Town of Swanzey, New Hampshire
Board of Selectmen
Meeting – May 6, 2026
Whitcomb Hall
17 Main Street, Swanzey, NH

CALL TO ORDER

The meeting was called to order by Chair James Tempesta at 5:05pm. at Whitcomb Hall, Main Street, Swanzey, NH. Other members present were Selectmen Mark LaBelle, W William Hutwelker, and James Ward. Also present was Recording Secretary Susan Ells.

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 5:05pm. Present were James Tempesta, Mark LaBelle, W. William Hutwelker III, James Ward and Recording Secretary Susan Ells.

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 5:20pm.

Mark LaBelle made a motion to unseal the non-public minutes from 4/22/2029 Session #2 and 4/29/2026. All in favor and the motion passed.

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 Jay Ward to enter a non-public session pursuant to RSA 91-A:3, II (c) which was seconded by Mark LaBelle. All were in favor by Roll Call and the motion passed**.** The Board entered the non-public session at 5:25pm. Present were James Tempesta, Mark LaBelle, W. William Hutwelker III, and James Ward. Also present was Recording Secretary Susan Ells.

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 5:28pm.

A motion was made by Mark LaBelle to seal the minutes because divulgence of the information likely would affect adversely the reputation of a person other than a member of this Board; Jay Ward seconded the motion, and it passed 4-0.

Alan Gross joined the meeting at 5:30pm.

Chair Tempesta reopened the public meeting at 5:30pm.

OTHERS PRESENT

Kai Kraemer with FACT TV, Jeremy Evans, Fire Chief Eric Mattson, Deputy Fire Chief Mike Burke, DPW Director Joe DiRusso, Cathy Bergstrom, Mark Scalera, Kim Varney Chandler, Bill and Jen Caswell, Ann Heffernon.

MINUTES

The regular meeting minutes of April 29, 2026 were considered. A motion was made by Mark LaBelle to approve the minutes as presented; Jay Ward seconded the motion; Bill Hutwelker suggested edits; the amended minutes were approved 5-0.

The non-public session minutes of April 29, 2026 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. Special Events Permit-Recreation Department-Town Wide Yard Sale

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

PUBLIC INPUT

Jeremy Evans, President of the local snowmobile club, explained to the Board that last winter, after his snowmobile trailer became stuck in the Riley Conservation area, he talked with Chair Tempesta who then spoke with DPW Director Joe DiRusso who facilitated the DPW plowing the area for the rest of the winter. Mr. Evans's club appreciated this service, so he researched and found a program which could provide some revenue to the Town for the plowing. He explained this is the first year the State of NH Bureau of Trails has reimbursed snowmobile clubs up to 70% of the charge for plowing through the Grant-In-Aid program. The club submitted a request to the program on behalf of the Town for $3000 for 10 plowing events at $300 each and were reimbursed 70%. He'd like to make this an annual process and discussed with the Board how this could be arranged so that the Town and the club could benefit. The Board will discuss this with the Finance Director to determine the process needed but were very interested in pursuing this idea. The request needs to be submitted by May 10th so Joe DiRusso will provide an invoice for Mr. Evans to submit.

Mark LaBelle made a motion to accept and expend under RSA 31:95-b $3000 donated by the Keene Snow Riders to thank the DPW Staff for their efforts with plowing and to post the revenue to DPW Miscellaneous and Income for the purpose. Jay Ward seconded the motion and the motion carried.

Mike Burke, Deputy Fire Chief, supplied a report to the board of furnishings needed for the new fire station. There was some confusion regarding which items might have been ordered by the contractor, but it is not clear if it was part of the balance due. The Board asked Deputy Burke to move forward to order the items needed once confirming what has already been ordered and for him to get back to the Board. Deputy Burke added that he said he is really looking forward to working in the new building.

NEW BUSINESS

A. Authorization & Approval of Funds for the Purchase of a 2026 Ford F-350 XL J282

Joe DiRusso explained that there is $80,000 in the Capital Improvement Plan for purchase of a new 1 ton pickup truck. He put this out to bid with both the State contract and locally in Swanzey; there is a new manager at Monadnock Ford who provided the lower bid and Joe would like approval to move ahead with the purchase.

A motion was made by Mark LaBelle to approve the purchase of a 2026 Ford F-350 XL Pick-up Truck and to further authorize the funds to come from the Highway and Cemetery Equipment Capital Reserve Fund not to exceed $80K. The motion was seconded by Jay Ward; with no further discussion, the motion passed 5-0.

The Board then asked Joe for an update on the road repair projects. He reported that the repaving of West Street is finished and under budget; next they will base coat Sugar Hill and then will be moving on to Partridgeberry Lane where there are several culverts that are 20 feet deep which will need to be replaced. They will need to shim to get a base coat applied but will wait to topcoat until next year to let the culverts settle. There will be more done on Marcy Hill this year before moving on to Christian Hill. Sugar Hill will be top coated at the end of the season, depending on the budget. The Board thanked Joe for the work being done.

APPOINTMENTS

A. Kim Varney Chandler, National Society for the Preservation of Covered Bridges

Kim Chandler introduced herself as a life member of the society; she also introduced the president, Bill Caswell and his wife Jen Caswell and explained that she had reached out to Town Administrator, Lori Rautiola, to discuss providing signage at the historic Thompson Bridge.

