

**MINUTES
TOWN OF SWANTON
SELECTBOARD MEETING**

**Town Office Building
1 Academy Street, Swanton, VT 05488
In-Person & By Zoom
Tuesday, January 6, 2026**

Present: Joel Clark-Chair, Earl Fournier, Nicole Draper, Steve Bourgeois-Members, Brian Savage-Town Administrator, Cathy Fournier-Town Clerk, Christina Candels-Assistant Town Administrator, Bill Sheets, Suzie Kelleher, Bob Nielsen, Ron Underwood, Katie Underwood, Josh Ramsdell, Josh Aldrich, Betsy Fournier, Alice Cota
Zoom: Nick Brosseau-Member

A. Call to Order

Mr. Clark called the meeting to order at 6:00 pm.

B. Pledge of Allegiance

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

C. Agenda Review

Ms. Candels requested to add Lister Information under Any Other Necessary Business.

Ms. Draper said the Promote Swanton Budget is loose not in the packet.

Mr. Savage said he has one piece of correspondence to be added under Any Other Necessary Business.

D. Meeting Topics

1. Minutes

a) Regular Selectboard meeting of December 16, 2025

b) Special Joint Meeting with the Highgate Selectboard, Swanton Village Trustees and Board of Directors of Missisquoi Valley Rescue, Inc. of December 17, 2025

Mr. Bourgeois made a motion to approve the Regular Selectboard meeting of December 16, 2025 & Special Joint Meeting with Highgate Selectboard, Swanton Village Trustees and Board of Directors of Missisquoi Valley Rescue, Inc of December 17, 2025, as written, seconded by Mr. Fournier. Motion carried.

2. Public Comments

None

3. Law Enforcement

a) Health Officer Report

The board reviewed Ms. Kelleher's report. Ms. Kelleher received a complaint from a resident of the Swanton Motel receiving a CVOEO voucher.

Ms. Kelleher responded to a complaint from a resident of the Swanton Motel regarding mold and possible bedbugs. Ms. Kelleher referred to the complaint to VTDH Licensing & Lodging to investigate as it is out of her preview. The VTDH inspector Keenan Neigel investigated but didn't share his findings as he is not required to.

4. Highway Department

Mr. Clark said he will have a more detailed report at the next meeting.

The Highway Crew has been very busy keeping the road clear.

The new truck is repaired and back in service.

5. Old Town Business

a) LVRT update

Mr. Clark said he is waiting for the camera installer to install the cameras.

Work is complete and they have one more bill to submit to the State.

b) MVSD, Rowell, Town of Swanton Land Swap update

Mr. Savage said last week the mortgage discharge for Mr. Rowell was recorded. Mr.

Savage let the Town Attorney know and they will schedule the closing for the land swap with all parties. It has been at least three years to get to this point.

c) Fire/EMS Dispatch Contract with City of St. Albans

Mr. Savage shared that he met with Mr. Sheets, Ms. Paradis and Ms. Candels as directed to discuss how to split the dispatching fees from St. Albans City for Fire & Rescue. Dispatch costs will be removed from the Fire and Rescue budgets and added to the General Fund budget.

Mr. Savage shared that the Town will be billed in one invoice for Fire and Rescue dispatching at a rate of \$15 per capita based on a population of 6,792. The total invoice for July 1, 2026-June 30, 2027, is \$101,880.00. This is an increase from \$11.00 per capita to \$15.00 per person as previously billed. The present year the two departments are billed \$74,420.00.

Mr. Clark asked if St. Albans shared why there is such a significant increase? Mr. Savage said they felt they were getting a deal and brought Swanton up to what other Towns are billed.

Both Fire and Rescue fees have been paid up to June 30, 2026. Next year the budget will be the full amount.

Mr. Fournier made a motion to add dispatching to the General Budget, six months (July 1, 2026-June 30, 2027) in the amount of \$50,940.00, seconded by Mr. Bourgeois. Motion carried.

Ms. Draper made a motion to have Mr. Savage sign the contract with St. Albans City for dispatching services, seconded by Mr. Fournier. Motion carried.

d) Approve the following proposed 2026 Budgets previously presented:

1) Highway Budget

Mr. Clark said all of the Town budgets; they do not have the insurance costs yet from PACIF. Mr. Clark asked if they wait until the next meeting, do they have enough time before the Town Report needs to be done? Yes, if it is just these budgets.

Mr. Clark said they have not had any changes since the last meeting. They do need to plan how to proceed with paying for the Barry Rd culvert.

Mr. Clark said he spoke with Tyler Billingsly today and he suggested waiting to see if they get the grant from the state top go out to bid, they would not know until May. This will make it late to get a contract this year. If they do not get the grants this year they could do more paving. Mr. Billingsly does not foresee a catastrophic failure of the culvert, but what they should watch for is sinkholes.

Mr. Bourgeois asked if they should have it checked regularly for sinkholes?

