

**MINUTES
TOWN OF SWANTON
JOINT INFORMATIONAL MEETING & PUBLIC HEARING
Swanton Village Board of Trustees
Swanton Town Selectboard
In-Person and Zoom Access
Swanton Village Municipal Complex
120 First Street, Swanton, VT 05488
Thursday, April 21, 2022 @ 7:00 p.m.**

Present: Neal Speer, Board of Village Trustees Chair; Adam Paxman, Eugene LaBombard, Christopher Leach, Village Trustee Members; Reg Beliveau, Village Manager; Lynn Paradis (ZOOM User), Assistant Village Manager; James Guilmette, Selectboard Chair; Mark; Earl Fournier, Nicole Draper, Ed White, Selectboard Members; Brian Savage, Town Administrator; Joseph Cava, Administrative Assistant; Jenn Yandow; Mary Pickener; Patrick Parah; Chevon Cooper; Sandy Skeels Kilburn; Ron Kilburn; Crystal Lampman; Paul Chapman; Al Kinzinger; Allen Letourneau; Ashley Bowen; Nick Smith; Jack Nichol; JB Sugar; Lin (ZOOM User); Kelly (ZOOM User); Darci Laroche Benoit (ZOOM User); Sonia (ZOOM User); 18028686041 (ZOOM User); TheSpeers (ZOOM User); Kyanna King (ZOOM User); Gordon Winters (ZOOM User)

*All motions carried unanimously unless stated otherwise.

1. Call to Order

Mr. Speer called the Board of Village Trustees Informational Meeting to order at 7:01 p.m.

Consecutively, Mr. Guilmette called the Town Selectboard Informational Meeting to order at 7:02 p.m.

2. Pledge of Allegiance – Mr. Speer led those present in the Pledge of Allegiance.
3. Public Hearing on Retail Sale of Cannabis in Village and/or Town of Swanton

Mr. Savage explained that there is a lot of confusion and public misperception on why Swanton wants to do this. He explained that the Town had already sent out their warning before Town Meeting Day, but the Village was able to submit their warning before the deadline. He expanded saying that if the Town voted to approve the sale of cannabis, it would not supersede the Village if voted down again. Mr. Savage then explained the rules of procedure saying personal attacks would not be tolerated before opening the floor to the Board of Village Trustees and the Town Selectboard.

No questions or comments from the Town Selectboard.

No questions or comments from the Board of Village Trustees.

4. Public Comment

Mr. Speer opened public comment by talking about Swanton's Downtown expressing a need for more business. This vote came about from individual community members stepping forward to express interest in opening a cannabis dispensary in Swanton.

Ms. Kilburn was not present at the previous informational meeting but expressed a need for answers to lingering questions to justify this type of venture. Mr. Nichol and Mr. Sugar stepped forward as representatives for operating a retail cannabis operation in Swanton. They expressed that this is a brand-new market with limited research available. Ms. Benoit asked what type of tax base this would add to the community? Mr. Savage responded that a special 1% tax could be added if passed by July 2023.

Ms. Yandow raised a point about the varying forms of cannabis infused products and asked Mr. Nichol how a business would moderate non-modified organic products? Mr. Nichol responded saying cannabis oils and candy undergoes vigorous testing and quality control. Mr. Sugar added that there is also product tracking to ensure quality standards. Mr. Fournier asked about the level of THC in products sold? Mr. Nichol explained that the cap is 30% total THC in products sold. Mr. Sugar added that edible THC is concentrated at 5% per serving with a cap of 50% per package.

Ms. Lampman expressed concern over the level of THC in edible products. Mr. Lampman expressed similar concerns over THC levels that have led to hospitalizations in children and young adults. Mr. Lampman also expressed that marijuana is no different than other substances like alcohol that release high levels of dopamine. This can lead to higher levels of anxiety, depression, and negative impacts to cognitive thinking. Mr. Kinzinger was under the impression that a store would not be a danger to youth because it still requires an age limit to purchase and use. He also expressed that a business like this would help to illuminate street dealers that pose a higher danger. Mr. Savage shared in Mr. Kinzinger's points adding that any established cannabis business would be subject to the same regulations and laws as any other business would.

