Town of Swanzey, New Hampshire
Board of Selectmen
Meeting – September 15, 2026
Swanzey Fire Station
321 Old Homestead Hwy, Swanzey, NH

CALL TO ORDER

The meeting was called to order by Chair James Tempesta at 09:35 am at the Swanzey Fire Station Old Homestead Hwy, Swanzey, NH. Other members present were Selectmen Mark LaBelle, W William Hutwelker, James Ward. Also present were HR Coordinator Meagen Kerris and Administrative Assistant Katie Collins, Fire Chief Eric Mattson, Assistant Chief Mick Sanchez, Deputy Chief Mike Burke.

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 9:35 am. Present were James Tempesta, Mark LaBelle, W. William Hutwelker III and James Ward. Alan Gross joined at 9:58am. Also present was Fire Chief Eric Mattson and Administrative Assistant Katie Collins.

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 10:05 am.

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 5-0.

PUBLIC SESSION

Fire Department Update: Chair Tempesta provided an update on the progress of the new fire station. Meetings and training are now being held at the new station. Mick Sanchez noted that Hazmat training was recently held at the station.

Chair Tempesta discussed the importance of keeping the new station clean, organized, and orderly. Mick stated that maintaining the station can be difficult with only three members available to assist, particularly when members are limited on time due to training requirements.

Chair Tempesta stated that an updated list of active members is needed due to increasing workers' compensation costs. Mick stated that he would provide the list by the following week. Chair Tempesta discussed the need to remove members who are no longer actively participating. Mick explained that the current requirements include responding to 25 calls per year and attending at least half of the required training. Alan Gross commented that seeing inactive members removed may encourage other members to participate more regularly.

Chair Tempesta reminded the Fire Department to be prepared for the upcoming Capital Improvement Program (CIP) process and noted that last year's submission did not go well. He emphasized the importance of reviewing and being prepared to support any items submitted for the upcoming CIP.

Mike Burke discussed a potential settlement that may provide an opportunity to replace older fire engines with newer equipment. He will obtain additional information and follow up with the Board. Chair Tempesta also suggested looking into equipment that the City of Keene may be replacing or disposing of.

Mick provided an update on the upcoming Open House and discussed plans for the event, including potential parking concerns. Chair Tempesta suggested that the Selectboard provide the food for the event so that Fire Department members can focus on giving tours and interacting with attendees. All Selectboard members agreed with the suggestion.

Mick said he would come up with a list of questions he thinks people may ask and share them with Mike and Eric to make sure they are all on the same page. Chair Tempesta asked if signs would be posted, and Mick said he would put up the Fire Department training signs. Chair Tempesta asked how calls would be handled during the event. Mick said other stations would respond to calls. There was also discussion about putting a flag on a ladder truck. Mick left the meeting at 10:46 a.m.

Mark LaBelle spoke about fire ponds being included in the CIP and asked about maintenance of the ponds. Eric stated that the fire department is maintaining the fire ponds. Eric also noted that permits for fire ponds can be extensive and that the Town needs to continue building up the number of fire ponds over the years. Tempesta asked how many fire ponds are currently active and whether they are tested. Eric said the ponds are used during fires. Mark asked if a list of active fire ponds could be provided.

Mark also spoke about the run cars and asked where we currently stand with them. Mark said Rene Doyle is waiting for Eric. Mike said they are waiting for an email regarding equipment. Eric said he would follow up. Mark then asked about assembly permits and how often they are checked. Mark noted that there were several buildings with expired permits posted. Eric explained that the permits had been issued and that it is the responsibility of the property owner to display the permit. He stated that the 2026 permits had been provided to the schools and Pilgrim Pines. Jay Ward suggested that, going forward, permit recipients be asked to post the permits when they are issued.

The Board and Fire Department continued discussion regarding fire ponds. Bill Hutwelker said that in the past the Town used to clean up the fire ponds and asked why that was no longer being done. There was discussion about obtaining equipment to assist with cleaning and maintaining the ponds. Bill asked about the Planning Board's policy regarding fire ponds required for development, including the fire pond in Woodland Heights, and who is responsible for maintaining it. Eric said the association is responsible for maintaining that pond because it is not Town property, and if the Fire Department used water from the pond, we would have to replenish it. Tempesta asked why the responsibility falls on the association rather than the Town and what the Town does if a pond is not at capacity. Discussion included possibly notifying the association when a pond is not meeting the required standard.

Mike noted that it is difficult to get volunteers to respond to calls, let alone have them available to cut brush and maintain the ponds. Tempesta asked whether DPW employees could be hired to cut the brush. Bill said the Rail Trail is looking into equipment that could potentially be used for this purpose.

Chair Tempesta asked how often the Fire Department uses the fire ponds. Eric said one had been used last year. Mike said fire ponds are important and that it would benefit the Town to purchase the water department.

Mike provided an update on the Fire Department. He said he had spoken with the State regarding obtaining Fire Department signs and was told there would be no issue and that the signs should be completed in approximately one month. He also reported that the compressor is expected to arrive in October, the flagpole is coming in, the generator is expected in November, and the fence has been completed. Jay stated that a list of reimbursements had been sent out.

Eric returned to the discussion of fire ponds and asked where the fire ponds are that he does not maintain. Eric stated that the ponds the Town currently has are all accessible. Mike said the Fire Department will put together a book containing information on the fire ponds, including photographs and their locations. Alan left the meeting at 11:28 a.m.

Bill then spoke about a 10-99 grant and suggested looking into what the grant could be used for. He suggested that the Fire Department consider including the grant in its budget and look at possible uses, such as a fire escape.

Mark spoke about a meeting room for Emergency Management and Joint Loss Management. Eric said they were all set and could use the meeting room at the station.

Jay ended the meeting by asking what the Selectboard could do to help the Fire Department.

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 11:35 am.

Respectfully Submitted,

Katie Collins, Administrative Assistant

Approved on October 7, 2026