

SEP Steering Committee ANNUAL Meeting
September 5, 2024 5:30 – 7:00
Holy Trinity Church
Minutes

Present: Betsy Fournier, Henk Lambert, Molly Lambert, Joel Clark, Brian Savage, Reg Beliveau Jr, Chevon Cooper, Nick Brosseau, Chris Dodge, Darci Benoit, Sandy Skeels-Kilburn, Ron Kilburn, Gordon Winters, Suzie Kelleher, Kiersten Bourgeois, Neal Speer, Marie Speer, Denise Smith, Crystal Lampman, Nicole Draper, Kathleen Schotto, Abby Gaudette, Suzanne Washburn, Laura Simon, John Simon

1) Welcome & Review Agenda

Betsy Fournier started the Swanton Enhancement Annual Meeting at 5:35 pm.
Pastor welcomed everyone to the

Kathleen Schotto introduced herself as the new Rector for Holy Trinity Episcopal Church. Kathline is new to Swanton, moving here from Maryland.

2) Review Minutes

Joel made a motion to approve the minutes from May 2, 2024, seconded by Nick. Motion carried. No discussion.

3) Finance Update-Joel Clark

Joel gave a financial update effective July 31, 2024, bank statements:

Unrestricted \$12,390.96

Restricted \$ 17,921.36 Of this \$3,800 committed to LVRT Trailhead

Restricted By Category:

Bikes/Signs \$88.95

Capacity Building \$1,477.25

Substance Abuse \$1,625.61

Beautification \$10,114.55 (Less \$2,100 in checks written in August) (\$18,000 CD will renew soon)

Marble Mill \$815.00

Joel has statements available for anyone to view.

Betsy asked Joel if he had written a check for the Block Party bouncy house? Yes.

Molly asked if combining the funds are they close to the \$50,000 IRS limit? Yes, within \$1,000-\$2,000. There is nothing negative in going over that limit, it just requires different reporting practices.

Kiersten asked what the balance of the restricted funds to be used for? They are listed above as restricted by category.

4) Presentation of Kilburn-Lambert Community Service Award & Yard of the Year

Molly thanked Ron & Sandy Kilburn for a lifetime of service to the citizens of Swanton.

Molly shared the Kilburn-Lambert Community Service Award was created in 2020 honoring people who have dedicated years of service to create a more vibrant Swanton. Joel Clark & Reg Beliveau have been honored with the award in previous years.

Reg shared he was the recipient of this award last year. Tonight's recipient is a lifelong

member of this community, raised a successful family, ran a successful business, and a member of the local Masonic Lodge holding most positions including master. In the late 1990's he saw the deteriorating condition of the local downtown and decided to get involved. Over the years his continued focus and dedication has helped bring business back downtown. He was voted Swanton Village President and held the office a majority of the time until 2024. As Village President he led with honesty, integrity and demonstrated a strong sense of teamwork and community devotion. He was instrumental in coordinating with Gordon & Debbie Winters on the major revitalization of the Prouty block and Memorial buildings. He had the foresight decades ago to save the sign from the Champlain Theatre which now lights up the building. Shining brightly over the "Green Mountain Bistro". Other key accomplishments under his Village President leadership are the currently water line project, continuing the process of relicensing the hydro dam, reimagining the Hotel Rive space and improvements to our downtown.

Hank shared our recipient made his presence known throughout Swanton, representing the Village at Swanton Enhancement Project meetings, attending events like the Chamber of Commerce annual car show, annual night out. This candidate made sure to be present for each community member to show his genuine concern for Swanton. In an interview earlier this year our candidate talked about three values he felt he brought to the community: humility, trust and teamwork. Our candidate exuded those values with family, a mason, on the construction site, and in his role as Village President.

Joel shared at our candidates' last Village Trustee meeting one trustee said it was as good as anyone could.

"I remember a day on my porch I spoke with him about me running for trustee. I told him I had my doubts about being able to do the job if I was elected. I didn't go to college, and I didn't have a degree. This is what he said: You have common sense and a love for your community which you have, you will do just fine. For that he was right, and I owe him a dept of gratitude. We had a great team, we were family, he made sure regardless of the circumstances we remained family. He was the glue that bound our board together, even though he did not have a vote in any outcome. He was the one who held us together when the art wall fiasco happened. He kept us calm when we were called racist and calls for our resignation. He kept us calm when some citizens were creating unrest and division within the community. He never backed down from a challenge, never hid behind a computer screen when things got tough. Most of all he had our backs, and we had his. He taught me a lot about being a good citizen. As a leader his guiding principles were humility, trust and teamwork. The team worked extremely well under these principles. Swanton will be a greater place if these principles continued" These are the words of Adam Paxman Swanton Village Trustee.