Mr. Paxman asked why Swanton would be a good place to establish a cannabis business? Mr. Nichol responded that Swanton geographically is strategically located between New York and Canada. Mr. Nichol also asserted that cannabis is new and fresh and implied that other businesses take notice of popularity to new ideas and will spur future business development. Ms. Yandow asked how many other towns have enacted similar votes? Mr. Nichol said about two in every three towns across Vermont have casted similar votes to legalize the retail sale of cannabis. Mr. Sugar added that this will still be a small-town venture that supports other local businesses.

Ms. Pickener asked about the type of dispensary Swanton would operate? Mr. Nichol responded that the State hasn't begun regulating medical marijuana so this would be a recreational dispensary with future opportunities for expansion. Ms. Pickener mentioned how observant children are with things that they can see, smell and touch and mentioned the importance of proper advertisement and marketing. Ms. Kilburn expressed that this is a really big decision citing her background in counseling and expressed the dangers of having this in the community.

Ms. Cooper expressed the perception that cannabis is not harmful to young people, but shared figures against this. In Swanton's high school system 39% of high school students reported using marijuana, which is close to the state's average of 40%. Coming from a background in rescue, Ms. Cooper said there is not enough staffing to cover drug enforcement and referenced the lack of Drug Recognition Experts (DRE) in the State of Vermont. She followed asking how enforcement will be managed? Mr. Speer responded that the State is in the process of regulating it and cited how a portion of cannabis sales tax could go towards youth education and prevention. Mr. Savage added that the enforcement of the Cannabis Control Board is similar to how the Liquor Control Board regulates alcohol.

Mr. Parah responded that the kids that are getting a hold of marijuana aren't getting it from dispensaries; they are getting it off the street and from their families. Mr. Parah asked Mr. Nichol would prevent theft? Mr. Nichols answered that there are gate keeping methods in place to manage the cycle of sales and incoming foot traffic. Theft is an issue with any business and measures will be implemented including security systems. Mr. Winters asked how a store in Swanton would be managed? Mr. Nichol said they would do what they had to if it means hiring an armed security guard to check ingoing and outgoing customers.

Mr. Winters asked about public enforcement for smoking in public? Mr. Savage responded that the Cannabis Control Board limits the use to private consumption preventing any use in public buildings or squares. Ms. Cooper asked about advertisement and whether it would stereotypical imagery of pot leaves? Mr. Nichol responded that their advertisement plan is under the radar and does not highlight what the public perceive cannabis to be. People worry about products being laced, but Ms. Cooper

expressed that it being regulated would prevent a lot of these otherwise dangerous products.

Ms. Yandow asked if the Village would be willing to enforce education and enforcement? Mr. LaBombard responded that personally, yes. Mr. Speer added that education is also up to families to educate their children. Ms. Kilburn said people are here tonight with their own views on what they feel is best for Swanton and the information presented is coming from people who haven't lived here their whole life. Ms. Cooper asked if there could be another informational meeting closer to when a business is getting ready to open if passed?

Mr. Fournier expressed a need for zoning to address marijuana businesses for cultivation and processing. Mr. Fournier asked Mr. Nichol where the product would be coming from? Mr. Nichol responded that it would be grown and processed in Vermont, with an emphasis on local growers to showcase their product. Ms. Lampman expressed using zoning as a tool to regulate cannabis and limit areas where a business like this can be located. Mr. Fournier responded that zoning cannot be used to single out cannabis.

Mr. Paxman added that Vermont is in favor for these types of ventures for their tax base. Mr. Leach expressed conservatively that it is here whether we want it to be or not, but he has seen how it has benefitted loved ones with critical illnesses. It is Mr. Leach's personal belief that a store, properly operated and maintained, would be a great addition to the community. Mr. Nichol added that we know we aren't a deli, and this venture is not normal, but turning it into a positive for the community rather than running off of the misinformation surrounding cannabis is the key to its future success. Mr. Paxman commented that Mr. Nichol is setting the example for how a business like this is operated.

5. Any Other Necessary Business - None

6. Adjournment

Ms. Draper made a motion to adjourn the Town Selectboard Informational Meeting at 8:30 p.m., seconded by Mr. Fournier. Motion carried.

Respectfully Submitted,

Joseph Cava
Administrative Assistant

Dianne Day
Village Clerk

Received and filed by:

Cathy Fournier, Town Clerk

Date