

**DRAFT MINUTES
TOWN OF SWANTON
SPECIAL SELECTBOARD MEETING
Town Office Building
1 Academy Street, Swanton, VT 05488
In-Person & By Zoom
THURSDAY
January 16, 2025 – 5:30 PM**

Present: Joel Clark-Chair, Earl Fournier, Nicole Draper, Brendan Long, Steve Bourgeois, Brendan Long-Members, Brian Savage-Town Administrator, Cathy Fournier-Town Clerk, Christina Candels-Assistant Town Administrator, Bill Sheets, Adam Paxman, David Winchester
Zoom: No Attendance

A. Call to Order

Mr. Clark called the meeting to order at 5:30 pm.

B. Pledge of Allegiance

Mr. Clark led those in attendance in the Pledge of Allegiance.

C. Agenda Review

Mr. Clark reviewed the agenda, stated they would move Police & Fire to the top of the list.

Mr. Savage requested to add an Executive Session for personnel.

D. Public Comment

None

E. Meeting Topics

1. Review and adoption of the Proposed 2025 Budgets

a. Fire Department

Mr. Sheets came before the board to share the 2025 budget.

Mr. Sheets said the Total 2024 Fire Department budget was \$388,901 for 2025; the proposed budget is \$417,287 with an increase of \$28,386.

The drivers in the budget significant increases in dispatching, property insurance, training, transportation and equipment replacement funds.

The increase in the equipment replacement fund of \$15,000 is part of the Fire Departments capital replacement plan. This plan will enable the Fire Department not to request bonds for a new piece of equipment until 2032. More information will come to the Selectboard February 18th.

Mr. Clark clarified that the percentage for this year's increase is 6.75%. A large portion of the increase is property insurance increase.

b. Police Department

Mr. Sheets shared the 2025 budget.

Mr. Sheets said the 2024 Police Budget was \$1,563,096 for 2025; the proposed budget is \$1,743,718 with an increase of \$180,622.

The drivers in the budget significant increases in salaries, dispatching contract, insurance, workman's comp insurance, retirements, health insurance.

Some of the 2024 savings are that they did not hire the additional full-time officer that was budgeted. This resulted in a carryover of \$90,000. This will result in a \$30,000 credit to the Town for 2025.

Mr. Sheets shared the \$45,000 increase in dispatching is because of a new contract with St. Albans. Mr. Sheets requested the State Police resume dispatching service for Swanton and that was not possible.

Mr. Fournier asked if the increase in workman's comp insurance was more employees? No, Swanton Village scene a significant increase in across the board, but Policing is very dangerous.

Mr. Bourgeois asked what the salary increases were? Mr. Sheets said they have now matched the St. Albans City Police Department to stay competitive. This will be good for the retention of officers.

Other Village staff received a 4% increase.

Mr. Clark said even though they were not able to hire the additional office the Town still received the coverage of 10 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days for the year plus additional services. (100 hours in 2024)? Mr. Sheets said yes, the Town was covered first.

Mr. Bourgeois asked how much the budget increase is over what the actual expense was for 2024? 3%.

Mr. Long asked what the significant increase in Department Supplies is? Mr. Sheets said this is due to cost increases.

Also discussed is the school resource officer. Mr. Sheets said that it is 100% funded by the school district: salary, benefits, workman's comp, retirement, FICA.

Mr. Fournier asked what the \$293,350 in grant income for 2024 was? Mr. Paxman said it was all "Operation Stone Garden" grant. Operation Stone Garden purchased a new Police pickup truck, overtime, trailer and a UTV.

Mr. Sheet agreed the budget is confusing due to the fact each year, the Town pays last year's approved amount for January-March and the contracted price for April-December. At some point it might be beneficial for both if the Town to get on a Police budget of January-December.

For 2025 the breakdown is as follows:

January-March \$118,764.24

April-December \$389,352.89

Total = \$508,117.13 Less \$30,000 credit from 2024

The Town Taxpayers will vote on \$478,117.13 for 2025 Police for the calendar year.

