**TOWN OF SWANTON**

**DRAFT MINUTES**

**ANNUAL INFORMATIONAL MEETING**

**Swanton Village Municipal Office**

**120 First Street, Swanton, VT 05488**

***Monday, February 27, 2017 @ 7:00 p.m.***

Present: Joel Clark, Selectboard Chair; John Lavoie, Selectboard Vice Chair; James Guilmette, Jeff Raleigh, Daniel Billado, Selectmen; David Jescavage, Town Administrator; Cathy Fournier, Town Clerk/Treasurer; Reginald Beliveau, Village Manager; Eugene LaBombard; Neal Speer; Elisabeth Nance, Secretary; Brian Savage; Lynn Billado; Leonard “Joey” Stell; Richard Thompson; Harold Garrett; Tim Girard; Dena St. Amour; Chris Leach; Adam Paxman; Josh Ramsdell; Al Kinzinger; Justina Jennett; Betsy Fournier; Ron Kilburn; Sandy Kilburn; A. Russo; Suzanne Washburn; Ann Parsons, Franklin County Home Health Care; Lora McAllister.

1. **Call to Order**

Mr. Clark called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m. He asked for a moment of silence for those whom the community had lost in the past year.

1. **Pledge of Allegiance**

Mr. Clark led those present in the pledge of allegiance.

1. **Reading of Warning – Town Moderator**

Mr. Brian Savage read the following warning:

*The legal voters of the Town of Swanton and the Town of Swanton School District, who are legal voters in Town Meeting, are hereby notified and warned to meet at the Swanton Village Municipal Complex, First and Elm Streets, Swanton on Tuesday, March 7, 2017, at 7:00 a.m. to vote on the articles herein set forth. All articles are to be voted by the Australian Ballot system. The polls open at 7:00 a.m. and close at 7:00 p.m.*

*Article 1: To elect from the legal voters of said Town the following officers:*

*Moderator, Town and Town School District*

*One Town Clerk for a 3 year term*

*One Treasurer for a 3 year term*

*One Selectman for a 3 year term*

*One Selectman for a 2 year term*

*One Lister for a 3 year term*

*One Lister for a 1 year term*

*One Auditor for a 3 year term*

*One School Director for a 3 year term*

*One School Director for a 2 year term*

*One Trustee of Public Money for a 3 year term*

*One Trustee of Public Money for a 1 year unexpired term*

*One Library Trustee for a 5 year term*

*One Cemetery Commissioner for a 5 year term*

*Town Grand Juror*

*Town Agent*

*Collector of Delinquent Taxes*

*Article 2: Will the Town appropriate $837,796.87 for the operation and maintenance of the Town Highway Department?*

*Article 3: Will the Town appropriate $151,109.00 for fire protection, $58,470.00 of which is for a fire truck replacement fund?*

*Article 4: Will the Town appropriate $108,076.37 to provide police protection to the residents of the Town of Swanton?*

*Article 5: Will the voters of the Swanton School District approve the School Directors to expend $8,479,668.00 which is the amount the School Directors have determined to be necessary for the ensuing fiscal year? It is estimated that this proposed budget, if approved, will result in education spending of $14,453.00 per equalized pupil. This projected spending per equalized pupil is 9.9% higher than spending for the current year.*

*Article 6: Will the voters of the Swanton School District authorize the School Directors to borrow money in anticipation of taxes?*

*Article 7: Will the voters of the Swanton School District authorize the School Directors to reallocate the remaining Feasibility Capital Reserve Funds of approximately $21,897.00 for the purpose of addressing playground equipment and grounds safety and improvement as outlined in the 2016 safety audit?*

*Article 8: Will the Town appropriate $464,390.19 for the Town General expenses?*

*Article 9: Shall the Town collect its real and personal property taxes to defray the expenses of the Town for the fiscal year commencing January 1, 2017, and annually thereafter, by its actual receipt of payment (postmarks will not be accepted) at the Town Offices by 5 p.m. on October 15th, or if the 15th shall fall on a weekend or holiday, the following business day by 5 p.m., with an eight percent (8%) penalty and one percent (1%) interest per month (or portion thereof) due thereon for the first three months, and one and one half percent (1.5%) per month (or portion thereof) thereafter, to be charged for late payment of any installment?*

*Article 10: Will the Town appropriate $249,000.00 to provide rescue services to the residents of the Town of Swanton?*

*Article 11: Will the Town appropriate $93,922.50 towards the Operating and Maintenance Budget of the Recreation Department?*