Joel said we are quite sure you have figured out by now the 2024 Kilburn-Lambert Community Service Award is being presented to Mr. Neal Speer.

Neal said he is completely honored in receiving this award. There is no award he has received except maybe builder of the year that he would put up against this. The Kilburns & Lamberts are staples of our community and have been here longer than I have. I was a little disappointed this year at the Town Meeting as Joel, Hank and Reg said we had a good team, we trusted each other, I see that sliding. Not because I'm gone, but the community is changing a lot. I hope the community can stay together as it has in the past with different challenges. Reg and I are very proud to have teamed up with Gordon Winters to improve our downtown. Back in 1999 when I got on the board originally, I was worried about our downtown. It only took 25 years, but we are back! I hope that continues. It is more of a

vibrant downtown more than it has been since the grocery store left. Still have a great team at Swanton Village and the Community. If anyone needs anything from me, they know where I live and have for 55 years.

Thank you, I am humbled and honored to receive this award.

Betsy thanked Nicole Gaduas for creating the Swan award each year.

Betsy congratulated Neal and said the award is definitely well deserved and you have done a tremendous amount of work in our community.

5) Presentation by Denise Smith newly selected Executive Director of Vermont Council on Rural Development

Molly introduced Denise Smith, the newly selected Executive Director of Vermont Council on Rural Development as this year's guest speaker.

Denise thanked Molly for inviting her tonight. Denise is thankful to be here and in the Town of Swanton. Denise shared the wonderful work she had done previously with Swanton Enhancement Project. Denise has just started working with Vermont Council on Rural Development.

Denise shared a community visit in Swanton at MVU high school and energy around that visit is what formed Swanton Arts Council and the Beautification Committee. These things helped move Swanton forward.

Denise shared her vision for healthy Vermont Communities. Communities are in the same places postindustrial, post pandemic and are struggling. Across the country, across Vermont there are major issues that are affecting us. We know substance abuse disorder is an issue affecting our communities. The sense of isolation Denise scene with her 8 years at NMC. When I think about a healthy Vermont or Community I think about youth opportunities, the circle of courage the Abenaki community is doing with Circle of Courage. How important that work is. How we need to create opportunities for our youth to feel appreciated and accepted. Denise shared how Crystal and Betsy have done so much for youth in Swanton. When you think of healthy Vermont, we do a great job with younger kids but fail with teens. We need to do a better job with pre-teens and teens in our communities. How are we creating healthy things for them to do. Denise shared info about Community Health Needs Assessment recently done. This shows how some teens feel forgotten about in our community. Denise shared people being unable to get their basic needs met, houselessness this is affecting children and families. How do we make sure people are getting their basic needs met. Food Insecurity is on the rise. John Gorton in Sheldon has all the data on this in Sheldon. In order to have a healthy community we have to address access to basic needs of the people in our community.

One of the things that has come about is access to care and services. Some of that access is caused by rural communities, affordability.

Our local community hospital and many still have to go to Burlington for treatment.

Denise said communities are always changing, but safety and belonging are important. These go hand in hand with safety and diversity, accepting of people of who they are.

Denise shared how Swanton has improved their community, they have places to go. Covid taught us, we're social beings and we need each other. Swanton over the last decade has created places for people to go. All successful downtowns have a coffee shop or someplace for people to gather, Swanton has a variety of places for people to gather. What makes a difference is "People Who Care" Swanton has done this. All you need to serve your community is "Love for your Community". Betsy thanked Denise for coming and sharing, they have done it! A lot of the people who started this process are still here today.

Nick said he works for Vermont Health Connect, Medicaid gives rides to people who don't have access to a car, like GMTA. Most often it is free. What other improvements do you want to see? Denise said if you don't have Medicaid, you don't have access to that network and you have to give them 24 hrs. notice. The other thing to mention is NMC offers a taxi voucher program. Different communities have done different things. Some communities have good volunteer programs. CIDER in the islands is a great program. Medicaid rides are a great resource but there are no cab drivers taking Medicaid. Amy Brewer at NMC is talking about how to address this regionally.

Suzanne said it is her understanding that Age Well has a program with SSTA that will provide that level of service to bring people to drs appointments in Burlington? Yes but they need volunteers, again there are qualifications to get these rides.

Denise said the Village Trust Initiative is a partnership with Vermont Council of Rural Development & Preservation Trust. They will select communities under 2500 people and identify a community building that needs repair. Creating a trust to pay for it. This was funding secured by Senator Leahy. The first cohort of 7 towns have been selected.

