Town of Swanzey, New Hampshire

Water and Sewer Advisory Committee

Meeting Minutes – September 10, 2026
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 take place at the next regularly scheduled meeting of the Board.

CALL TO ORDER
The meeting was called to order by Chair Scott Self at 10:00 am at Whitcomb Hall.

Members present: Committee members Chair Scott Self, Steven Bittel, Ken Greatbatch, Larry Crowder, Selectman Bill Hutwelker, Cathy Bergstrom, Stacey Goodale, Public Works (DPW) Director Joe DiRusso, Selectman Jim Tempesta, and Pat Ambrosio.

Absent: Sylvester Karasinski

Others Present: Operator of the West Swanzey Water Company, Mark Houghton, and President of the West Swanzey Water Company, Dan Brown. Also, Doug Brown and Assistant Planner Stephon Mehu.

MINUTES:

Bittel **moved** to approve the minutes from August 27, 2026. Second made by Crowder. There was no further discussion. All were in favor. ***Motion passed.***

DISCUSSION:

The West Swanzey Water Company

Self spoke about a leak/plug that developed recently in the system. He noted the gates are working fairly well. He spoke about the subsequent water outage. There was further discussion about gate valves, which opened and closed appropriately. Ambrosio asked if this happened again, would the results be the same. Self said no, it would not, now that they know how the pipes are connected.

There was a discussion about costs. Crowder said the more loops you can have in a system, the better off the system is. You are creating more flow without many dead ends. Houghton said the right thing is for the Town to buy the system since it is the backbone to the development of State Route 10 and existing services. He noted the system hasn't had timely storage updates. DiRusso said the challenge is the storage capacity and its costs. Houghton said the financial situation will pay dividends in the future. He noted over a dozen companies have backed out from developing on State Route 10 because of the water situation and no water suppression capability.

Crowder spoke about lead pipe service. Self said the State of New Hampshire Department of Environmental Services (DES) requires that by 2037 the final report for lead pipe removal must be submitted. Crowder said they will accept someone present at the time the lines were put in to validate the lack of lead pipes. There was discussion about the number of lines that are undocumented. Self said the system was put in 1965 and in 1986 extra lines were added. Bittel asked about the number to be dug up. Self said possibly the ones in question, 45 undocumented sites, would need to be dug up. Bittel asked about the cost associated with that action. Houghton said it would be expensive. Crowder

estimated $2,500 per line, assuming you know where the line is. Crowder estimated about $60,000 plus. Bittel calculated quickly and said about $100,000 would be cost. DiRusso noted many of the water services under discussion are under brand new road surface. DiRusso noted DPW found one home which did not have a curb stop and DPW had to install it. Bittel noted a possible Town liability for $100,000, given the lead pipe situation. Houghton said there are funding grants suitable for that kind of upgrade for a municipality. DiRusso noted some of the funding from the State has been cut back.

Crowder asked about the condition of hydrants. Houghton said 3-4 hydrants would have to be replaced ASAP. Crowder estimated cost at $15,000 per hydrant. Ambrosio asked about flushing out the hydrants. Houghton said they do flush the ends occasionally.

Bittel asked about estimate for any repairs to gates. Ten gates at $10,000 each or $100,000 would be cost said Crowder as an estimate if repairs or replacement is needed.

Houghton said the system provides clean water at a good volume. Self asked Houghton about his estimate to enable fire suppression. His response: $250,000. DiRusso asked about replacement costs for aging pipe. Houghton said that would be difficult to estimate but the pipes he has seen look okay.

There was a brief discussion about the circumstances at which both pumps would come on simultaneously (when there is heavy flow).

Tempesta spoke about the issues he sees i.e. fire hydrants, gates, and lead survey. Houghton said storage is a major need. Self spoke about tanks for water storage, which could be in ground. Tempesta noted the system will cost the taxpayers money in the near terms but will be good for the future. DiRusso pointed out folks who do not live in W. Swanzey won't vote for something not servicing them. Tempesta said he agrees with Houghton that the smart thing to do is to buy the company.

There was a discussion about private company expenses associated with asking for rate increases that are often denied by the Public Utilities Commission (PUC). Houghton said the system, once upgraded, will be profitable. Bittel said the Town has to take care of debt service and there will be costs to maintain it. Brown said the PUC doesn't want private water companies; they want municipal ownership. Bittel noted the assessment recently done of the sewer system costs and new rates established. He added that the number of customers serviced is relatively small.

Tempesta asked for a worse case scenario. Houghton said a hazardous chemical invasion of the water system would be bad. Self said something catastrophic is not likely to happen. DiRusso said a bad scenario would be getting a break that cannot be isolated. Bittel noted the majority of users in Swanzey have wells and are used to the unavailability of water when power goes out. W. Swanzey users without water during a leakage would not get sympathy from well users.

Crowder asked about standards for private versus public water system. Houghton said that would not change when the Town took over from the private company. The Town would answer to DES. The Chair asked for further questions for Houghton and the Browns and there were none. Houghton and the Browns left the meeting.

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There was a brief discussion about costs around repair materials and equipment needed. DiRusso noted that if the Browns walked away from the system, the State would take over and pass it along to the Town without the Town having to buy it. DiRusso said his concern is that we don't get a lot of grant funding, which makes it difficult to get this passed by the voters. He said DPW is not equipped to handle and maintain the water system; we have to calculate the additional costs for operation. Tempesta said the costs are returned to the Town as an investment in the future. DiRusso said ultimately the State would take it over and the Town would take it over at no cost. Crowder said if the Town is going to buy the company, we have to have capital. DiRusso added a need to raise rates and fund operational costs.

Bittel spoke about financing. He said the only way to sell it to taxpayers is to get funding from the rate payers, but there are not a lot of users. He noted the current water rate is very low, and W. Swanzey users will have substantial rate increases. He said the Town will incur debt service and will have to find grant money. Tempesta said there is funding out there for this kind of service. It was noted the Water Company is essentially at break even in regard to revenue versus costs. Ambrosio said it will need a fulltime operator. Bittel noted that DiRusso said we do not have the proper tools or equipment to fix the system. And he noted any full-time employee cost needs to be calculated for salary and benefits. DiRusso said he isn't trying to be negative but wants to warn the Town that there will be more to this than appears on the surface. You must have a licensed operator. Crowder said he agrees with DiRusso. Tempesta said the taxpayers will get some relief if we can attract business to State Route 10. Ambrosio said we will need a storage tank to encourage new business. Mehu said we have to put fire suppression on paper to get funding.

DiRusso said we need to get a better handle on operational costs. Crowder said he thinks the Town needs $500,00 in capital. There was discussion about finding an operator. Tempesta suggested talking to North Swanzey to help come up with a plan. Selectmen will speak to Sly Karasinski to get his thoughts. Self determined by asking each member of the committee that there is a consensus to move ahead, with concerns. Mehu noted the timeline for getting on the Warrant for this coming year may be difficult.

OTHER BUSINESS:
Sewer System Update
Hutwelker passed out a letter that was sent to residents about Sewer rates and plans for the future of the water treatment facility. There will be an informational public meeting on Saturday, September 19th at 9 am at Whitcomb Hall. There was a brief discussion about impact of rate increases for some users.

NEXT MEETING: Thursday, September 24, 10 am at Whitcomb Hall

ADJOURNMENT
Bittel **moved** to adjourn, and Tempesta seconded the motion without further discussion. All were in favor. Meeting adjourned at 11:54 am.

Respectfully Submitted,

Recording Secretary