

Town of Swanzey, New Hampshire
Board of Selectmen
Special Meeting – July 9, 2016
Swanzey Town Hall, 620 Old Homestead Highway, Swanzey, NH

CALL TO ORDER

The meeting was called to order by Chair W. William Hutwelker III at 9:00 a.m. at the Swanzey Town Hall. Present were W. William Hutwelker III, Kenneth P. Colby, Jr., and Sylvester Karasinski. Also present was Town Administrator Michael Branley. The meeting began as a Coffee and Conversation with the Board and continued as a meeting regarding the need for facilities improvements in the Town. Recording Secretary Beverly Bernard joined the meeting at 9:38 a.m.

OTHERS PRESENT

Members of the Capital Improvements Program (CIP) Committee, members of the Municipal Facilities Review Committee (MFRC), and other members of the public: Bruce Bohannon, Don Skiba, Mike Gomarolo and his wife Jenny, State Representative Ben Tilton, Steve Bittel, Wally Smith, Glenn Page, Francis Faulkner, Deb Davis, Mike Jasmin, and Bob Smith.

The Board hosted coffee and conversation with several citizens. Items discussed were the Homestead Woolen Mill Property the progress at Whitcomb Hall, summer concerts at the Potash Bowl, and other items. No decisions were made.

DISCUSSION

Use of Former Homestead Woolen Mills

There was a discussion about the need for a plan for use of the former Homestead Woolen Mill building. Jasmin said he is willing to work with the owners to create a workable plan.

Municipal Facilities

Those present reviewed the responses from the public for the Municipal Facilities Study conducted in April 2016. Page noted that there are prominent members of the Fire Department who are against the Safford Drive site. There was discussion about use of the Carpenter Home property and land where the Potash Bowl is located. Page said that the Potash Bowl lot is indicated as a separate lot from the Carpenter Home property and Hutwelker said it will take an attorney to figure out what can and cannot be done with that land due to the reversionary clause if the Carpenter Home is no longer operated. Bohannon mentioned the possible plan from the State for placing a roundabout at the intersection of Route 32 and Sawyer's Crossing Road which would impact on any use of the Potash Bowl for a Town building. Bittel noted that a Fire Station at the Potash Bowl land would be questionable given a roundabout and the access road to the Carpenter Home.

Tilton asked about the land the Grange is located on. Faulkner said that it isn't quite an acre there and Bittel noted that the Grange is a registered historical landmark.

Hutwelker spoke about Safford Drive being favored by the Board because of access to public water and sewer for cleaning of uniforms and trucks, as opposed to wash water going into ground water. He also spoke about a factor in favor of Safford Drive was a reduction in response times from the Fire Department for folks living at the north end of town where many of the calls come in from. The other item was an inducement for business to locate there. He also noted an attempt to take these kinds of uses out of residential areas.

There was discussion about push-back regarding the first bond request since the public was concerned about the Town coming back asking for more money each year. Skiba noted that the Fire Department is tied to Town Hall and you can't separate facility improvements to the Fire Department without dealing with Town Hall.

Colby pointed out that the Board is trying to engage with the public by use of the Coffee and Conversation meetings with the Selectmen. He noted that about 83% of the folks who responded to the survey said there was adequate job of getting information out.

Bittel pointed to the Fire Station being the "poisoned pill" portion of the bond request. He noted a split between the location of the Fire Department and the cost. He spoke about response times of the Fire Department being better for west Swanzey as well as for north Swanzey. He said that if the Fire Station had been bare bones, it might have passed as a separate Warrant Article. He noted that the CIP investigated other locations and there wasn't one to be had centrally located other than the possibility of the airport. He suggested taking DPW separately. He also suggested building a new Town Hall somewhere else and leaving the Fire Station as is.

Bob Smith asked about negotiating with the School District for the Wilcox School. Bittel noted that there are space issues with the location. He also noted that Town Hall does not have issues with sewer and water that the Fire Department has.

There was discussion about de-toxing equipment. Page said that West Swanzey has sewer service and de-tox space could be created for washing out equipment. Page also said that Fire Department training could also be considered for Whitcomb Hall. Karasinski added that West Swanzey station is currently being used for de-toxing.

Wally Smith said that communication is an issue. He said the survey should be done ahead of time to provide feedback to the folks planning. He also noted that many residents have limited incomes as retired folks. Bohannon said that you have to advertise a year ahead, and Faulkner said a professional media person would be helpful.

Bittel spoke about the Town not having a forward looking Capital budget. He suggested taking DPW off the bond issue. He also said that Capital Reserve funds actually cost more than a bond but most people are not aware of that. Tilton suggested a presence at Old Home Day. Bittel said to take care of DPW with Capital Reserve funds and Warrant Article for the Police Station.

Bohannon suggested a new building for the two libraries and then use the Mt. Caesar land location for Town Hall and/or Fire Station. Branley said that the bequest for both the Mt. Caesar and Stratton Libraries were specific for use as a library and the Town does not own the Mt. Caesar Library property. It was suggested that a new Town Hall could be located at the Potash Bowl. Bittel asked to have Town Counsel to look into using that land. Colby said that the Wilcox School would be a better location for a Town Hall.