*Article 12: Will the Town appropriate $141,007.00 towards the Operating and Maintenance Budget of the Swanton Public Library?*

*Article 13: Will the Town appropriate an additional $16,000.00 per year for salary and benefits in support of making the part time Children’s Librarian into a full time Children’s Librarian at the Swanton Public Library?*

*Article 14: Will the Town appropriate an additional $3,634.00 per year in support of Franklin County Home Health Agency to increase the annual allocation to $13,497.00?*

*Article 15: Will the Town appropriate $500.00 in support of Vermont Center of Independent Living?*

*The legal voters of the Town of Swanton are further notified that an Informational Meeting will be held at the Swanton Village Municipal Complex on Monday, February 27, 2017 at 7:00 p.m. for the purpose of explaining all budget items to the voters.*

*Dated at Swanton, Vermont, this 26th day of January, 2017*

*Joel A. Clark, Chair Jay Cummings, Chair*

*L. John Lavoie, V. Chair Tobias Maguire, V. Chair*

*Daniel Billado Mary Wood*

*James Guilmette Patti Jo Walker*

*Jeffery Raleigh John Creelman*

### *SELECTMEN SCHOOL BOARD DIRECTORS*

*Dated and filed this 26th day of January, 2017*

*Attest: Cathy L. Fournier, Town Clerk*

1. **Swanton School District FY2017-18 Budget**
   1. **Presentation**

Mr. Savage introduced School Board Chair, Jay Cummings, who in turn presented School Board members Patti Jo Walker and Mary Wood, as well as Dena St. Amour, Principal of Swanton School. Mr. Cummings informed the attendees that this is his sixth and final year on the Board and thanked the community, Dena St. Amour, and Justine Jennett for their support and work. Mr. Cummings also said he felt that the board was very dedicated and mindful of the needs of the community. He especially thanked the business managers for doing a difficult but important job. Mr. Cummings concluded his introduction by stating the Board’s development goal was to present a budget that meets the needs of Swanton students at a reasonable cost to taxpayers. Mr. Cummings then invited Ms. St. Amour to address those present.

Ms. St. Amour led off the presentation with some highlights from 2016, including Swanton School’s “What’s News” program available on the school’s website and that the Elementary School won the Gold Medal Award for the Healthier US Schools Challenge for their nutritional efforts, physical activity, and school wellness policies.

Ms. St. Amour showed that the school priorities focused on Multi-Tiered Systems of Support, using Professional Learning Communities, Instructional Framework, Configuration/Master Schedule, Behavior, and School Culture. They had worked with Dr. Anthony Muhammed, an internationally known an education consultant.

Mr. Cummings added that professional development, with social and emotional skill training, was a big focus for 21st century learning and teaching. The Board hopes to expand the initiative to fund a 1:1 computer initiative for grades 4, 5, and 6 that had been launched a few years ago to include the 3rd grade. More generally, Mr. Cummings indicated that staff goals include maintenance of current IT structure and replacement of computers on a planned cycle and that they are well-placed to meet these goals.

Mr. Cummings and Ms. McAllister informed attendees that Special Education teacher costs, transportation, and operations expenses are now budgeted at the Supervisory Union level; Swanton’s portion are then billed back to the school. The exception is that paraprofes-sionals are still employed directly by Swanton Elementary.

The FNWSU budget assessment includes the Central Office budget, Special Education budget, and early education (teachers, paraprofessionals, Swanton School administration). The budget assessment noted 40 additional special education students throughout the SU, an increase in out-of-district student placements, and a high number of students impacted by trauma, all of which increase costs.

While student enrollment across Vermont has been decreasing, 20% over the past decade, Swanton has reversed that trend and, after having dropped in the last few years from about 560 to 490, enrollment for the 2017-2018 school year is currently approximately 506 with the recent addition of prospective students. School leaders considered student/staff ratios and the quality of education programming while continuing to “right-size” school staffing. There are currently approximately 16-20 students per classroom.

The current staff was 118.6, with 64.6 professional staff, 13.0 support staff, and 43.0 education support/paraprofessionals. The current Professional Staff Master Agreement is in effect until June 2017, and is currently being renegotiated. One major issue affecting these negotiations is the effect of the Affordable Care Act on healthcare costs; these costs are as yet unknown. Dental insurance costs are anticipated to remain the same or decrease by as much as 3% for FY18. They were in Year 3 of Teacher Early Departure Agreement by 3 professional staff.

As part of the Board’s commitment to meet its budget goals certain line items were reduced to accommodate mandated increases; no new programs are planned.