The Town Contract will be if approved \$489,137.19 for April 2025-March 2026.

Mr. Bourgeois made a motion to approve the Fire Department budget of \$316,225 and the Police Department budget of \$489,137.19, seconded by Mr. Long. Motion carried.

c. Highway Department

Mr. Clark said the Highway Department budget had previously been approved but they have since made some changes. Ms. Cathy Fournier said they bumped the overtime, and insurance due to rate increase. This proposed 2025 budget will result in a tax decrease.

From the 2024 budget there is a carryover of \$287,158.33 of this they will carry over to 2025:

\$19,998.60 for Brooklyn Street Stormwater Project

\$149,500 for Road Improvement Project (Swanton Hill redesign)

\$35,837.50 for Storm Water Permits

Anticipated Highway receipts of:

\$150,000 Highway State Aid

\$6,000 Judicial Fees

\$81,822.23 balance on hand after rollover allocations

Equaling \$237,822.23 credits

For 2025 the proposed Highway budget is \$1,268,951.91 - \$237,822.23 =

\$1,121,129.71 to be raised by taxes.

Based on the current grand list the 2025 Highway Tax Rate will be 0.3426, that is a -0.0226 decreases from 2024 once you add Fire & Police.

Mr. Long made a motion to approve the 2025 Highway Budget as presented in the amount of \$1,121,129.71 to be raised by taxes, seconded by Ms. Draper. Motion carried.

d. General Budget

Ms. Cathy Fournier said the proposed 2025 General Fund budget is \$1,001,642.49.

Anticipated General Fund recipients of:

\$50,000 License & Recording fees.

\$40,000 Zoning & Planning Fees

\$8,472.12 Town share of Railroad Tax

\$152,668.26 balance on hand from 2024

Equaling \$251,140.38

For 2025 the proposed General Fund budget is \$1,001,642.49 - \$251,140.38 =

\$750,502.10 to be raised by taxes.

Based on the current grand list the 2025 General Fund Tax Rate would be 0.1822 a 0.0063 increase from 2024 once you add in Missisquoi Valley Rescue, Swanton Public Library Building & Payroll and Swanton Recreation.

Mr. Bourgeois made a motion to approve the 2025 General Fund budget as presented in the amount of \$750,502.10 to be raised by taxes, seconded by Ms. Draper. Motion carried.

e. Swanton Recreation

Mr. Clark shared a large portion of the increase in the 2025 Swanton Recreation proposed budget in health insurance and payroll. Swanton Recreation intends to hire a part-time employee. Mr. Clark suggested the large increase in insurance added to the budget, if the current full-time employee does not pick up the insurance that money cannot be used elsewhere without discussing with the Selectboard. Mr. Fournier asked if they are over in another line and spending that money? That's when they should come to the Selectboard.

That can be discussed at the next meeting when they review the Recreation Bylaws.

Mr. Bourgeois asked if they are operating off bylaws from 1975? Ms. Draper said

That is a Betsy Fournier question.

Mr. Bourgeois asked if the new part-time employee is in the budget? Ms. Draper said yes, if the budget passes, they will hire a part-time employee.

Mr. Bourgeois said he is uncomfortable with a committee adding more employees without the Selectboard's approval. Ms. Draper said that is something to discuss with Betsy Fournier. Mr. Fournier said that is a valid point and should be added to the policies. Ms. Draper said it was discussed last year; to continue to grow their programs and she spends a lot of time, and the concern is her burning out.

Mr. Bourgeois said Betsy Fournier had answered some of his questions via email and said the Selectboard does not assist in their hiring practices.

Mr. Clark said the current Town of Swanton Personnel Policies & Rules of Employment do state, under hiring practice "The Selectboard shall be responsible for the hiring of all employees except the Assistant Town Clerk" Mr. Clark said that policy was signed in 2016. Mr. Clark suggests everyone on the board review the current Personnel Policies and discuss them more. Mr. Clark says seasonal employees he doesn't believe they should get involved, but full time or year around it be added clearly. Mr. Fournier said they should also come to the board if they are going to increase the number of seasonal employees. This is a conversation to be continued.

