Swanzey Governance Committee Meeting 10.26.26

Call to order 5:35 PM

In attendance-

Ann Heffernon, Mark Labell, Mike York, Scott Self, Dan LeClair, Josh Guion, Dick Lane, Jessica Sanchez

Approval of the August minutes was not resolved during the discussion.

The committee focused on public education for the proposed Public Works building and upcoming wastewater and water-system projects.

Public Works

- Heffernon said the Select Board wants the committee to prioritize Public Works and sewer communications. The Public Works open house is scheduled for December 5 at 9 a.m.; its message should explain how the project protects town assets while maintaining a stable town tax rate.
- Members discussed showing the building's safety and operational needs, including snowplow installation, vehicle maintenance space, and employee breaks. Short walkthrough videos, a PowerPoint, digital posts, and a Shopper article were discussed. Any cost-saving examples should be verified and framed as cost avoidance or completed work, not unsupported savings.
- The town's overall debt service is projected to decrease by 3.5% in 2027 even if the building bond is issued. Members stressed using plain language such as "town loan payment" and distinguishing town taxes from school taxes.

Sewer And Water

- Preliminary wastewater engineering will compare routes, including Route 10 and two other alternatives. The committee expects to seek funding for the engineering; the route, and project cost. Grant award and eventual construction funding remain uncertain. The longer-term project estimate discussed was about $19 million to connect to Keene, versus about $26 million for a new plant.
- The wastewater system is an enterprise funded by West Swanzey sewer ratepayers, not the whole town tax base. The revised rate is two cents per gallon; the estimated household charge rose from $85 to about $109.20 per quarter. Members identified funding and rate impacts as questions that require clear explanation.
- The proposed water-company purchase is about $613,000, with two grant applications of $306,500 each. The current operator may stay for one year; later operating arrangements and any system expansion remain open.

Meeting And Outreach

- Members discussed an informational gathering for the sewer project, tentatively targeting Saturday, December 12, with more project details expected by then. A water company event will also be scheduled as a separate event.

Action Items

- Send the completed Public Works open-house press release to the committee. (Heffernon)
- Promote the December 5, 9:00 a.m. Public Works open house through digital channels and place an ad; also ask Nicole to write a Shopper article about the event. (Heffernon)
- Meet with Joe to gather specific information about DPW operations, employee needs, safety issues, and cost-avoidance examples for the campaign materials. (Heffernon)
- Coordinate production of short, bite-sized DPW walkthrough videos, including snowplow operations and other employee work conditions. (who can help Heffernon with this)?
- Email the committee a breakdown of the campaign workstreams so members can add information or volunteer to help. (Heffernon)
- Investigate creating and linking an Instagram account to the existing Facebook page for automatic cross-posting. (Guion)
- Prepare a set of short infographics covering debt-service impacts and quantified DPW cost avoidance for public communications. (Guion)?
- Review and edit Ann's draft public posts for the sewer and water projects before publication. (DiRusso, Self)
- Email Michelle regarding sending an informational letter to the sewer ratepayers through Rick Pears. (I believe this has been completed)? Scott, can you please confirm this?

Outline

Minutes And Priorities

- Discussed whether the August minutes had been received and whether approval should wait until a later meeting.
- The Select Board tasked the committee to focus on Public Works and sewer communications.

Public Works Campaign

- December 5, 9 a.m.: Public Works open house, intended to build public understanding of the proposed building.
- Discussed communicating operational and safety issues, including snowplow installation, equipment height, maintenance space, and employee breaks.
- Considered short videos, a PowerPoint, digital posts, a Shopper article, and graphics. Members emphasized verified figures and clear explanations of cost avoidance.
- Discussed that the town’s projected 2027 debt service would decrease by 3.5% with the proposed bond included; the school district’s tax impact is separate.

Wastewater Project

- Preliminary engineering is comparing potential routes, including Route 10 and other alternatives. Route selection and engineering costs are not yet settled.
- The committee discussed a roughly $19 million Keene connection option and a roughly $26 million new treatment plant option.
- West Swanzey sewer ratepayers would fund the enterprise project. The rate change to two cents per gallon yields an estimated charge of about $109.20 per quarter, compared with $85 previously.
- Grant availability, project financing, the final user impact, and the engineering warrant remain unresolved.

Water Company

- The proposed purchase is about $613,000, with applications for two $306,500 grants.
- The current operator may remain for one year. A possible operating arrangement with North Swanzey was discussed.
- Expansion or additional storage was deferred; the committee discussed purchasing and operating the system before deciding on upgrades.

Public Information Session

- Members tentatively discussed Saturday, December 12, for a sewer and water information session, when more funding and route details may be available.
- The session could be combined with other project outreach, while the Public Works event may remain separate.

Meeting adjourned 6:55