The proposed budget is $8,484,056. To put this in perspective, Swanton was the 74th least expensive out of the 88 Vermont school districts belonging to a union or joint high school that operate elementary schools. Based on voter approval of the budget, the equalized pupil spending of that would be $14,453, which represents an increase of 9.9% over FY17 but is $200 less than the prior year state average.

The education spending for FY17 is projected to be $6,908,208, or $13,140 per equalized student. The homestead tax rate variables were controlled by the taxpayers, but the legislature controlled the equalized pupil rate, the yield amount, and the base tax rate. Other variables included the local, state, and federal revenue, and the ratio of elementary to secondary students.

The Swanton School budget had very little impact on the business and non-homestead tax rate, which is estimated to be $0.752. The homestead tax rate after CLA adjustment for the 2017-2018 school year is projected at $0.696. It was noted that roughly 70% of Swanton taxpayers receive some property tax reduction from state funds; taxes are based on either income or value of house and two acres.

Ms. St. Amour highlighted ongoing efforts by the school to incorporate community partners, such as RiseVT, the Missisquoi Wildlife Refuge, the Swanton Library, and others.

Mr. Cummings directed people to the school’s website to find more information.

* 1. **Audience Questions and Comments**

Mr. Fournier asked what effect the consolidation of those certain expenses at the SU level would have on the tax rate. Ms. McAllister stated the there is no effect, simply a difference in what money goes directly to the SU versus the individual schools. Mr. Fournier stated that with budgets going up the tax rate will likely go up. Mr. Fournier stated his belief that we need to do a better job shifting money to cover early education.

Ms. Washburn asked for the actual expense numbers versus the projected figures shown in the presentation. Ms. McAllister indicated that the actual expenses are presented at the monthly meetings and are on the annual report on page 71. In addition, because the year is not yet complete the projected figures in the presentation include the actual expenses thus far plus the projection for the remainder of the year.

Ms. Kilburn commented that the school is doing a wonderful job but that we know issues often start in the home and may need to be addressed through parent education; schools are asked to do more today than they used to be.

Mr. Garrett questioned the Special Education assessment on Town Report p. 79, specifically the “drop” in budget that may be related to that shifted to SU instead of individual schools. There was much back and forth about the complexity of the budget and tax system, and the new allocation of certain monies to the SU versus directly to the school.

Mr. Thompson asked how much funding comes from the federal government with the point being that policies and procedures are mandated but are not being financially supported.

Mr. Kilburn asked about the transportation costs on p. 71 of the town report. The figure is likely related to the higher-than-anticipated cost of out-of-district transportation.

There was a general discussion about moving budget meetings to May, as a number of districts already do, to get better current FY numbers and better sense of future needs. Mr. Savage mentioned that this was on the table and that the school funding mechanism was “broken beyond repair” and agreed that something needed to change to make more sense. Many options were in discussion, including having one school district for the whole state, but none would be taken up by the legislature until sometime after the Town Meeting break. Comments were made that the state needs to come up with more simplified school tax code

Ms. Fournier commented that the state has a negative effect on the local budget and school district and wanted to take issue with Ms. St. Amour’s contention that the school has no new programs planned as they have successfully created new programs with community partners at no cost to anyone.

Mr. Garrett thanked the Board and asked if there should there be one SU for Franklin County? There are meetings scheduled where the community may ask these types of questions and anyone interested should contact Superintendent Win Goodrich for information.

Ms. Walker presented Jay Cummings and Mary Wood each with a plaque for their service on the Board.

Mr. Lavoie asked about certain line items that had been on previous years’ budgets, such as the boiler and parking lot maintenance/paving. Because the building and the adjacent areas are in good shape no specific line items were included in the budget but rather in the $50,000 capital improvements. Upgrades to the playground were an exception but would be handled through the capital improvements as inspection of the area had exposed some concerns.

1. **Town of Swanton FY17-18 Budget**
   1. **Presentation**

Mr. Clark presented the following information:

2016 *In Memoriam* -Mr. Clark asked for a moment of silence to honor two members of the community who were lost in 2016

* + David Barney
  + Allan Laroche

Employment and Volunteer Opportunities - The Town is looking for volunteers to serve on the Development Review Board, which has two vacancies, and on the Planning Commission, which has one anticipated vacancy. There is a small stipend offered for those serving on both. Interested individuals were directed to contact David Jescavage.