Mr. Caswell explained that their society is working with The William G. Pomeroy Foundation, which provides grants for signage to help raise awareness of the historic significance of covered bridges. The Society would apply for the sign; the Foundation would order and pay for the sign and post, including shipping. It takes 8-12 weeks for delivery. The only requirement from the Town would be to determine where it will be installed, to have it installed, and to arrange for a ceremony to dedicate it. This is the society's first bridge project, and they chose Swanzey because of the number of covered bridges within the town. Ms. Chandler added that the Historical Society of Cheshire County would like to partner in the process and they have also reached out to the Swanzey Historical Society.

Mr. Caswell explained that the National Society for the Preservation of Covered Bridges was incorporated in 1954 in Boston and is a 501(c)3 non-profit whose purpose is to preserve the nation's covered bridges. They also make donations such as providing fire retardants for bridges and for construction projects. They have 400 members.

Bill Hutwelker mentioned that one challenge the Town faces is damage to the bridges; Mr. Caswell expressed that this is a problem across the country. There are some towns that have installed steel headings, but there are liability concerns; he noted that signage is not generally effective. Chair Tempesta asked if he had any experience with the flashing lights that can sense a vehicle that would be too tall; Mr. Caswell knew of one town north of Atlanta, Georgia, but that there are issues with the sensors getting dirty, or covered with snow, and maintenance would be needed.

When asked what their society needs from the Town to proceed, Mr. Caswell replied that they will start the application and will need a letter of support from Town, photos of the location where it will be installed, and assurance that it will be installed.

Alan Gross made a motion to endorse the National Society for the Preservation of Covered Bridges to create a sign for the Thompson Bridge and to allow the Town Administrator to write a letter of support and include the location photos; the motion was seconded by Jay Ward; all were in favor and the motion passed.

NOMINATIONS

A. Jane Johnson - Reappointment for Alternate to Conservation Commission

A motion was made by Mark LaBelle to reappoint Jane Johnson as an alternate to the Conservation Commission. The motion was seconded by Jay Ward; with no further discussion, the motion passed 5-0.

A motion was made by Bill Hutwelker to nominate Gus Lorandeau as a commissioner to the Southwest Region Planning Commission for a four-year term ending at Town Meeting 2031. The motion was seconded by Jay Ward; with no further discussion, the motion passed 5-0.

NEW BUSINESS - continued

B. Authorization & Approval of Funds for Maintenance – Whitcomb Hall

There was discussion regarding the items that are requested for Whitcomb Hall. Chair Tempesta expressed concern about the quality of the chairs, which are only $16 each; he feels more research is needed for other choices.

A motion was made by Mark LaBelle to approve the recommendation from the Whitcomb Hall Committee and to authorize up to $5,000 from the Whitcomb Hall Non-restricted Trust Account for the cleaning and application of 2 coats of finish on the downstairs floors. Jay Ward seconded the motion and the motion carried.

PUBLIC INPUT

Ann Heffernon provided an update on Community Conversations which is a program sponsored by NH Humanities and Community Development Finance Authority who are funding 6 sites across NH and Swanzey has been approved. The event would be held at Whitcomb Hall; the grant is for refreshments, and for 2 people to help facilitate the group to find a project to bring the community together; they also provide $2000 in funding for the work on the project that is selected as well as an artist to depict the events of the day. Ann added that she has spoken with a couple of those who participated last year and there has been very positive response. She said the Governance committee will help with this and would like to get younger people involved; she said that Keene will also be doing this. Ann would like support to involve other committees as well as the Recreation Department. Timing was discussed and Ann said it needs to be in 2026. She asked for funds for advertising and for members from other committees as well as the Recreation Department. She will provide a quote for advertising. The Board thanked her for the work she's doing.

NEW BUSINESS - continued

C. Consideration of Swanzey Uncovered Distribution Method

Bill mentioned to the Board that in the past, the Town had 4 editions of the newsletter mailed out. Currently, due to printing costs escalating, 2 are now printed and 2 are electronic versions but the challenge is getting people to sign up to receive the newsletter electronically. Cathy Bergstrom offered to have a signup at the EDAC booth at Old Home Days. Bill felt there should be someone to organize this effort. Mark Scalera suggested that a note could be inserted into the tax bills before they are mailed; Bill thought that was a good idea, but that the envelopes might already be sealed when the Town receives them. Mark then suggested that perhaps there could be a message printed on the envelope. The Board will ask Lori to investigate this suggestion.

D. Establishment of a 250th Anniversary Committee

A motion was made by Mark LaBelle to authorize the establishment of a 250th Anniversary Committee to plan, coordinate, and support commemorative activities that honor the Town's history, celebrate its present, and engage the committee in preparation for its 250th anniversary. The Committee will work collaboratively to organize events, promote community involvement, and ensure a meaningful and inclusive celebration that reflects the Town's heritage and values. The motion was seconded by Jay Ward; with no further discussion, the motion passed 5-0.

E. The Board discussed the draft of the RFP for EMS services to the Town which Lori provided; the Board will review and respond to Chair Tempesta Thursday then he will discuss with Lori by noon on Friday for her to finalize and send out on Monday; Mike Burke offered to also provide his input on behalf of the Fire department.

F. The Job description for the new financial opening was discussed; some changes were suggested including keeping it on one page. Jim will let Meagen know the changes that are needed so it can be posted quickly; Bill expressed his appreciation to Meagen for the quick work getting the job description created.

OLD BUSINESS

None

ADMINISTRATIVE UPDATE

Jay let the Board know that the Partridgeberry Lane house is available for a site visit; if the Town doesn't take over the house, he will tear it down. The group will meet at 9AM on Monday at the site. Jay will send directions.

CORRESPONDENCE

None

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 7:00pm.

Respectfully Submitted,

Susan Ells, Recording Secretary

Approved on May 20, 2026