11.7.25

Swanzey Governance Committee meeting

Present; Ann Heffernon, Mike York, Scott Self, Lee Dunham, David Stinson, Ben Tilton, Eric May, Jessica Ramsey-Sanchez, Mark Scalera

Quick recap

The meeting began with a brief explanation by York on being careful regarding speaking about committee business outside of our meetings. Heffernon sought clarification from York about what information can be shared publicly. Administrative discussions about school units and budget matters, including a proposed change to a deliberative session date and discussion of a budget-related bill. The group then addressed town meeting formats, debating between traditional open town meetings versus the current SB2 system while considering various recommendations and communication strategies. The committee concluded by discussing voting locations and procedures, event planning for March, and the need for community engagement through various communication channels. Dunham noted that the Selectboard wants something to be done and should have the capacity to fund the changes we will be recommending.

Summary

Traditional vs. Modern Town Meetings

There was, again, a brief discussion of making a motion regarding our decision to go from SB2 to Open Town Meeting . The committee discussed the format of town meetings. They debated the merits of returning to traditional town meetings versus maintaining the current SB2 system, with Heffernon expressing concerns about the potential costs and complexity of a traditional town meeting. It is felt that the Selectboard can make the funds available should they agree to this outcome. The committee agreed to continue exploring the possibility of implementing a traditional town meeting format, while also focusing on improving information dissemination to residents.

Town Meeting Format Recommendations, Take one

The committee discussed recommendations for town meeting formats and agreed to present both a primary recommendation for open town meeting and a supplement with options for both SB2 deliberative sessions and Open Town Meeting. Creating additional video content should be held off until we have feedback on the current videos. The committee decided to create a Facebook poll to gauge engagement with their recent videos and plan to distribute flyers at the upcoming Veterans Day ceremony. The group also discussed the possibility of the town hiring a communications

director, though they acknowledged budget constraints for this. It could be requested vis petition, and it could be part-time. Further discussion on budget hearings, and both York and Self explain that the Selectboard meetings with the budget presentations are public hearings. Meaning, if our recommendation is taken and requires funding, it will be on the budget in 2026 and therefore have a public hearing.

Voting Location Recommendations Discussion

The group discussed recommendations for voting locations and procedures, focusing on the high school as the correct site. They agreed to add to our request that the town provide supplemental information tables outside polling places to help voters understand warrants and candidates, while ensuring no interference with the voting process. Heffernon emphasized the importance of being prepared to defend their recommendations to the town. The discussion also touched on parking issues at voting locations and the need for assistant moderators in case of overflow crowds at either the Open Town meeting or a Deliberative session.

Enhancing Town Meeting Structures

The committee discussed recommendations for town meeting structures. They agreed to draft a recommendation emphasizing the importance of informed voting and timely decision-making, noting that even smaller attendance at traditional meetings would result in more informed voters/voting. The group also considered adding quarterly meetings in different villages as a separate recommendation, with potential locations already identified.

March Event Planning Recommendations

The group discussed recommendations for an event in March that would encourage community participation and provide information about town governance. They agreed to finalize and submit their recommendation by the end of November, with plans to present it in person to the Selectboard. Heffernon will request this to be placed on their agenda. The group also decided to create a Facebook poll with three basic questions to gather public input, and Heffernon will email these questions to Ramsey-Sanchez who will post them individually.

Next steps

Ann: check and see if we can have a post on the sign at Town Hall advertising our video's

- Ann: Print 20 flyers for David to distribute at Veterans Day ceremony on Tuesday, November 11th at 11am Done
- Ann: Write down Edmund's email to add him to committee communications distribution list
- Jessica: Create Facebook poll with questions regarding posted videos and post to multiple Swanzey Facebook pages Done

- Jessica: Post all committee videos to additional Facebook groups including Westport page
- Ann: Meet with Kristen and Katie to discuss ways to implement information distribution improvements
- Ann: Retype and send out draft recommendation document to all committee members for review First draft done
- Ann: Request to be placed on Select Board agenda for presentation, tentatively for meeting around November 24th or early December Done
- Ann: Email Jessica the three basic questions discussed for the Facebook poll Done
- Ann: Email town council RSA documents to committee members who want to review them Done
- Mike: Follow up with Lori to obtain Brian Rogers' petition as soon as Select Board receives it

These notes were taken by Ann Heffernon with the assistance of AI

Respectfully submitted,

Ann Heffernon