capital Reserve Fund for the Engineering Services to Fuss & O'Neill for the Swanzey Lake Dam Analysis and Remedial Repair Design. Jay Ward seconded the motion, and it passed 5-0.

Additionally, Lori reported she met with the Keene City Manager regarding the proposed solar project and was asked if the Board would be interested in entering an agreement with the City of Keene as part of their Group Net Metering Project. This would bring in some revenue for Swanzey; the agreement would be for twenty years, but has an Opt-out Clause, so if Swanzey wanted to have their own in the future they could get out of the agreement. She noted it would be a 10% discount or rebate based on the Town's electricity consumption; the first year would be about $4,000; year five would potentially be $22,000 and up from there based on the Town's KWH consumption. Lori will let the City Manager know the Board is interested and report back.

Bill Hutwelker asked Lori if she had been able to locate the dog ordinance that Ashlee Crosby had said she had provided. Lori responded that she received the document again from Ashlee, and made a note to review it, adding it was on her list, but had to prioritize her duties, but hoped to get to it soon.

PUBLIC INPUT

Cathy Bergstrom said she would like to establish a social media account for the Economic Development Committee and she received consensus from the Board to do so.

Lori Rautiola reported she met with Ann Heffernon, Chair of the Governance Committee and brainstormed ideas on a new mission statement which Ann will present to the Committee and then report to the Board with feedback.

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 Mark LaBelle to enter a non-public session pursuant to RSA 91-A:3, II (c) which was seconded by Jay Ward. All were in favor by Roll Call and the motion passed**.** The Board entered the non-public session at 7:54pm. Present were James Tempesta, Mark LaBelle, W. William Hutwelker III, James Ward and Alan Gross. Also present were Town Administrator Lori Rautiola, Recording Secretary Susan Ells and Tax Collector, Kevin Westcott.

A motion was made by Mark LaBelle to come out of the non-public session, seconded by Jay Ward. All were in favor by Roll Call and the motion passed. The non-public session ended at 8:53pm.

The Board then discussed the dry hydrant on Westport Village Road.

Mark LaBelle suggested having fireworks for the 250th/Old Home Day.

The Board reviewed the earlier discussion regarding the bonfire. Lori Rautiola will write a letter after receiving the fire warden report and will send it to the interested parties.

ADJOURNMENT

A motion was made by Mark LaBelle to adjourn the meeting; Jay Ward seconded the motion, and it passed 5-0.

Adjournment occurred at 9:12pm.

Respectfully Submitted,

Susan Ells, Recording Secretary

Approved on April 22, 2026