

**Convene, Communicate, Inform and Engage**

**Swanton Enhancement Project (SEP)**

**Community Meeting**

**March 13, 2025**

**Swanton Village Complex**

Present: Molly Lambert, Hank Lambert, Joel Clark, Crystal Lampman, Kiersten Bourgeois, Bill Sheets, Brian Savage, BJ Benoit, Darci Benoit, Michelle Desautels, Chris Dodge, Nick Brosseau, Marie Speer, Chief Brenda Gagne, Neal Speer, Abigail Gaudette, Aaron Bartemy

1. Welcome & Agenda Review

Molly called the meeting to order. Molly thanked Betsy Fournier for all of her help and dedication to SEP. She explained that Betsy has had to step away for personal reasons. Crystal Lampman, Vice-Chair will made a motion appoint Molly Lambert as interim chair for the March & May meetings

Joel requested to add under new business a donation request from the Swanton Chamber of Commerce.

2. Review Minutes of January 9, 2025

Molly said the minutes stated it was the annual meeting; the annual meeting is in September.

**Kiersten made a motion to approve the minutes, seconded by Joel. The motion passed.**

3. Finance Update-Joel Clark

Joel shared the following:

Unrestricted balance is \$11,556.35(one online donation of \$40)

Restricted balance is \$12,632.00 (\$3,800 committed to LVRT will go to the Town soon)

Balance by other categories:

Bikes & Signs \$88.95

Capacity/Building \$1,477.25

Substance Misuse \$1,625.61

Beautification \$4,825.19 (CD \$16,482.84)

Marbel Mill Park \$800.15

Kiersten asked if there is a plan for the \$800 for Marble Mill? Joel said there has been discussion but no plans. Bill Sheets said they are seeking grant funding for pickle ball. He will follow up.

Molly shared that many community members have commented on the tremendous work that the Beautification Committee is doing with the flowers and trees.

4. Motion to appoint Molly Lambert Interim Chair.

**Crystal made a motion to appoint Molly Lambert interim chair, seconded by Joel. The motion passed with no further discussion as noted above.**

5. Town Meeting Highlights-Town & Village

Brian (Town) shared that 803 voters cast ballots in the town on town meeting day. He stated it was a low turnout. The results of the voting:

Joel Clark won reelection for his Selectboard seat and was reappointed Chair.

Nick Brosseau won his seat on the Selectboard.

All money articles passed by healthy margins.

Molly congratulated Nick on his win. Nick thanked everyone and looked forward to serving. Joel said as Selectboard they were pleased to see the Police budget pass with a healthy margin vs last year when it was very close vote. Molly thanked Joel for his leadership.

Bill (Village) shared the results of the Village voting.

They have a new Village Trustee - Neal Speer. Welcome back.

Neal thanked and expressed his appreciation to Eugene LaBombard for his many years of service to Swanton Village.

Bill shared that all village budget items passed.

The vote for the new electric building failed by 6 votes. 21% of voters voted. Bill said they took the feedback from last year's vote to develop the proposal for this year that was ultimately defeated. The building would have met the need for the next 50 years. Bill said for an additional .30 to .50 a day the new facility would solve the long-term space needs.

The Public Works budget passed with 83% in favor. The Police budget passed with 63% in favor, those are the largest two tickets items on Village taxes.

Bill said all the options regarding the failed electric building vote are on the table for the Village Trustees at the next meeting. He said they will not have a Police department in 3-5 years if they do not get them more space. Bill said they had nine people show up for the 3 informational meetings. They must find a way to get accurate information out to the voters to reduce the disinformation on Facebook.

Crystal suggested showing what other Police departments have vs. what Swanton Village Police are lacking. Officers are happier when they have adequate, safe spaces to work.

Crystal said at her job as a dispatcher she sits behind 7 locked doors, the ladies in this office don't have that. This Police department does a great job and needs support. Bill said they had 34 informational meetings on the project and 9 people came. Bill said it would cost the taxpayers much more to move the Police department. The propoasal put before the voters is the cheapest and most efficient way to solve the space problems facing the village.

After lengthy discussion among members of the audience, the consensus among those present was strong support for the Trustees efforts to ensure safe and ample space for its police department.

6. Guest Speaker-Chief Brenda Gagne, Abenaki of Missisquoi Molly introduced Chief Gagne. Chief Gagne said, "First of all you say Town of Swanton. This is all stolen land. Our homeland, Swanton & Highgate are very important to our people."

She then reported on some of the work and concerns of the Tribal Council.

- Their food shelf has fed 8,032 families in the last year. 1,416 of them were Abenaki families. Chief Gagne said that with the new administration in Washington, funding is going to be an issue.

- DEI affects kids in school.

- Funding cuts are starting with food shelves.

