

Town of Swanzey, New Hampshire
Board of Selectmen
Meeting – December 21, 2015
Swanzey Town Hall, 620 Old Homestead Highway, Swanzey, NH

CALL TO ORDER

The meeting was called to order by Chair Deborah J. Davis at 9:00 a.m. at the Swanzey Town Hall. Present were W. William Hutwelker III and Kenneth P. Colby. Also present were Town Administrator Michael T. Branley and Bookkeeper Theresa Louder (taking minutes).

OTHERS PRESENT

Police Chief Thomas De Angelis, Director of Planning and Community Development Sara Carbonneau, Conservation Commission Member Wally Smith, Open Space Committee Chair Victoria Ames, Municipal Facilities Review Committee Chair Don Skiba, Fire Chief Norman Skantzze, and Alfred "Gus" Lerandeau.

Review of Preliminary Town Meeting Warrant

Discussion related to locations of meetings pertinent to Town Meeting occurred, with it decided that the Budget Hearing would take place at Town Hall, the Deliberative Session would be held at the Monadnock Regional High School, and voting would take place at the Christian Life Fellowship Church on Whitcomb Road.

Branley advised the Board that the amount listed in the proposed warrant article for expendable trusts and capital reserve funds was only a placeholder. The Whitcomb Hall Committee is scheduled to meet with the Board on December 29th to discuss their request further. Should the Committee recommend lowering the amount requested, Branley suggested that the Board consider increasing the amounts proposed for the Town Bridges and/or the Town-owned Dams Capital Reserve Fund(s).

Hutwelker stated that the final amounts for the proposed expansion of the TIF District to include the airport would be available next week and he hoped to get an article related to this on the 2016 warrant.

Discussion occurred regarding the status of the School Resource Officer (SRO). The costs are not included in the draft budget at this time. They would be completely offset by revenue received from the school district. There would be no additional or hidden costs related to the program. The estimated cost of the program as presented to the district is approximately \$60,000. The person hired for the position would be a dedicated part-time employee assigned to the school. Branley suggested and the Board agreed to have him and De Angelis work out the logistics of the Memorandum of Understanding with the SAU and then bring it back to the Board.

The draft articles were discussed. The Board has no preference regarding whether the Zoning Amendment articles were at the beginning of the warrant or at the end. The bond article needs to be updated with the proper wording and amounts. The operating budget article will include the budget amount after further discussion by the Board, as will the article related to capital reserve and expendable trust funds.

An article requesting money to be placed in the Carpenter Home Expendable Trust Fund (to offset the anticipated operational deficit) was proposed to be kept separate from the annual warrant article and the Board agreed. Davis wishes to hear Representative Tilton's ideas regarding the viability of the

Carpenter Home. Selectmen discussed the salary amount budgeted for an administrator for the home and decided to revisit filling the position on a long-term basis.

Branley and Louder spoke about the proposed Public Safety Detail Revolving Fund and how, if approved by voters, the general operating budget would be affected.

The wording for the anti-dumping ordinance article was updated from the 2015 warrant to specify "unauthorized persons". Property owners would not be affected. Smith stated that the Conservation Commission had asked for input and received no response. Town Counsel needs to review the wording of the ordinance.

Discontinuance of Whitcomb Road was discussed. Branley informed the Board that Attorney Kinyon had already prepared releases of damages for property owners along this stretch of road which is no longer used. This article has no financial impact.

Branley asked if there were other issues that should be included on the warrant, other than the expansion of the TIF District. There were none noted by the Board.

Bonding of Town Facility Improvements and Construction

Skiba spoke to the Board regarding the proposed costs for the plan to be presented to voters. The cost for the fire station has been reduced \$320,000. The overall proposal is \$5,350,000 and would be a 5-10 year solution. The building improvements themselves would last longer.

The Board wishes to seek approval for the entire amount, then obtain several different bonds as the projects move forward. Questions arose regarding the possibility of the Homestead Woolen Mills property. The current proposal for Town Hall alone is estimated at over \$2 million; the Scully proposal done last year was \$2.3 million for both Town Hall and Police and had room for expansion and an expected useful life of 20-30 years. The Board decided that Town Hall will remain in its current location and the Homestead Woolen Mills property is not an option at this time.

Discussion continued regarding the need for another warrant article in future years should the original design change. The Municipal Facilities Review Committee and the Board of Selectmen agree that this will be an all-or-nothing plan.

