Swanzey Governance Committee

11/19/25

Call to order 3:01 PM

In attendance; Ann Heffernon, Michael York, Mark Scalera, Scott Self, Richard Lane, Eric May, Lee Dunham, Mark Labelle, Ben Tilton, David Stinson

Guests; Sheila Heffernon, Bill Hattendorf, Michelle Mack, Ed Mack

Self moved to approve meeting notes of 11/7/25, seconded by Scalera.

Quick recap

The Swanzey Governance Committee discussed social media metrics and plans for presenting recommendations to the Selectboard regarding town meeting formats vs SB2. The group reviewed various aspects of town governance, including voting procedures, information tables at polling places, and election logistics, while also addressing the need for improved town communication systems. The committee concluded by discussing plans to transition from deliberative sessions to open town meetings, with a focus on increasing voter participation and community engagement through better communication strategies.

Board Meeting Procedures Review

The board discussed meeting procedures and attendance recording. Heffernon also raised a technical question about AI and meeting notes, which was addressed by suggesting adding a note in the next minutes to clarify the procedure. She will verify.

Social Media Metrics and Recommendations

The committee reviewed social media metrics, noting 3,576 views on their Facebook page and over 100 views per video, with one video reaching 168 views. They discussed plans for presenting recommendations to the Select Board, with two options to choose from, and agreed to prepare for a 30-minute presentation. The group also considered creating additional videos after the Select Board's decision, though timing and committee dissolution may impact this plan. Depending on the decision of the Selectboard, we will determine this.

Swanzey Governance Committee Decision

The Committee discussed and compared two versions for presenting their recommendation to the board regarding the town meeting format. They decided to focus on Self's version which more clearly addresses the technicalities, and agreed to use more official terminology.

Town Meeting Logistics Planning

The group discussed recommendations for town governance and meeting logistics. Heffernon proposed formatting supplemental suggestions as a separate list and will redistribute the updated document to the committee for editing. The team brainstormed requirements for holding a town meeting at the high school, including the need for multiple rooms, childcare, snacks, a sound system, video display, and additional assistant moderators to assist in managing the voting process. They also discussed giving out colored cards, wristbands, and yes/no slips at voter check-in. They debated the feasibility of conducting a dry run, with Heffernon expressing concerns about the logistics and costs involved.

Planning Board Information Table Discussion

The group discussed creating an information table outside polling places to explain zoning questions. They noted that while this would be useful for ballot questions that require town meeting approval, it wouldn't be necessary for items discussed and voted on during regular board meetings. York suggested checking with the Secretary of State about the required distance from polling places for such tables, as there was uncertainty about whether they could be placed inside or outside the building.

The group discussed election procedures and parking logistics for polling places. They agreed to recommend increasing the number of handicap-parking spaces and creating more distance between candidate signs and the polling entrance to accommodate voters with disabilities. *They clarified that while they could provide recommendations, enforcement of election day activities would be the moderator's responsibility, including managing interactions between voters and campaign volunteers.*

Improving Town Communication Forums

The committee feels there is a need for increased communication to our residents. The group then focused on establishing regular, in-person forums to improve town communication, with a proposal for 4 quarterly meetings held in different locations such as the Community House, Swanzey Lake, Brown Fields, the Fire Station and the Grange. The Committee discussed improving town communication systems, including creating a town government app and expanding the town citizen email list for regular updates. They agreed to consult with Adam Paquette about avoiding redundancy in communication efforts and to leave the current draft as is for further refinement. May suggested hiring a dedicated communications professional to manage information flow more effectively, acknowledging that volunteer management could become overwhelming.

Town Governance and Meeting Format

The committee plan to submit their recommendations to the Selectboard on December 10th, 2025 for inclusion on the 2026 warrant. Self advised that the entire committee should attend. Heffernon will present the recommendation but will count on other members of the group to provide historical context and to answer questions. Also noted was that the Selectboard may not make the decision to accept or adopt the recommendation at the presentation. They may have to consider the idea and there may need to be an open hearing

The supplemental suggestions will be included, but not presented. We acknowledge the challenges in implementing all of the suggestions.

Next steps

- Heffernon: rewrite and edit the recommendations document with corrections discussed and send out to all committee members
- Heffernon: shorten the mandate to first one or two sentences and add to the beginning of the recommendation
- Heffernon: schedule one more committee meeting before December 10th to vote on final resolution
- Committee members: attend Select Board meeting on December 10th at 5:30 PM to present recommendations
- Heffernon: look up information about towns that have videos of their town meetings
- Heffernon: get in touch with Adam Paquette to coordinate and avoid redundancy with his quarterly informational meetings

Motion to adjourn meeting, Scalera, seconded, Labelle at 4:09 PM

Respectfully Submitted by Ann Heffernon with AI supplementation

Meeting notes approved 12/1/25