- Many of the homeless in our area are Abenaki

- Abenaki have the highest suicide rate in Franklin/Grand Isle County.

- They offer a monthly foot clinic, which is important for elders as well as blood pressure checks.

- They offer a lot of classes. The building is very busy. As an example, the Circle of Courage is in its 33<sup>rd</sup> year!

- She continued to summarize a number of current projects and events that are happening: She noted their appreciation foflag being added to the Welcome to Swanton signs. They are currently waiting for bids to improve their building. They will dedicate the building to Chief Homer St. Francis, as well as a plaque for Chief Blacky Lampman. She they were recently gifted \$1,000 from VELCO which they will use for deserving families. They do not say needy, everyone is deserving.

- Memorial weekend is Pow Wow weekend. Last year they had 1,400 people show up.

- Ribbon skirt workshop is coming up.

Joel asked for more information about Circle of Courage. The Chief spoke in detail about the Circle of Courage. They are located in the Church of Nativity Parish Hall. They have 30 kids who attend. They teach them to stand up for themselves, belonging, generosity, mastery, traditional dancing, drumming, weaving, basket making, pounding ash, language and so many things. There will be a new curriculum coming out in May for K-12 for every school in the state.

Chris Dodge shared a compliment with Chief Gagne that he had received through a survey they were conducting at the schools. They have been working on every student having and knowing one trusted adult. A recent survey of every student identified multiple students stating Circle of Courage, which was not an option listed. Incredible evidence of your program.

Crystal asked how can the community be supportive of you? Chief Gagne said the community has been supportive when we reach out. Molly shared that that is what SEP is all about – convening, communicating, informing and engaging. She thanked Chief Gagne for her presentation and her continued engagement with SEP.

#### 7. Business Spotlight-TDI

Joel shared TDI began operating in 2001. They currently operate within a 15,000 square foot facility, with an addition currently being added. They have 50+ vehicles in their fleet. Aaron recently assisted the removal of a Town vehicle off the road, very fast and efficiently.

Aaron Bartemy, one of the family member/ owners of TDI thanked Swanton and SEP for having them and for what they have done in support of their family business. They have had calls asking if they are moving to St. Albans. No, they have purchased a small piece of land in St. Albans for sales but have no plans to leave Swanton. They would like to get the word out about what they can offer the community. They have recently opened a car detailing location on Canada St.

Aaron said after coming tonight he would like to get more involved anywhere they can or are needed.

Aaron thanked his employees who often do not go out in the best conditions. TDI would not be where they are without them. They currently employ 28-30 employees.

Aaron said reach out if you need help or donations reach out and ask.

Aaron shared what a day looks like at TDI. Every day is different. Aaron shared that their customers are primarily commercial, but they have recently invested in smaller vehicles to assist anyone.

Crystal shared the Police Dept she works for uses TDI in their rotation. Joel shared last year he witnessed TDI removing a tractor trailer from the river.

Aaron said they have two rotator wreckers, the equipment needed for that job. Aaron shared that they are currently hiring two roadside technicians and two heavy wrecker operators. The front half of the Canada St. location is going to be a technology/training center.

## 8. Committee Reports

### a. Library

Abbey shared upcoming classes: needle felting, mini-terrarium class, poetry tea time, teen night, watercolor class. April break will be magical creatures camp, open mike night, sushi class, family movie nights, bird feeder class, candle painting class, plant swap, family nights in the park, summer camps (all slots are full). Visit the Library website for dates and times.

### b. MVSD

Chris shared their appreciation for the support of this year's school budget vote. Holy Trinity Church is helping with books for social emotional learning, Respectful, Responsible & Caring with an incredible \$3,000 donation. Swanton School has already distributed \$1,500 worth of books to classrooms. MVU annual blood drive is March 18<sup>th</sup> 8:30-1:30. Walk ins are welcome. MVU recently received distinction as one of very few locations who have generated 5,000 or more pints of blood - an incredible benchmark. Highgate is starting a new partnership with Ameri Corp and Green Up Vermont. MVSD will have a district wide literacy night at Swanton School on April 17<sup>th</sup>. This is the 2<sup>nd</sup> year they have offered this with children's authors Peter & Paul Reynolds. The Swanton School website now has a mental health resources tab for anyone needing assistance. Chris said they will have a group coming May 16<sup>th</sup> from the Vermont Symphony Orchestra open to the community. Abbey asked if the library could have a table at the literacy night? Yes.

### c. Swanton Arts Council

Abbey shared they will have a 10th birthday party for Swanton Arts this weekend. Art supplies, seeds all kinds of fun from a free art grant. They have opened the art nook at the library, rotating every two months.