The Board prefers one bond article for multiple facilities and wishes to see the impact on individual taxpayers. Branley will obtain bond schedules, rate impacts from a 10-year and 20 year bond (which probably would not impact the tax rate until 2017) and finalize the wording of the warrant article. Branley will provide amounts for the fire station alone and for the entire proposal.

Contributions to Capital Reserve and Expendable Trust Funds

Branley began by explaining the increases in the requests and again spoke about the Whitcomb Hall Rehabilitation amount being preliminary. Branley put Town Dams back on the list. Selectmen discussed the Fire Pond fund. It was decided that the requested amount would be changed to \$10,000. Hutwelker asked about the increase for Emergency Communications. After a brief discussion, the Board agreed to lower the requested amount to \$10,000.

Review of 2016 Operating Budget

Branley provided a summary of explanations for the larger increases and decreases in the 2nd version of the draft budget.

A lengthy discussion regarding a separate warrant article for the proposed full-time Fire Inspector (currently part-time) occurred. The Town has included position changes in the operating budget and has also had separate warrant articles. The Board decided to leave the position in the operating budget.

Hutwelker emphasized the need to have the discussion regarding moving toward a full-time Fire Department and ambulance service. Skiba spoke of how the proposed plan for the new fire station currently included a second floor attic for storage which could be changed to extra rooms, but currently has no consideration for on-site staffing.

De Angelis passed out survey documents to the Board regarding wages, salaries and benefits. De Angelis and Skantze had begun a joint Police/Fire wage survey, but it is not completed. They used towns of comparative sizes, demographics and tax rates, but did not look at other surrounding communities. Swanzey's wages are not competitive, which leads to attrition and extra costs. Skantze stated that all of the responding communities had wage scales with labor grades and step increases, which Swanzey does not have at this time. De Angelis asked the Board to – despite tough economic times – consider a 4% increase for patrol officers for 2016. Hutwelker would like to see local towns included in the comparison. The Board requested that De Angelis, Skantze, Branley and Lounder continue with the project and present a pay scale proposal to them next year for consideration beginning in 2017.

The Board decided to provide no cost-of-living increase and a 2% merit increase in the operating budget.

Without the 2% merit increase, the proposed operating budget for the general fund is up 3.59%. The merit increase will cause the operating budget to increase approximately 4.5%. Colby wants to cut \$40,000-\$50,000 from the operating budget to make it more palatable to taxpayers. Hutwelker suggested returning Town Hall staff to 37.50 hours per week. Branley pointed out that the largest increases in the proposed budget were all approved by the Board (full-time Administrative Assistant, full-time Fire Inspector, and increased hours for Town Hall staff). Branley does not believe there is much more that can be cut from the proposed budget, but will speak with departments.

The Board requested inclusion of the 2% increase in wages, proposed revenues and opportunities for reductions in the budget for their next meeting. Colby would like to see the proposed budget increase be 4% or less.

OTHER BUSINESS

Altitude North

Hutwelker queried staff regarding the payment status of Altitude North. The invoices for Police and Fire details remain unpaid. Town Council recommended the Town take them to small claims court. Branley will send them a letter with an updated statement of the balance due and with the threat of legal action. Branley will also work on revising the events policy to include a provision for interest and attorney's fees for nonpayment of invoices.

Town Hall Closures

Colby discussed the sign in front of Town Hall. The Town Clerk's office will be closing at noon on December 24th and at 3:00 p.m. on December 31st. Selectmen expressed concern regarding closing early

on the last day of the month. Colby proposed closing Town Hall at 1:00 p.m. for staff not already closing their office at noon on December 24th. The Board also considered closing early on December 31st. The Board decided to close Town Hall at 1:00 p.m. for all Town Hall staff outside the Town Clerk's office and have Town Hall remain open the entire day on December 31st.

Propane Issue in Keene

Selectmen questioned Skantze regarding the propane issues in Keene last weekend. Skantze stated Swanzezy Fire personnel responded to several calls to assist in Keene during a 12-hour period and that the personnel from Swanzezy "did a good job".

Davis asked if the Town would be reimbursed for our personnel. Skantze believed that, due to the hazardous material situation, the Town could be reimbursed. Skantze will contact Keene Fire Chief Mark Howard to inquire about this matter.

ADJOURNMENT

Davis **moved** to adjourn the meeting, seconded by Hutwelker, and there was no further discussion. All were in favor. ***Motion passed.*** Adjournment occurred at 11:30 a.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Theresa Louder, Bookkeeper

Approved on December 29, 2015