6) **Review of Current Steering Committee Membership and Election of Officers**

Chair Betsy Fournier
Vice-Chair Crystal Lampman
Secretary Kiersten Bourgeois – nominated 2024
Treasurer Joel Clark

Molly didn't believe they needed to vote, Chevon said as communications officer that was elected and they voted for it. Molly said there are four officer positions.

Molly said the Secretary position is vacant. They have someone who takes the minutes, the secretary would review the minutes and keep up the register them with the State as a non-profit. Communications there is no vote it's up to the chair.

Neal said there should be a motion for the secretary to cast one vote for the existing officers for the existing officers to continue.

Suzie nominated Kiersten Bourgeois to be Secretary, Molly seconded. Motion carried. Kiersten cast a vote to accept the slate, seconded by Molly. Motion carried.

7) **Committee, Chair & Stakeholder Reports**

- MVSD – Chris Dodge-Swanton Central School Principal
Chris shared that MVSD has finished up a process of “portrait of a learner” of students. You will be hearing a lot about this in the future of students and how they will get to this. Community engagement, skills and knowledge are all part of this. Swanton school is very busy in the summer with as many as 250 students attending their three summer programs (special education, tutoring & crossroads). Chris shared this school year that more than half of the new hires are Swanton residents. MVSD has worked hard to connect students with the community.
Swanton Central Open House 9-26-24 6pm, 10-1-24 Title 1 Night 6pm, Monthly Drop In Session (Coffee with Chris) dates coming, Mentor Program coming soon.
Construction is complete at Franklin Central School. MVU Principal Dan Palmer would like to hear from anyone who is interested in helping students work in the community. Highgate Elementary hosted literacy programs this summer that is going to help the district.
- Swanton Arts Council –Abby Gaudette

Abby shared they will be partnering with A Place for Grace, Farel to Forever for a cat themed art show on 10-5-24 at Swanton Public Library. They will have cats available for adoption. Also working on the Halloween booth.

- Swanton Public Library – Abby Gaudette-Swanton Public Library Director
Top 3 events coming:
Eight book clubs: three youths, two adults, one whole family read aloud.
Band book event 9-14-24 at Legislators, Librarians coming to talk about banned books.
Howard Center partnership, they are bringing a mobile unit. This will be on the church property.
Crystal shared Abby and Nicole stepped up this summer and filled the gap with the Notch not continuing their summer program. Fantastic Job!
- Recreation Department – Nicole Draper-Swanton Recreation Director
Nicole shared 250 youth registered for fall athletics. Excellent summer turnout.
Returning programs: safe sitter, youth dungeons and dragons, kids' kitchen, project youth council, Franklin County youth paranormal investigators, DIY RC car club, youth photography club, after school comedy club.
Exciting things this summer were: 1st youth Empowerment, Community Yard Sale
Iron sites on the green concert, Family Nights on the Green, Community Block Party, National Night Out, Cornfest. Tennis & Skateboarding to Marble Mill, Coed Softball, kayaking.
Nicole shared a newsletter and the 2025 focus survey.
- Swanton Historical Society – Nick Brosseau
Nick shared the Museum is open, fundraising is ongoing to purchase the Roy's insurance building.
- Town of Swanton – Brian Savage-Swanton Town Administrator
Brian shared the Town resurfaced roads, LVRT went out to bid in August with no bids, this will use Federal money, so those contractors are busy. This will be sent back out for bids in early 2025. Working with engineers for new storm permitting water rules affecting a couple developments. Developing in Southern Growth Center, two lots have been sold. Zoning Bylaw modernization-public hearing to come. Flags for Veterans- approved purchase of up to 50 more flags \$150 each, they will be ready by Memorial Day.
- Village of Swanton – Suzie Kelleher-Swanton Village Trustee'
Enacted a Swanton rec parking on Blake St. Traveling vendor ordinance and permit.
Promoting Swanton Committee. Discussions with Habitat with Humanity possible sale of 6 South River St. Community Development grant with Abenaki Nation of Missisquoi to renovate office and food shelf. Hosted 1st of many AOT discuss rehab or replace B6 bridge in 2029. Successful food drive with Village employees that they dispersed to the Catholic Church food shelf & Abenaki food shelf. Electric: planning of village offices and moving electric department to 124 First St, once plans are in place they will start hosting community meetings. Hydro: still working with FERC relicensing. W Scott Muller internship was awarded to local Swanton student. Water/Wastewater: Missisquoi river crossing almost complete. Paving on Foundry and Canada Streets as soon as completed. Gate will be installed on Webster Terrace. 8-million-dollar wastewater upgrade has started. Inventorying water system, those who did not complete the survey will have people coming to check. PWD B6 repair was completed early, detour route was adjusted as necessary. The only incident was due to the driver's inattention. PWD Job Opening because Gary Bouchard is retiring after 47

years of service. Police still have one full time opening for a police officer. They were able to buy with Operations Stone Garden grant a truck & trailer (to be used as a command post as necessary) an ATV and night vision goggles. The Fire Department has been very involved in community service. Working on a dry hydrant, looking for grants for exhaust system. The lady's auxiliary is planning a haunted drive thru for Halloween. They are looking for volunteers please contact Ashley Chevalier for information.

