Town of Swanzey, New Hampshire
Board of Selectmen
Meeting – May 20, 2026
Whitcomb Hall
17 Main Street, Swanzey, NH

CALL TO ORDER
The meeting was called to order by Chair James Tempesta at 4:30pm at Whitcomb Hall, Main Street, Swanzey, NH. Other members present were Selectmen Mark LaBelle, W William Hutwelker, Alan Gross, and Town Administrator Lori Rautiola.

ABSENT: Jay Ward

OTHERS PRESENT
Barbara Skuly, Bob Audette, Cheri Domina, Elizabeth Ferland (Keene City Manager), and Mark Zankel from ReVision Energy.

The Board discussed the possibility of joining a group net-metering account with the City of Keene.

Chair Tempesta recessed the meeting at 5pm.

The meeting was reconvened at 5:30pm.

OTHERS PRESENT
Kai Kraemer with FACT TV, Recording Secretary Susan Ells, Brian Simonds, Deputy Fire Chief Mike Burke, Fire Chief Eric Mattson, Scott Self, County Commissioner Skip DiBernardo, County Administrator Chris Coates, County Director of Finance Sheryl Trombly, County Commissioner Terry Clark, Ed Atkins from Cheshire County EMS, Cathy Bergstrom, and DPW Director Joe DiRusso.

Alan Gross announced that Ken Colby passed away and asked for a moment of silence.

MINUTES
The regular meeting minutes of May 6, 2026, May 11, 2026, and May 12, 2026, were considered. A motion was made by Mark LaBelle to approve the minutes as presented. Alan Gross seconded the motion, and it passed 4-0.

The non-public session minutes of May 6, 2026, Session 1 and 2 were considered. A motion was made by Mark LaBelle to approve the minutes as presented. Alan Gross seconded the motion, and it passed 4-0.

CONSENT AGENDA
A. Payroll Manifest
B. Accounts Payable Manifest
C. Special Events Permit-Cheshire Fairgrounds-Country Fest
D. Special Events Permit-Frogg Brewing-Winkfest
E. Special Events Permit-Cheshire Fairgrounds-Kingdom to the Counties 2026
F. Excavation Tax Levy – M/224 L/26
G. Yield Tax Levy – M/233 L/41
H. Land Use Change – M/254 L/38 , M/254 L38-1, M/248 L42

A motion was made by Mark LaBelle to approve the Consent Agenda. Bill Hutwelker seconded the motion, and it passed 4-0.

PUBLIC INPUT

Brian Simonds, who lives on Foxglove Lane, asked for information on the rumors regarding a piece of property being donated to the Town, presumably so the owner could avoid paying taxes. Mr. Simonds expressed his concern about this, stating it would be moving the tax burden onto the other taxpayers. Chair Tempesta explained that no decision has been made at this time, but they hope to decide by the next meeting on June 3. Bill Hutwelker clarified that there are 2 properties, but the proposal would be to donate the uninhabited property. He added that the owner has the option of providing a conservation easement which would also affect tax revenue, and that this consideration is at a very preliminary stage. Mr. Simonds was thanked for bringing his concerns to the Board.

NOMINATIONS

A. Consideration of Appointment of Victoria Ames as Planning Board Representative to SWRPC

A motion was made by Mark LaBelle to appoint Victoria Ames as a Planning Board Representative to Southwest Regional Planning Commission, to a 2-year term through the Town meeting 2028. The motion was seconded by Alan Gross. With no further discussion, the motion passed.

APPOINTMENTS

A. Chris Coates, County Administrator – County Services

County Administrator, Chris Coates and Director of Finance, Sheryl Trombly presented the Board with reports from the County. They have just completed a 5-month tour of every community in Cheshire County with the goal to provide education regarding the programs the County provides and how costs are determined. Publicity is provided via a monthly radio show, podcasts, and Instagram to try to engage the community to let them know what is going on in the County. As an overview, Cheshire County is one of 10 in the State, covering 729 miles and 22 towns plus the City of Keene. There are 20 departments and the County employs almost 500 employees.