Mr. Bourgeois asked if they received any money from the school district for programing? Ms. Draper said no, but they partner with them often.

Mr. Fournier made a motion to approve the 2025 Swanton Recreation budget in the amount of \$ 239,602.00 to be raised by taxes, seconded by Mr. Bourgeois. Motion carried. Ms. Draper abstained.

Mr. Bourgeois asked if he should send his questions for the meeting with the Recreation ahead of time. Yes.

d. Swanton Public Library Operation

Mr. Clark said the amount the Swanton Public Library is requesting for 2025 is \$80,260.

Mr. Long asked about the budget increase from \$1,000 (2024) to \$4,800 (2025) in bookkeeping. Ms. Fournier said previously they didn't have anyone, now they have someone they contacted.

This led to a discussion about if there should be one bookkeeper/treasurer for all of the Town funds. Mr. Savage said that is the direction the State would like that, and a lot of

Cities & Towns are going that route. The Town cannot take over the library. That's a conversation for another time.

Mr. Fournier made a motion to approve the 2025 Swanton Public Library operation budget in the amount of \$80,260, seconded by Ms. Draper. Motion carried.

Mr. Bourgeois asked in regard to additional grants received how is that accounted for and do they charge fees for programs? Ms. Draper said if the library receives grants, they use them to offer additional programming directly and no most grants stipulate the programs must be free to participants. The income from the trust is very restrictive on what it can be used for.

f. Swanton Public Library Building & Payroll

Ms. Fournier asked about the increase in the budget for insurance to provide insurance for both full-time employees? Ms. Cathy Fournier said yes. Also included in the budget is an increase in building maintenance because this year the compressor replacement at \$3760 and the sprinkler system replacement at \$6590 need to happen so they are added to the budget. Both of those need to be done in 2025.

Mr. Long asked if the library employees received the same 4% raise as Town employees if the budget shows a 12.21% increase? Ms. Cathy Fournier said they don't control their salaries. Mr. Fournier said they have before. Ms. Cathy Fournier said in November there was an email to give their full-time employees a raise immediately. Mr. Bourgeois asked if that came to the board? Yes, it was discussed. Mr. Savage said the way the law is written, if the library has trustees, they have full say over salaries and benefits. Mr. Clark asked their Town employees for benefits? Ms. Cathy Fournier said they are considered Town employees, but they don't control them. Mr. Fournier said the current salaries are not higher than average. Ms. Draper said it has been talked about for years they are trying to equalize the rate of pay to be competitive with other libraries across the State, which is why the trustees gave their full-time employees a raise. The previous years the discussion was to increase part-time help and give them a more livable wage.

Mr. Fournier made a motion to approve the 2025 Library Payroll & Building Maintenance budget in the amount of \$307,776.36, seconded by Ms. Draper. Motion carried.

g. Missisquoi Valley Rescue

Mr. Clark said the proposed 2025 community support request is \$259,490 Last year it was \$229,761. Mr. Fournier said they also had a large increase in dispatching. The board discussed Highgate putting it on the ballot to vote for Missisquoi Rescue & Amcare.

The board discussed how the membership works and if you get bills as well if you use the services.

Mr. Fournier made a motion to approve the 2025 Missisquoi Valle Rescue request of \$259,490, seconded by Mr. Long. Motion carried.

F. Any other Necessary Business
None

G. Public Comment
None

H. Next Regular Selectboard Meeting – Tuesday, January 21, 2025 – 6:00 pm Town Office

I. Executive Session (Personnel)
Ms. Draper made a motion to enter executive session at 6:51 pm, seconded by Mr. Fournier. Motion carried. Roll Call Vote.

Mr. Fournier made a motion to exit executive session at 7:01 pm, seconded by Mr. Long. Motion carried.

No Actions Taken

J. Adjourn
Mr. Fournier made a motion to adjourn at 7:01 pm, seconded by Ms. Draper. Motion carried.

Respectfully submitted by
Christina Candels-Assistant Town Administrator