*2016 SWANTON HIGHLIGHTS*

* Sidewalk scoping study was done by Cross Engineering for South River St. & Rt.78.
* Northern Gateway Economic Development Project was started By NRPC, Town, & Village.
* West End Robin Hood Drive engineering, design, & permitting in progress.
* The Highway Department is back to a full crew.
* The 5-member Selectboard was working well.
* The Selectboard named the recreation path after Dick Thompson who was instrumental in the creation and construction of the path. The path is used by pedestrians and non-motorized vehicles.

2016 ACCOMPLISHMENTS

* Level funded accounts wherever possible and practical.
* Paid down new highway garage debt.
* Approved funding for library upgrades.
* Sponsored and participated in events in partnership with the Swanton Enhancement Project.
* Awarded municipal planning grant for town & village municipal plan revisions.
* Repaired roofs on Town Office Building & Railroad Museum.
* Adopted Green Energy Standards for The Municipal Plan.
* Filled Lister vacancy with David Horton.
* Adopted revisions to the Personnel Policy.

Highway Department:

* + Paved the following roads:
    - Lakewood Drive: .8 miles
    - Jonergin Drive: .8 miles
    - Babbie Boulevard: .3 miles
    - Tabor Road: 2.7 miles
  + 6 new culverts were installed and road shoulders were improved on Tabor Road.
  + 2 new employees hired for highway Crew: David Peloubet & Brock Shumway.
* $175,000 Vtrans grant awarded for Pond Road for paving & improvements.
* Cross Engineering designed a lean-to on sand shed and supports for sand shed walls.
* Highway crew constructed 850 feet of new concrete sidewalk on the west side of Robin Hood Drive.
* Highway crew improved knowledge & skills by attending several training workshops.
* Town roads well maintained in the winter.

FUTURE PROJECTS IN 2017

* Start repaving/improving Pond Road.
* Finalize the design & permit process for last part of Robin Hood Drive.
* Finish sidewalk on Robin Hood Dr.
* Paving additional Town roads to keep them in good condition.
* Construct a lean-to on the sand shed.
* Cross Consulting Engineers to present final sidewalk scoping study.
* Apply for grant funds.

LIBRARY REPORT

* Patron numbers doubled in 2016.
* Received 4 grants in 2016 totaling $11,250.
* Held many new, active kids’ programs including 4 popular camps, and Harry Potter Night.
* Participation in community events.
* School Apartments Book Club.
* Pollinator Garden & Youth Garden Club.
* Reading & computer access for all ages.
* Two Story hours per week.
* Reader’s Theater after-school program.
* Family arts & crafts programs.
* Extension Thursdays with the Swanton Elementary School.
* Coordinated programs with Notch Camp & Crossroads.
* Requesting $16,000 to create full-time Children’s Librarian position.
* Requesting 2017 budget of $141,007.

2017 GENERAL BUDGET (IN DOLLARS)

If all Articles approved 1,175,940.46

To be raised by taxes 464,390.19

2017 projected tax rate 0.1456

2016 tax rate 0.1384

2017 tax rate increase 0.0072

2017 HIGHWAY BUDGET (IN DOLLARS)

If all Articles approved 1,311,473.53

To be raised by taxes 837,796.87

2017 projected tax rate 0.2306

2016 tax rate 0.2319

2017 tax rate decrease 0.0013

TOWN ARTICLES

Article 13: Additional $16,000 per year to make Children’s Librarian full-time.

Article 14: Additional $3,634 per year in support of Franklin County Home Health.

Article 15: New appropriation of $500 in support of Vermont Center of Independent Living.

Total $20,134 for all 3 articles combined will result in an annual $6.00 increase for a $200,000 home.

2017 BUDGET REQUESTS SUMMARY (IN DOLLARS)  
 (If All Voted Articles Are Approved)  
 Town general budget 1,175,940.46   
 Town highway budget 1,311,473.53

Mr. Clark stated that the FY17 general budget represents a 5.2% increase over FY16 while the FY17 highway budget represents a .0013 decrease.