There was a discussion about the influence of the Fire Department staff and how to convince them. Karasinski said that 80% of calls are for medical reasons. Ambulance comes out of City of Keene. House fire in north Swanzey will be covered by City of Keene first. He said that Swanzey Center is better served from Swanzey Center than Keene would be able to achieve. He said that the Town should take advantage of City of Keene. He noted that there is land at the airport that could be used for a Fire Station. He noted that the City of Keene would have to be amenable to allowing a Fire Station there. Bohannon said that the CIP looked at land at the airport and there was something about the land that it could not be used. Discussion continued about land on Route 32 on airport land where there is a house and vacant land that is up for sale. Colby noted land negotiating with the City of Keene may not be easy.

Hutwelker asked about consensus from the group for separating DPW out of the bond and dealing with the Police Department this year and the potential for different locations for Town Hall and Fire Station be put off for now. Colby noted that the Police Department has made some changes to try to accommodate their needs so the design may need to be updated. Bittel again stressed that using Capital Reserves cost more than a bond would cost for such projects.

Karasinski said the second plan for the Fire Station was okay except for the second story even though it wasn't finished. He stressed that Swanzey is a bedroom community and the Town should use Keene as best we can. He also stressed it is cheaper to contract out for services like ambulance service and fire services than to pay employees and include benefits. Karasinski also said it is easier to comply with ADA issues with a one-level building, whether Fire Station or Town Hall.

Hutwelker said that the Board will initiate communication with the School District as a takeaway from this meeting; Faulkner suggested a press release that this meeting was held and suggested the possibility of a Facebook account and Branley said the staff is open to the idea but is trying not to rush into it. Bittel said that it is important to know what to say and be clear about it in any communication.

Skiba said that it is important to note what Karasinski said about being a bedroom community to Keene and to take advantage of Keene rather than being autonomous. Hutwelker said there are two different messages regarding the Fire Department – one from the Fire Chief – another from some of the Fire Department staff. There was a discussion about the second Fire Station plan and Karasinski said that the Town was going down the road for a full time staff. He said that the Town won't need full-time staff and can get along with a volunteer Fire Department. He said that the town is showing no growth in population.

There was discussion about opportunity of input from Fire Department staff and several folks said there was plenty of opportunity to do so. Bob Smith asked why Fire Fighters did not take part in the gathering of needs for the Fire Department and Karasinski said that they did not want to engage because of the Chief having a different attitude and the Fire Department is a paramilitary organization where speaking publicly is not done. Davis said there have been issues within the Fire Department for many years under multiple chiefs and that is not going to change.

Branley asked the Board who should be doing the work on the next plan and what would be the role of each of the committees. Hutwelker said he would like to digest the input first and meet later with the committees to give them a charge. Bittel suggested delay any action on the Fire Department and move forward on other buildings. Bohannon said that it is his opinion that the Fire Chief isn't getting input from his staff when providing input for the design of a Fire Station.

There was a discussion about declining numbers of fire department volunteers. Karasinski spoke about a County Fire Department as one way to address the decline in volunteers that is being done in other parts of the country. Colby noted it takes effort to become a Fire Fighter these days which means fewer folks can provide that amount time. Bohannon pointed out a national trend in more education for fire and emergency personnel. There was more discussion about the lack of resident attendance at Selectmen's meetings and at the Deliberative Sessions.

Jasmin spoke enthusiastically about the Town of Weare's voter guide, which provides information about the Warrant Articles and which has a score sheet on the back which assists the voter further.

Bittel pointed out the need to update the pricing for the Police Department and DPW costs. He also suggested moving ahead with the salt shed for DPW. There was discussion about the first phase of electrical work being done for the Recycling Center, but not the roof. Hutwelker said that the roof will be gotten to.

Smith suggested using the Recycling Center to announce meetings to get the attention of more residents. There was more discussion about reaching out to the Fire Department staff. Faulkner said that in 40 years the Fire Department has always worked in the background. It was suggested to do a Survey Monkey just for the Fire Department. Hutwelker stated he did not want to compromise on location due to a small number of people who are on the fire department wanting it close to where it has historically been located.

There was more discussion regarding Capital Reserves which cost the tax payers a lot of money. Bittel said they work well for recurring purchases but long term projects should be financed by bonds so that future tax payers as well as present-day tax payers foot the bill.

Hutwelker said the Board would investigate possibilities with the School Board and investigate land around the airport, and FAA concerns. Skiba pointed out the Board has separated the Fire Department from the mix, and perhaps the MFRC could update the dollars for DPW and Police Department with Public Works Director Lee Dunham and Police Chief De Angelis. Bittel suggested open bidding for the DPW work. The Police Department design is not construction ready.

Skiba said that DPW work requires a structural engineer, taking a couple of months for a design for concrete for the clear span. Skiba noted that there were two estimates for DPW roof and Recycling Center roof already obtained. Bittel suggested an RFP for the engineering work for the foundation for the salt shed. Skiba said that the numbers for the office housing could be obtained fairly quickly.

Branley suggested he and the Police Chief speak to the architect Katie Sutherland and update the plan for that facility. The Board agreed to meet again with these two committees September 10, 2016 at 10:00 a.m.

ADJOURNMENT

Motion to adjourn was made by Karasinski. The motion was seconded by Colby without further discussion. All were in favor. **Motion passed.** Adjournment occurred at 12:10 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,



Beverly Bernard

Approved on July 20, 2016

Unsealed on