Swanzey Governance Committee Meeting

8.21.25

In attendance:

Bill Hutwelker, James Tempesta, Mark LaBelle, Ann Heffernon, Cathy Bergstrom, Lee Dunham, Francis Faulkner, Stacey Goodale, Jon Hoden, Greg Johnson, Dan LaClair, Richard Lane, Eric May, Jessica Sanchez, Mark Scalera, Scott Self, Susan Simonds, David Stinson, Michael York,

Called to order 6:09pm.

Bill Hutwelker opened meeting and welcomed committee members and laid out the purpose of the committee from the Swanzey Selectboard (Bill Hutwelker, Jim Tempesta & Mark LaBelle);

The impetus for forming this commitee came from conversations regarding the lack of community spirit and desire to go back to town meetings. (Deliberative Sessions are attended by only 50/60 people, a much smaller number than actual voters in our town).

The committee was charged to study and formulate a plan or recommondations for the future of Swanzey's government.

The Selctboard members then departed.

Nomination of Vice-Chair: Mike York was nominated by Dan LeClair, seconded by Scott Self. Moved and approved, all in favor.

The chair then spoke about our process:

The role of the Selectboard; the process we will follow, the rules.

There was a brief discussion about the town budget process (deliberative session vs town meeting) and the variety of options for a governing structure: other systems—charter, council, town manager.

The committee will look at our current structure with the knowledge that a community under 10K creates some limits legally for the Selectboard. However, we may be over that 10K threshold within the next 5 years.

The hope is that by the end of November or sooner our recommendations will be given to the Selectboard.

David Stinson asked if there is a current charter for town governance and are we expected to come up with language (Yes, we will be supplied with the charter, and the selectboard would take our recommondations and create the language)

Jon Hoden reminded us that we voted to increase the selectboard to 5 people at the election in March of 2025.

Bill Hutwelker told us that there has been some discussion regarding changing the town administration to town manager position. We do have a contract with the current Administrator for three years. A town manager search would be costly, the salary would be higher and said person would need their own asstistant. This is a possibilty down the road. This would however reduce the ability of the towns people to be in charge of the town's governance.

Jim Tempesta stated that town meetings are important. We may have lost a couple of important votes last year because people are not informed and the ballot language is confusing.

Dan Leclair wondered if the town can send out the warrant articles in plain English. We have in the past.

A new law states that any item on the warrant that has an impact on the tax rate must have an explanation on the ballot. This will create a more cumbersome and confusing ballot.

Jon Hurt– For an example (to the above) The exact amount that the new fire station will cost would have to be spelled out in detail more than it was on the ballot.

Richard Lane asked can we create focus groups for different parts of the town to explain and educate?

It would be helpful to have a timeline of the history of Swanzey's goernance.

Greg Johnson asked if the state has municipal committees that can help us with changes. Scott advised that the Municipal Association could assist, but we need to have specific questions regarding the RSA.

Cathy Bergstrom would like us to a clear and plausable plan. For example, with the Fire Station if we had started years ago with "here is what we currently have/here is what we could have" we might have been able to manage that vote in a shorter time frame.

Francis Faulkner wondered if having switched to SB2 we put more information in front of voters who are less educated on the information?

In doing this, how can we get more voters involved?

How can we communicate with as many citizens as possible?

The committee adjourned at 700pm after deciding to meet next on Monday, August 25, at 5:30pm.