Town of Swanzey, New Hampshire
Swanzey Governance Committee
Meeting – 9.22.25
Whitcomb Hall
17 Main Street, Swanzey, NH

Note: Draft Minutes are subject to review, correction and approval by the Board. Review and approval of Minutes generally takes place at the next regularly scheduled meeting of the Board.

CALL TO ORDER

The meeting was called to order by Chair Ann Heffernon, at 5:05 pm. at Whitcomb Hall, Main Street, Swanzey, NH. Other members present were Michael York, Vice Chair, Richard Lane, Lee Dunham, Mark Scalera, Frances Faulkner, Scott Self, Cathy Bergstrom, David Stinson, Lori Ratiola, Jessica Ramsey -Sanchez, Dan LeClair, Bill Hutwelker

OTHERS PRESENT

Kristin Reynolds

MINUTES

The regular meeting minutes of 9.3.25 were considered. There was a motion by Stinson to approve the minutes as amended (page 3 of notes reference to LaBelle); the motion was seconded by Self and there was no further discussion. All were in favor and the motion passed. Ramsey Sanchez was a nay.

NEW BUSINESS

Heffernon notes that we will have two new members. We will vote them in once they have have been sworn in.
Regarding swearing in: Members who are at the meeting tonight who have not taken care of this are going on Wednesday to the town hall for this. Heffernon will send an email to those who have not followed up.
Scalera has concern about members who are not attending the SGC meetings and whether or not they should be permitted to stay on the committee. It is pointed out that members that are not sworn in may not vote. Our mechanism is that if they are not sworn in they are off.
Dunham makes a presentation to us regarding the history of town meetings in Swanzey. The paper presentation is attached. (Incorporate history, SB2 in 2005 because of the petition because not enough participation was happening in town meeting. People are looking forward to going back to this).

Stinson asks if there has been a conflict over sb2? Discussion about how town employees outweighed # of town people at the deliberative session. Dunham discusses last year's school meeting and how Richmond towns people swayed the outcome of the session.
Stinson; Was there a concern in 2003 that people were not coming to the town meeting? Yes. The school had the same issue. School first moved to SB2 by petition then vote, followed the next year by the town..
Ramsey-Sanchez notes that there is no absentee ballot for town meeting and this is a concern. The absentee ballot is still available for the election.
Discussion of number of people not coming to deliberative session. Even if there was major issue, people do not attend.

Scalera; A town meeting situation would give people the opportunity to learn or as Stinson says pass the info on to others sharing it to a broader audience.
Ramsey- Sanchez asks what the time frame for the meeting would be? Evening? Saturdays? Polls would be open in the afternoon through the evening. The Rsa only states day. Not time. It could be changed to April by a vote by the town. Dick asks does the state deterimine the time that the polls are open? No.

Heffernon to follow up on Social Media posting on town Facebook page. Ratiola says they will post the initial intro post, please send it to Christine
Bergstrom and Ramsey-Sanchez have agreed to help with posting and monitoring social media. Ann asks about a third person to watch and give feedback on any posts on. Scalera asks for York to help with this. York agrees.
Discsussion/reminder of when and how to respond to comments on posts.

Heffernon gave our guest a brief description of our hope to have four information sessions a year. Reynolds (guest)asks us to consider doing a video Zoom session and recording it like an interview but with two people from committee. Doing these on different topics

Ramsey-Sanchez; Next post should define for people the difference between deliberative and vote verses tradtional town meeting. Make this an educational post If people do not understand a warrant article they vote against it

Lane; Do a video of each warrant article. Can Fact TV do this? Hutwelker asks if we can do this as a town

Heffernon asks about whose name should be on the LTE. The committee decided it should be just York and Heffernon

Mock town hall(Stinson this would be an explanation of what this would be like).We need to work on presentation. You can debate with whomever is not in agreement with you or in agreement and then you vote. Debate and then decide. We make people more comfortable with the process.

Scalera; Town meeting mock up - should we do it? Will it be well attended? Can we expect participation?

LeClair; If we taped it people can watch afterward.

Ramsey-Sanchez; would a facebook poll be something we could do to see if we have enough interest? This idea receives a positive response.

Heffernon leaves and York takes over as chair

York; What should we do going forward about members not showing up? How many unexcused absences is acceptable? Members not sworn in? Send email?

LeClair; 3 weeks in a row unexcused needs action. Anyone already sworn in would need to formally resign.

Self; we aren't removing anyone, but need to reach out to see if they still want to participate.

Motion by Self- Any one who hasn't yet been sworn in or has missed 3 weeks in a row thus far should get an email asking if they still intend to participate.

LeClair seconded.

Unanimous in favor

York; Anything we should not concern ourselves with?

Budget Committee-

Lane; Budget committee Capital Improvement Program Committee exists & budget committee may be redundant

Discussion ensued - for & against governance committee taking on task of further looking into budget committee (Self, Stinson, & York).

York; - Operating budget would be the focus. Different than CIPC. We need to look at it to take some of the burden off of the town administrator, et al. Would be by election - Steve Bittel may be able to shed some light on what that would look like with current CIPC. Thinks it should be advisory in nature.

Dunham; Would be with the warrant on the ballot if it is recommended by budget committee.

York; there are options to how it is set up - elected or appointed members.

Hutwelker suggests that if we want feedback from the select board we should formally make a proposal so the select board has specifics to give feedback

New business –

Per suggestion by Hutwelker discuss further at next meeting a formal proposal to request feedback/recommendation from Select Board about budget committee. Proposal should include terms, expectations, number of members, how the committee will interact. Will it be advisory only?

York; 3-15 members including a select board member if set up that way

Ratiola; asked have we discussed the 5 member vs 3 member select board and if so, did we come to a conclusion as to whether we should pursue anything relevant to that.

Stinson, Self, Scalera & Ramsey-Sanchez all answered - General consensus - Yes the committee did discuss, but given that we just voted & passed last March to go to 5 member select board & since we'll be voting in 2026 on 1 of the 3 existing, along with 2 new members, that it would not be prudent to consider further discussion of a possible reversal on the same ballot. It may cause confusion as well as concern as to why as a committee we would seek to reverse the vote before even trying a 5 member select board.

Scalera; motion to adjourn

LeClair or York? - seconded

All in favor - meeting adjourned

ADJOURNMENT

There was a motion by Scalera to adjourn the meeting which was seconded by LeClair and or York there was no further discussion. All were in favor and the motion passed. Adjournment occurred at 4:50 PM

Respectfully Submitted,

Ann Heffernon & Jessica Ramsey-Sanchez, Recording Secretaries

Approved on