Mr. Clark said he will speak with Mr. Lapan, and they will inspect the culvert every couple of weeks and keep a log of this.

Mr. Fournier asked if they should budget \$300,000.00 this year for it? Yes, and if we can't get it done roll that money over for next year.

Mr. Fournier clarified by saying at the 12/16/25 meeting proposed was to budget \$350,000.00 should they in addition to this budget another \$50,000.00 because of the projected 3.63% decrease in this draft.

If approved this would set aside \$400,000.00 and the Town's liability would be the \$160,000.00 of the grant applied for. If they did not receive the grant for this amount, they could use Rec's Special Funds so the project could be completed this year. The money will be returned to Rec's Special Funds next year.

If they add another \$50,000.00 to the Barry Rd culvert line, it will still show a decrease in the budget. If they do it this way with the plan from the last meeting they could go out to bid sooner, or if they do wait until 2027, they will have \$350,000.00 already saved. Mr. Clark suggested waiting to put the bids out until after they know if they get the grant from the State.

Mr. Fournier asked what was happening with the Brooklyn St. project? They will carry that money to next year (\$35,837.50) and complete the project.

2) Library Operating Budget

Mr. Savage said this is the same budget presented by the library.

Mr. Clark asked if the budget be clearer the ask to the taxpayers in the Town Report.

Ms. Draper made a motion to approve the Swanton Public Library budget in the amount of \$79,4000.00 for 2026, seconded by Mr. Fournier. Motion carried.

3) Library Building Budget

This budget they are still waiting for the building insurance costs.

This will be added to the next meeting.

Mr. Fournier asked if they needed the \$20,000.00 for building because they didn't use it all in 2025? Ms. Cathy Fournier said she thought it was a good idea to leave that amount in the budget.

Mr. Savage said this morning they had a meeting with Mr. Scangas and the engineers with the elevator, and they will need to do some work. Mr. Clark shared a recap of the meeting.

Mr. Fournier asked where they were with the Railroad Depot and the grant? Mr. Savage said they did not get the full grant they applied for, they will receive \$3900.00. The State does have a second round of grants they are at the top of this list for. Mr. Savage needs to discuss it with Mr. Scangas and discuss what is the most serious items to do with the amount awarded.

Mr. Fournier asked where they would get the match from budget or Capital Improvement fund? Mr. Savage will find out how much they need to match also.

Ms. Cathy Fournier said they budget \$12,000.00 for building maintenance for the depot. The Capital Improvement fund has money available also to get the woodwork done.

The members also discussed finding out how much use the usage/visitors building gets. Mr. Brosseau will find out from the visitors log and speak with the two volunteers in the summer.

Mr. Fournier said they can advertise the depot as trail recreation, continue from the LVRT. Mr. Clark has also suggested putting an office or two in the building to be able to get some income from the investment.

4) Swanton Recreation Budget

Ms. Betsy Fournier came before the board and shared an updated budget.

The new budget does have the LVRT maintenance costs removed. The ask from the taxpayers is \$250,492.00 resulting in a 4.54% increase over last year.

The estimated surplus is \$46,593.06.

Mr. Bourgeois asked if they would apply the surplus to the ask bringing down the request? Ms. Betsy Fournier said no they would like to keep the surplus and put it towards an item on their list, a vehicle. The taxpayers have approved that money already.

Mr. Fournier said if they used the carryover for a vehicle plus some from the reserve account, next year's budget wouldn't change much.

Mr. Clark asked if Rec could carry over money? Ms. Cathy Fournier said yes, once the taxpayers approve the money is their money they don't need approval to carry it over. General Fund cannot carry over money unless it is voted on.

Ms. Betsy Fournier said all of their Special Funds are earmarked for specific things, cannot spend it on other things.

Mr. Fournier asked if they would make up the balance for a vehicle from their Capital Reserve fund? Mr. Bourgeois said they have not decided on that yet.

Ms. Betsy Fournier said they have not decided on what vehicle yet, she does have a list of what they want for the RFP.

Mr. Bourgeois said he sent a memo that has a whole list of things they should address before purchasing a vehicle. Mr. Clark said he had sent it to Ms. Draper previously.

Mr. Clark said if they keep the budget at a 3% increase, they could use some of the carryover, that's roughly \$3,000.00 difference. Taking that out of Capital Funds will not be a huge difference in the \$500,000.00 they have.

Mr. Bourgeois said he agrees with the recommendation of a 3% increase over last year. (\$246,790.06)

Ms. Draper said the difference in the budget is the loss of little league and is hopeful in 2027 they will have a strategy to have the additional revenue back.

Mr. Brosseau made a motion to approve the 2026 Recreation budget as noted with a 3% increase \$246,790.06, seconded by Mr. Bourgeois. Motion carried. Ms. Draper abstained.

Ms. Betsy Fournier said going forward any emails sent to Swanton Recreation have to go to Betsy Fournier and Ron Underwood.

