

**TOWN OF SWANTON
SELECTBOARD
SPECIAL ANNUAL MEETING
INFORMATIONAL SESSION
MINUTES**

**Swanton Village Complex Meeting Room
120 First Street, Swanton, VT 05488**

Monday, February 24, 2014 @ 7:00 p.m.

John Lavoie, Selectboard Chair; Dan Billado, Selectboard Vice Chair; Dick Thompson, Joel Clark, and Kathy Lavoie, Selectmen; Cathy Fournier, Town Clerk; David Jescavage, Town Administrator; Jay Cummings, Tobias Maguire, Patti Jo Walker, and Jack McCarthy, School Directors; Dena St. Amor and Brent Coon, Co Principals; Rebecca Hart, School Business Manager; Brian Savage, Moderator; Betty Cheney, Collector of Delinquent Taxes; Fire Chief Tim Girard, SVFD; Police Chief Leonard “Joey” Stell, SVPD; Paul Rocheleau, David St. Pierre, and Lynn Billado, Missisquoi Valley Rescue; Harold Garrett, Road Foreman; Ronald Kilburn, Village President and Zoning Administrator; Yaasha Wheeler, Secretary; Sandy Kilburn; Eugene LaBombard, Village Trustee; Lora McAllister; Sandra Skeels; Robert Nielsen; Kathy Rossner; Reginald Beliveau, Village Manager; “Turk” Thompson; James Guilmette; Macy Lavoie; Sally Dubois; Deborah Dubois; Earl Fournier; Betsy Fournier.

A. Call to Order

Mr. John Lavoie opened the hearing at 7:01 p.m.

B. Pledge of Allegiance

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

C. Reading of Warning- Town Moderator (Brian Savage)

Mr. Brian Savage read the warning, as follows:

**TOWN OF SWANTON & TOWN OF SWANTON SCHOOL DISTRICT
ANNUAL MEETING
TUESDAY, MARCH 4, 2014**

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 4, 2014 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 Town Treasurer for a 3 year term**

One Selectman for a 3 year term
One Selectman for a 2 year term
One Selectman for a 1 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 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 \$810,470.77 for the operation and maintenance of the Town Highway Department?

Article 3: Will the Town appropriate \$167,901.00 for fire protection, \$42,968.00 of which is for a fire truck replacement fund?

Article 4: Will the Town appropriate \$114,698.00 to provide police protection to the residents of the Town of Swanton?

Article 5: Will the voters of the Swanton School District appropriate \$8,318,740.00 necessary for the support of the Swanton Schools for the school year July 1, 2014 through June 30, 2015?

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 appropriate \$100,000 for the purpose of addressing certain building issues, such as HVAC controls, Babcock lighting and electrical, and other capital improvements as needed?

Article 8: Will the Town appropriate \$457,371.72 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, 2014, 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 \$224,762.00 to provide rescue services to the residents of the Town of Swanton?

Article 11: Will the Town appropriate \$99,925.00 towards the Operating and Maintenance Budget of the Recreation Department?

Article 12: Will the Town appropriate \$124,577.00 towards the Operating and Maintenance Budget of the Swanton Public Library?

Article 13: Will the Town increase the percentage of voters required on a petition for reconsideration or rescission from five (5) to twenty (20) percent?

Article 14: Will the Town appropriate an additional \$2,000.00 for the Green Mountain Transit Agency for a total appropriation of \$2,500.00, if approved?

Article 15: Will the Town appropriate an additional \$655.00 for Franklin County Court Diversion for a total appropriation of \$1,000.00, if approved?

The legal voters of the Town of Swanton are further notified than an Informational Meeting will be held at the Swanton Village Municipal Complex on Monday, February 24, 2014 at 7:00 p.m. for the purpose of explaining all budget items to the voters.

Dated at Swanton, Vermont this 24th day of January 2014.

L. John Lavoie, Chair
Daniel E. Billado
Kathy L. L. Lavoie
Richard J. Thompson
Joel A. Clark
SELECTMEN

Toby Maguire
Patti Jo Walker
Mary Wood
Jay Cummings, Chair
John Creelman
SCHOOL BOARD DIRECTORS

Dated and filed this 24th day of January 2014.