Town Residents’ Budget 2,487,413.99

Village Residents’ Budget 1,935,617.00

Swanton School Budget 8,494,121.00

MVU High School Budget 14,659,490.00

PROJECTED 2017 RESIDENTIAL TAX RATES (IN DOLLARS)

Town Residential: 2016 ACTUAL 2017 PROJECTED

Town general tax rate: 0.1384 0.1456

Town highway tax rate: 0.2319 0.2306

Education tax rate: 1.2692 1.3330

TOTAL TOWN TAX RATE: 1.6395 1.7092

Village Residential: 2016 ACTUAL 2017 PROJECTED

Town general tax rate: 0.1384 0.1456

Village tax rate: 0.7721 0.7949

Education tax rate: 1.2692 1.3330

TOTAL VILLAGE TAX RATE: 2.1797 2.2735

PROJECTED 2017 – NON-RESIDENTIAL TAX RATES (IN DOLLARS)

Town Non-Residential: 2016 ACTUAL 2017 PROJECTED

Town general tax rate: 0.1384 0.1456

Town Highway tax rate: 0.2319 0.2306

Education tax rate: 1.4123 1.4720

TOTAL TOWN TAX RATE: 1.7826 1.8482

Village Non-Residential: 2016 ACTUAL 2017 PROJECTED

Town general tax rate: 0.1384 0.1456

Village tax rate: 0.7721 0.7949

Education tax rate: 1.4123 1.4720

TOTAL VILLAGE TAX RATE: 2.3228 2.4125

PROJECTED 2017 TAXES – RESIDENTIAL PROPERTIES (IN DOLLARS)

Town Residential:

Property taxes on $200,000 property assessment

Your 2016 Tax Bill: 3,279.00

Your 2017 Tax Bill: 3,418.40

Increase: 139.40

Village Residential:

Property taxes on $200,000 property assessment

Your 2016 Tax Bill: 4,359.40

Your 2017 Tax Bill: 4,547.00

Increase: 287.60

PROJECTED 2016 TAXES – NON-RESIDENTIAL PROPERTIES (IN DOLLARS)

Town non-residential:

Property taxes on $200,000 property assessment

Your 2016 Tax Bill: 3,565.20

Your 2017 Tax Bill: 3,697.00

INCREASE: 131.80

Village Non-residential:

Property taxes on $200,000 property assessment

Your 2016 Tax Bill: 4,645.60

Your 2017 Tax Bill: 4,825.00

INCREASE: 179.40

CANDIDATES FOR OFFICE

Auditor (3 years) – Amy Giroux

Lister (3 years) – Amy Giroux

Lister (1 year) – David Horton

Collector of Delinquent Taxes (1 yr) – Betty L. Cheney

Trustee of Public Money (3 years) – Joseph P.H. Raleigh

Trustee of Public Money (2 years) – (Write-In)

School Director (1 year) – Meaghan M. Conly

Library Trustee (5 years) – Kathy Messier

Cemetery Commissioner (5 years) – Arthur Goodhue

Selectman (3 years) – L. John Lavoie

Selectman (2 years) – James Guilmette

Town Clerk (3 years) – Cathy L. Fournier

Town Treasurer (3 years) – Cathy L. Fournier

Town Agent (1 year) – Gerald Barney

Town Grand Juror (1 year) – Gerald Barney

Moderator (1 year) (town & town school district) – Brian K. Savage

Mr. Clark concluded the presentation by suggesting community members visit the town’s website for any further information.

* 1. **Audience Questions and Comments**

Mr. Garrett asked if there was any rollover money from FY16. The general fund has a total of $220,000, which was used to calculate how much in taxes that needed to be raised.

Mr. Thompson inquired into the function of the Vermont Center of Independent Living. This agency works on accessibility issues for people with mobility issues and the visually impaired. They have worked with Swanton residents, particularly with ramps to provide handicapped access.

Ann Parsons from Franklin County Home Health highlighted what her agency does including that 266 people in Swanton received visits. All total Swanton residents received $850,000 in free home health care. Ms. Kilburn, as a former agency board member, spoke of the valuable assistance the agency provides.

Mr. LaBombard thanked the Selectboard and appreciated work with Village board of trustees.

Ms. Washburn commented on the increasing tax rate and likened it to Chittenden County. Residents want to stay in the community but need to weigh that with affordability.

Ms. Kilburn wanted to publically acknowledge Dean Ryan the plow truck driver who was instrumental in saving her neighbor’s life a couple of weeks ago. Dean along with first responders were to be commended and thanked for their efforts.

Mr. Fournier commented that the Swanton Art Council paintings, and other little things going on throughout the area make Swanton more attractive; the work of the Swanton Enhancement Project was acknowledged.

1. **Public Comments** – None beyond that noted as part of the budget presentation.
2. **Any Other Necessary Business** – None
3. **Executive Session (if needed)** – None
4. **Adjournment** – Mr.Guilmette made a motion, seconded by Mr. Lavoie, to adjourn at 8:49 p.m. Motion carried.

Received and filed by:

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Cathy Fournier, Swanton Town Clerk Date