One department is Maplewood Nursing Home and Assisted Living. When it was determined that the building needed upgrading, they garnered support in the County and ultimately bonded an expansion to renovate and expand the facility and improve the quality of life for the residents and the staff. They have a capacity of 150 residents but only have 115 currently due to staffing issues, but they have a waitlist if they could hire more staff. The facility has Assisted Living with 20 apartments which are full.

Department of Corrections' facility has a bond that will be ending in 2027. The current census is 115 inmates, 60 of which are local and the rest are federal inmates. The County is required to tour the facility every 6 months and to interview staff and inmates and then report to the Attorney General. The revenue of $2 Million offsets costs.

Cheshire County EMS is currently running 5 ambulances and paramedic intercept. They have a contractual relationship with 19 communities including Keene for 911 calls and perform all transfers for Cheshire Medical Center. They have contracted with a private company called Smart Ride to provide wheelchair runs which takes the pressure off the ambulances; in Swanzey alone, they provide 1000 - 1200 runs a year.

Connected Families is a program the County runs to work with families to reduce out of district placement of high-risk children. The State liked the program so much that they are having Cheshire County run this in other counties which generates revenue and off-sets taxes and keeps the children in their homes in the community.

The Sheriff's Dispatch is evolving by working in communities that are having trouble filling police positions. They have a contractual agreement with SAU 29 for truancy work at the Middle School for 180 days/year and could provide a Safety Resource Officer for MRMSHS if they can find someone to fill the position.

Cheshire is the only county that has a Grants department, and they are constantly applying for and receiving grants. One example is when Sheriff Dispatch needed to replace radio frequency equipment at a cost of $4.4 million, they were successful in getting this covered through grants. Another example is that they have coordinated with towns to write grants for the rail trails; they are continually proactively seeking funds to help the whole community.

Sheryl Trombly explained how county taxes are determined and pointed out that taxes only increased from 2019 to 2025 by an overall average of less than 1%. She said they try to educate the citizens of what the county does for them and that they are constantly trying to find other sources of revenue in order to not increase taxes.

Cheshire County is in a relationship with River Valley and Keene State College with nursing programs to increase the number of nurses in the region; they are accepting their second visa nurse from Canada who will provide a 3-year commitment.

The County provides a Grant writing program that has taught 70 individuals who have been very successful; for instance, Montessori School wrote 6 grants and received all 6. The Grant Director could support the Town with grant writing assistance. They also provide classes; the next class will be in September.

B. Josh Whipple, Recycling Manager, Building Maintenance on the New Addition

The Chair explained that the needs will be taken care of by DPW.

C. Scott Self, Chair, Wastewater Committee – W. Swanzey Wastewater Committee Update

Scott Self explained the W. Swanzey Wastewater Committee voted to recommend to the Board to change the rate structure and charge per gallon instead of per unit. They estimate this will increase the bills by about 2/3. Rates have not increased in the 40 years since the plant was built. Joe DiRusso would like a letter to go out with the bills in June to inform the users of the proposed plan to pump the sewage to Keene.

Scott said the committee was planning to create an RFP for engineering for the project but are reconsidering that step. They feel it would be much wiser to continue with Underwood Engineering since they've been so involved already. Joe said he spoke with DES and this could be considered another phase of the previous project so it wouldn't need an RFP. When they investigated more, they discovered that Underwood did more work than they thought; Lori added that Underwood is also helping with obtaining grants. The committee is meeting tomorrow with the City of Keene.

Scott added that he approached the Governance Committee about getting the word out to public. He said that Steve Bittel will help to determine the rates. Bill suggested organizing some meetings regarding the proposed project to start informing the public and to notify the users about the change in billing methods. This information could be included in the bills that are sent in June.

NEW BUSINESS

A. Consideration & Approval - Letter to W. Swanzey Wastewater Users

Mark LaBelle made a motion to approve the letter as presented by DPW Director, Joe DiRusso. The motion was seconded by Alan Gross. With no further discussion, the motion passed.

B. Approval & Authorization of Funds for New Fire Station IT and Supplies

There was a discussion about the costs that were not part of the bond; not all the invoices are in, but $75,000 were included in soft costs.