Attest: Cathy L. Fournier, Town Clerk

Mr. Savage introduced those who sat at the head table, as follows: John Lavoie, Selectboard Chair; Dan Billado, Selectboard Vice Chair; Dick Thompson, Joel Clark, Kathy Lavoie, Selectmen; Cathy Fournier, Town Clerk; Jay Cummings, Tobias Maguire, Patty Jo Walker, and Jack McCarthy, School Directors; Dena St. Amour and Brent Coon, Co Principals; and Rebecca Hart, School Business Manager.

Mr. Savage also introduced David Jescavage, Town Administrator; Yaasha Wheeler, Administrative Assistant; Betty Cheney, Collector of Delinquent Taxes; Fire Chief Tim Girard; Police Chief Leonard “Joey” Stell; Paul Rocheleau, David St. Pierre, and Lynn Billado, of Missisquoi Valley Rescue. He encouraged voting.

Mr. Savage informed the public that he was seeking reelection as moderator. Other individuals seeking election or reelection were as follows:

- Cathy Fournier (3-year term as clerk and treasurer)
- John Lavoie (3-year term as Selectman)
- “Turk” Thompson (2-year term as Selectman)
- James Guilmette (1-year term as Selectman)
- Jay Cummings (School Director)
- Betty Cheney (Collector of Delinquent Taxes)

D. Meeting Topics

1. Swanton School District Budget Presentation

Mr. Coon came forward and thanked Mr. McCarthy for his service to the community and to the children of Swanton. He also thanked the board members, as well as Lora McAllister and Dena St. Amor for putting the budget together. He then presented the Town of Swanton School District PowerPoint Presentation (*attached as Exhibit A*). During the presentation, Mr. Coon noted that the school would begin to implement Common Core State Standards, adding that the achievement gap closed with all students in the Grade 5 writing scores because of good professional development over the past 3 years in the area of writing. Also, the school was moving to a computerized assessment system, for which it needed new technology. Mr. McCarthy informed the public that the support staff contract had been ratified. Mr. Coon explained that the director of the building had been able to rebuild circulator pumps, resulting in savings. However, much of the kitchen equipment was original to the building (21 years old) and the school expected that the initial costs of replacement would eventually be offset by the energy savings. The school board also planned to redo the landscaping in order to beautiful the outside of both buildings. Some of the upgrades to the school buildings included automated controls for better energy efficiency, and the phasing out of the old florescent light bulbs in favor of new, energy-efficient lighting.

2. PowerPoint Presentation & Discussion of Town of Swanton's 2014 Budget

Mr. John Lavoie presented the Town of Swanton's 2014 budget (*attached as Exhibit B*). During the presentation, he noted that there was a potential purchaser for the old Town garage at 221 First Street, as well as interest in Park D. With the arrival of Walmart in St. Albans, the Selectboard had felt it was important to update the bylaws in regard to the Southern Growth District. Mr. Lavoie thanked Allan Laroche, former Animal Control Officer, for his outstanding service to the Town. Line striping on Hog Island (West Swanton) had been done in response to a citizen request, and more line striping was scheduled for 2014. Swanton had worked with the town of Sheldon on the Woods Hill Road project, which would be finished in 2014. About 65 people regularly used the recreation trail. The Swanton Dog Ordinance would be updated in 2014. The Town budget increase of roughly 2.4% was due to increases in some of the articles, while the Highway Budget had decreased the tax rate by less than 0.5%. The Highway bought its own equipment, so that it could do its own work rather than hiring out, and currently owned \$750,000 in equipment with only \$46,000 owed. He noted that the highway tax rate was incorrectly written as \$0.2292, and was in fact \$0.2292. Also, the actual rate for the total town taxes was \$1.4996, not \$1.4997.