### d. Swanton Recreation

Abbey shared Swanton Rec is working on summer camp and they still have slots open. Nicole just offered a family dinner night with pasta that was a success, with another night in June for pizza. This is a great event for kids.

Little league plans are underway as well.  
For any info check out the Swanton Rec website.

e. Swanton Historical Society

Nick shared the programing will increase in the spring & summer. They also will be doing fundraising for the Roy insurance building restoration.  
Molly asked, is there any way SEP can help with that? Nick said Heather is working on that.

f. Beautification

Hank shared a fundraiser flyer. Hank said the beauty of the flowers and trees is due to the support of SEP, Village Trustees, Selectboard and fundraising from many donors. Hank wanted to share information about the donation from the Taylor Estate. Three years ago, they received a \$20,000 gift from them to use for beautification purposes. The guidelines were to use \$2,000/year for 10 years. The second donation this year was \$11,400. They will use \$1,400 this year and have put \$10,000 into a CD that will be used at a later date for something special in addition to flowers & trees.

Hank said the planting day is May 17<sup>th</sup>. They will gather at the Village Green at 8:30. Volunteers will be appreciated 9-12pm. Green Up Day for 2025 is May 3<sup>rd</sup>. Hank distributed a flyer that has info related to the purchase bulbs & seeds, a portion of which you purchase goes to the beautification committee.

g. Healthy Communities/Substance Use

Crystal shared they been working with NCSS, Franklin County Caring Communities, Swanton Village. They have just been given the go ahead from the Village Trustees to show Screenagers followed by a round table discussion with NCSS. The goal is to share information on how screens affect our young people around mental health and substance abuse. More information to come.

h. Community & Economic Development/Promote Swanton

Darci is now co-chair of Swanton Chamber of Commerce.

Darci shared the changes in leadership, Elaine Nester and Darci will fill Adam Paxman's role after 16 wonderful years. The next meeting is March 17<sup>th</sup> if anyone is interested.

Promote Swanton is working on a flyer. More information to come.

MVU has a craft show on April 19<sup>th</sup>, befitting National Arts Honor Society.

Joel asked if the Chamber of Commerce is the point of contact for the Swans? Yes. Suzzane Washburn is still the contact.

## 9. New Business

### a. Chamber of Commerce donation request

Joel met with Suzzane to assist with the project of enlarging the swan pond and a new building they can stand up in. The current building is too small/short. Joel said they do not have all the money needed for the project.

Swanton Village and Swanton Selectboard have given them money for the liner for the new pond.

They are looking to build an 8'x10' building and the materials are estimated at \$2,500. There are enough volunteers to build the structure. Suzane sent a letter of request to Joel. Joel is suggesting they take this out of the unrestricted balance.

Kiersten asked for the total project costs? Joel said he believes around \$20,000.

Neal said the Village and the Town have contracted and paid for the pond liner.

They will need some concrete & fencing as well.

Molly asked about the condition of the bandstand – also an important community structure on the Village Green.. Molly believes its structural condition is unsafe.

This should be an enhancement of the Village Green as well. Could they use some of the Taylor donation and repair the bandstand in memory of them?

Kiersten asked the timing of the swan pond and the money on hand. Joel said it is a big project. The funds can be committed.

**Joel made a motion to donate \$1,000 to the Swanton Chamber specifically for the swan building on the Village Green at the appropriate time, seconded by Kiersten.**

Hank asked why not \$1,500? Joel amended his motion.

**Joel made a motion to donate \$1,500 to the Swanton Chamber of Commerce specifically for the swan building on Village Green at the appropriate time, seconded by Kiersten. The motion passed unanimously.**

They will continue the conversation on the bandstand at a future date. Bill said there has been plenty of conversation on this. Bill said there is support both for rebuilding the current or a whole new design. Currently there are no grants for this type of project.

### Meeting Dates:

2025 Proposed dates: May 8<sup>th</sup>, September 11<sup>th</sup> (Annual Meeting), & November 13<sup>th</sup>

Abbey said last year the library received special funds to purchase a pool pass, are these funds still available to renew the pass? Last year they split the cost three-ways

Library/Rec/SEP. Abbey said that is the most checked out pass in the building. A third of the cost would be \$430 last year. Screenagers is funded out of the Villages opioid

settlement fund, \$31,000. Crystal said the pool pass would be of great use to those funds as well and could propose purchasing a 2<sup>nd</sup> pool pass. Opportunities for families for different events. Abbey will find out more details on the cost and if Rec can contribute.

Crystal shared Crossroads is in need of help, if college kids are looking for summer work. When the NOTCH ended their summer program it left a huge hole to fill in the community.

Email Molly Hartman-Lontine

10. Adjourn

**Joel made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 7:18 pm, seconded by Crystal.**

Minutes Drafted by

Christina Candels