- Beautification – Hank Lambert

Hank has received many compliments on beautiful flowers around Swanton. This is due to volunteers.

Suzie Kelleher will be taking Hank's place as coordinator of the Beautification Committee. Thank you, Ross Lavoie, for replacement bridge planters that were vandalized.

In 2024 they created a new garden at the town office. They expanded the village office, veteran park, library garden, doubled number of hanging baskets, created a small garden by Merchants Row. Next year they are planning window boxes Codys diner, VFW welcome mural by an Eagle Scout. Part of their 7-year plan is to plant 10 trees a year. They are on par to do that. They are always looking for volunteers. This year they hired someone to water and that has worked out great.

Our thoughts and prayers go out to Ron & Sandy Kilburn they were founders and promoters of SEP.

Molly wanted to say the progress/evolvment of the beatification has been incredible." Hank leads with such grace".

Joel invited everyone to stand and recognize everyone who was part of the beatification.

Betsy said Swanton is a more beautiful place because of all they do. Suzie has big shoes to fill, Hank has put a lot of work into the beautification of Swanton. "Thank you for beautifying our community".

Suzanne thanked Hank for starting the beautification committee.

- Healthy Communities/Substance Use – Crystal/Betsy

Crystal shared that due to the State of Vermont shifting priorities Caring Communities is ending after 27 years. Crystal is very proud of the people in the community, they have stepped up. The programs they have begun will continue. The mentor program will move to the Spectrum mentor program. The teen institute will be finding a new home. The youth will continue to do great things.

They have purchased the license to show Screenagers 1, 2 & 3. This documentary follows a pediatrician and her family through her child's first interaction with a cell phone during teenage and young adult years. It documents substance misuse because of cellphone usage and mental health struggles because of screens.

They will host these viewings and community discussions. Crystal will meet with Bill and Balinda from NCSS. The goal is to best support our youth. Swanton has always stepped up to help our youth.

Betsy thanked Crystal for all her work. Crystal said United Way is picking up some of the policy work of Caring Communities.

Chris said they send an electronic newsletter every Wednesday, he believes these should be about more than just school and he would be glad to include these resources.

- Communications – Chevon Cooper

Chevon said she started "yard of the year", the contest for beautiful yards. Chevon said she is not yet ready to award. Chevon would like to have a garden party for the volunteers. She is still planning this and looking for help. Chevon said she is also going to help Ashley

Chevalier with the haunted drive through this will be for 13+. They will also have a kid's day.

Chevon has agreed to take over the food donation for the Swanton "Operation Happiness". Chevon would like to work with the school and have a competition between classes to gather food, Shaggy's and Swanton House of Pizza have agreed to sponsor a pizza party for the winning class.

Chevon asked if there is a way for SEP meeting minutes and YouTube videos to be put on the Swanton website? SEP does not have its own website. Brian and Christina will look into this. Crystal said there is also a tech class that might be able to help.

- Community and Economic Development- Darci Benoit
Darci shared that they have been working to create Promote Swanton, promoting Swanton as a whole.
- Chamber of Commerce-Suzanne Washburn
Crystal shared the car show was very successful this year. "Christmas in the Park" will be 11-30-24.
Suzanne shared the Swan Pond is 25 years old and the liner is deteriorated. Sam the swan keeps tearing it. They have a pond committee who is working to raise donations to replace the pond. They are not looking to use any money from the taxpayers. They have a new shed for the pond that will look like the rail station. There is more to come on this.
- Abenaki Nation-Suzie Kelleher
Suzie shared an update from Chief Gagne, they are serving over 800 people with the food shelf. They are revitalizing their culture by having drum making, basket making, ash workshops, ribbon/skirt making workshops. They had a guest speaker come to speak to them about eugenics and generational trauma that has caused the Abenaki Nation. They are now getting things together for people without homes: propane grills, blankets, pots & pans. You can see more on their website and Facebook page.

8) **New Business**

None

9) **Meeting Dates**

2024/2025 Proposed Steering Committee Meeting Dates-11/7/24, 1/9/25, 3/6/25, 5/1/25, 9/4/25.

These meetings are open to anyone.

10) **Adjourn**

Betsy adjourned the meeting at 7:11pm.

Minutes Drafted by Christina Candels