Mr. Lavoie publicly thanked Kathy Lavoie, Selectwoman, for her service, stating that she had a "full plate" in order to serve the community, and that she "turned over many stones" in her quest for a better Swanton. Mr. Lavoie also thanked Dick Thompson for his service to Swanton, including his 18 years as Town Administrator. Mr. Thompson "wore many hats" and had been an "unbelievable resource" to the Selectboard and other boards he sat on. Both Mrs. Lavoie and Mr. Thompson received standing ovations.

Adam Paxman asked for an explanation of Articles 9 and 10. Mrs. Fournier explained Article 9, stating that the article basically clarified when and how the Town wanted the tax payments delivered to the town clerks' office. The deadline had been changed from midnight to 5 p.m. on the 15th, and postmarks would not be accepted. The rest of the article explained how the interest and penalties would be calculated.

Mr. David St. Pierre explained Article 10, stating that the \$50,000 increase was due to rising costs and to a payroll increase. The increase in costs involved the fuel bill, the medical supply budget, technology upgrades, medical protocol upgrades and resulting training for that, a transition program to update to the new state certification levels, more expensive equipment, and higher insurance. As far as payroll, the lower level had formerly been \$9/hour, which needed to be adjusted since "you can work at McDonald's for that amount." Mr. Earl Fournier asked to know what the lower level salary had been increased to, and Mrs. Billado explained that salaries had been increased across the board by a dollar an hour. Sandy Kilburn thanked MVR for all that they did, and requested that their answering machine identify MVR.

Tobias Maguire asked to know the impetus for including Article 13. Dick Thompson replied that the Selectboard believed that the biggest voter turnout occurred on the regular voting day and that the decisions made on that day could be considered "the final vote." However, "contrary-minded people" could circulate a petition for a revote with only 5% of the voter population and could therefore "thwart the democratic process." The legislature had passed a bill to increase the revote number from 5 to 20 percent. A revote not only costs money, but it is also difficult to get people out to vote on a one-article ballot. To illustrate, Mr. Thompson cited a case in which a revote attracted only 22 voters in 12 hours. Essentially, the Selectboard felt that, at a special revote, a handful of people could overturn a decision the majority of voters had decided on town meeting day. The Selectboard therefore suggested the solution of raising the percentage for a revote petition from 5 to 20 percent. Mr. Maguire asked if it had been a 5-0 vote for the inclusion of the article, and Mr. Thompson replied that it had been.

Mr. Fournier asked if the taxes figured in the increase of the state-wide property tax. Mr. Jescavage stated that they did. Mrs. Fournier added that she had used the “worst-case scenario” at 9% across the board. Mr. Savage further explained that the rate had not yet been set by the legislature, but the increase on the state tax rate was estimated to be about 7 cents. The average percentage would be around 3.8, perhaps 3.1 in total. In his opinion, Act 60 was “broken beyond repair” and needed a complete overhaul. There were a number of problems with the funding mechanism. One cent on the statewide grant list raised \$10 million; however, there was a decrease in the student population as well as a decrease in the grand list because of the devaluation of real estate. If one or two of the larger school districts had a double-digit rate increase in the budget, it would skew the results for the entire state.

3. Public Comments – None.

4. Any Other Necessary Business

Sandy Kilburn shared that Larry Wall had passed away. He had been active in the town and village for years, and he was much missed. Mr. Lavoie agreed in honoring the memory of Mr. Wall, stating that in Swanton, “we know everybody.”

Mr. Lavoie stated that the people on the various boards had full plates, and that the service to the town was often not their “first job.” They made decisions with the best interests of all the townspeople in mind, and they genuinely cared about Swanton. He thanked the public for attending the annual informational meeting, and reminded them to vote on Tuesday, March 4, 2014 from 7 a.m. to 7 p.m.

E. Executive Session – Not needed.

F. Adjournment

Mr. Thompson made a motion, seconded by Kathy Lavoie, to adjourn the hearing at 8:06 p.m. Motion carried.

Typed on February 25, 2014
Minutes by Yaasha Wheeler
Received and filed by:

Cathy Fournier, Swanton Town Clerk

Date