C. Discussion on Use of Carpenter Home

Lori gave a brief background of the Carpenter home adding that for the past 3 years it has been leased to Honey Bee Hollow for day care. Their agreement is a 1-year lease which will be due to be renegotiated on the first of July. The business wants to expand class sizes and increase the number of staff, but the building needs some significant renovations. They might qualify for grant funding if they have a commitment from the Town. Lori asked the Board to consider long-term benefits for the building. There is only about $8K available for repairs so top priorities need to be determined. Joe said the building will be pressure washed; the roof was repaired, and they are paving the roadway, but not the parking lot. Lori shared that if Honey Bee can't get funding for expansion, the business might have to move to accommodate the growth. If that happens, what would the Town want to do with the building. Lori shared that ultimately, the business would like a long-term lease (such as 20 years) to increase their chances of getting grant funding for the building. The Board did not oppose a long-term lease agreement which would need to go before the voters. Lori will do some research regarding terms of a lease to put on the warrant next year.

D. Proposal for Foundation Assessment- Grange Hall

Lori informed the Board that the letter of intent was accepted for a grant through LCHIP. There are conflicting recommendations about work needed on the foundation. Lori recommended that since the Town has had two differing assessments on the foundation, a third party should assess the foundation.

Mark LaBelle made a motion to accept the proposal from Right Track Design, Inc. in the amount of $1,950, as stated in the Statement of Work dated May 11, 2026, and further authorize the withdrawal of funds to come from the Golden Rod Grange Capital Reserve Fund for this purpose. The motion was seconded by Bill Hutwelker. All were in favor and the motion passed.

E. Consideration of Request for Hardware – Two (2) Computers

Lori explained that there is not a current schedule to replace computers on a rotating basis. The Town Clerk's office is struggling with their aging machines and causing delays with customer service. She recommended purchasing two desktop computers for the Town Clerks office.

Mark LaBelle made a motion to authorize up to $3000 for the purchase of two computers and to further authorize the funds to come from the Town Hall Information Management Systems Expendable Trust Fund for this purpose. The motion was seconded by Alan Gross. With no further discussion, the motion passed.

F. Assessing – Elderly and Disabled Tax Deferral Application

a. M/243 L/55/0/MH0/90
b. M/227 L/10
c. M/101 L/12

Mark LaBelle made a motion to approve the slate of Elderly and Disabled Tax Deferral Applications. The motion was seconded by Alan Gross. With no further discussion, the motion passed.

G. Assessing – Veteran's Tax Credit/Exemption

a. M/240 L/40

Mark Labelle made a motion to approve the Veteran's Tax Exemption for M 240 L40. The motion was seconded by Alan Gross. With no further discussion, the motion passed.

H. Authorization to Sign - Water Pollution Control Revolving Loan Fund Program (Project No. CS-330191-08) – Supplemental Loan Agreement.

Mark LaBelle made a motion to authorize the Town Administrator, Lori Rautiola, to sign the Supplemental Loan Agreement for the Water Pollution Control Revolving Loan Fund Program. The motion was seconded by Alan Gross. With no further discussion, the motion passed.

OLD BUSINESS

Lori spoke with Sharon Greatbatch and Rick Robichard regarding purchasing chair covers for Whitcomb Hall, adding they will be purchasing some black covers for about $160 from the budget. She also asked the Board to approve the purchase of six round tables, one chair dolly and two table dollies.

Mark LaBelle made a motion to expend up to $3000 from the Whitcomb Hall Expendable Trust Fund to purchase 1 event chair dolly, 2 folding table dollies, 6 round tables, and some chair covers; Alan Gross seconded. With no further discussion, the motion passed.

The Board discussed the Finance Director opening, funding sources, and interview dates.

The Board discussed creating a committee to research and make recommendations for EMS options. This will be added to the next agenda.

PUBLIC INPUT

Scott Self asked for consensus whether the Wastewater Committee should keep working on the rates. The consensus was to keep it with the committee.

ADJOURNMENT

A motion was made by Mark Labelle to adjourn the meeting; Bill Hutwelker seconded the motion, and it passed 4-0.

Adjournment occurred at 7:12pm.

Respectfully Submitted,

Susan Ells, Recording Secretary

Approved on June 3, 2026