5) Promote Swanton Budget

Mr. Fournier discussed the new proposed Promote Swanton Budget. The group discussed last year Swanton Village approved of \$5,000.00 and the Town approved of \$4,000.00 out of the Highway department for the Beautification committee.

In the last presentation the Promote Swanton group had suggested moving the allocation to their budget.

Ms. Kelleher came to the table to discuss it as the head of the Beatification committee. Ms. Kelleher said she has spoken with Mr. Sheets from the Village, and they are going to leave the allocation the same this year for taxpayer approval. This was discussed and agreed upon, next year they will discuss if they want to change how it is budgeted.

With the removal of Beautification from the proposed budget Promote Swanton would like \$7,700.00. Mr. Fournier said this is only \$2,7000.00 worth of new dollars because the Town has always allocated \$5,000.00 for Town Celebration that will be moved to the Promote Swanton budget.

Mr. Fournier said he is hoping to see more activity with the new signage this summer and they will see a return on investment.

Ms. Draper made a motion to approve \$7,700.00 for Promote Swanton to be in the General Budget for physical year 2026, seconded by Mr. Fournier. Motion carried.

e) Amend General Fund Budget as a result of Fire/EMS Dispatch Contract if approved
Discussed above.

f) Barry Road Culvert financing
Discussed under Highway Budget.

6. New Town Business

a) Presentation of 2026 Budget Request of Missisquoi Valley Rescue, Inc. with possible adoption

Mr. Ramsdell and Mr. Eldrich came before the board to share the 2026 budget and the 2025 response information. Calls for 2025 were an increase of 4%.

The Community Support ask was \$276,386.00 but they will decrease the budget by \$50,000.00 as they need to remove the dispatching costs as discussed above.

The new amount requested is \$226,386.00. Last year MVR requested \$259,490.00 from the Town of Swanton.

Mr. Fournier asked why they spent so much above the budget for Professional Services? Mr. Ramsdell said they hired a new accountant; they needed to go back a few years because the previous company did not do what they needed to do.

They have also accrued legal fees for the ongoing investigative personnel issue.

Mr. Fournier asked what the line-item New Station amount is for? Mr. Ramsdell said they have an offer and a loan accepted but they have not pulled the final trigger yet for a new station.

The property is located at 555 Vt Route 78 in Highgate. The price is \$485,000.00. and an estimate of \$150,000.00 for renovations.

The land they have for sale now to build would cost over a million dollars. That mortgage of \$45,000.00 a year, and it is included in the budget.

Mr. Ramsdell said payroll increases are due to a 3% pay increase and a newly implemented retirement program.

Mr. Brosseau asked why the increase of ambulance payments? Mr. Ramsdell said they paid one ambulance off but purchased two new ones.

Mr. Bourgeois asked what the increase would be with the dispatch to compare?

Mr. Ramsdell said it is a 6% increase over last year.

Mr. Clark said the current contract has expired. Mr. Ramsdell said he did discuss with Mr. Savage they will cover until the new contract, after Town Meeting Day.

Mr. Bourgeois made a motion to put the budget amount of \$226,386.00 on the ballot, seconded by Mr. Fournier. Motion carried.

Mr. Clark asked if they had an update on the investigation? Mr. Ramsdell said the holiday slowed it down, they anticipate another week to week and a half. Once they receive the report they will get a copy.

b) Presentation of 2026 Budget Request of Swanton Police Department with possible adoption

Mr. Sheets & Ms. Kelleher came before the board to share the 2026 Swanton Police budget.

Mr. Fournier asked how much the increase is? 17% over last year.

Mr. Clark asked what the major increases are? Mr. Sheets said salary, benefits, dispatching, property/worker's comp insurances. Policing is a very expensive enterprise. They are doing everything they can to keep costs down.

Mr. Sheets said the previous contract was \$43,261.00 a month and the next 12-month contract will be \$47,842.80. The new contract will be for \$574,114.00.

Mr. Sheets said Swanton Village Police provided over 200 hours of additional services at no cost to the Town in the current contract.

Mr. Sheets said one thing to note is while Village employees received a 3% pay increase the Police received more, because St. Albans City Police received more. To be competitive they need to stay even.

Ms. Kelleher said it's the closest department if they're going to poach staff.

Mr. Sheets said there is no line for cruisers. They do not buy them new, if they have money left in the budget they buy them used, plus they are able to buy equipment with Operation Stone Garden.

Mr. Fournier asked about the \$200,000.00 for school resource officer? There is two officers now. Mr. Sheets said also remember the second officer Mr. Parah was hired with the understanding the Village would pay for his salary for the first year because they were having a hard time recruiting. Effective July 2026 his full salary will be paid by the school district. This week they hired a full-time officer. They currently have one full-time opening and July 1st when the school assumes the second school resource officer they will be back to two openings. They have two in the pipeline.

Mr. Clark said the dispatching increased from \$65,000.00 to \$107,000.00 in two years also. Mr. Sheets said to put it in perspective to start up their own it would be 1.5 million minimum in the first year.

Mr. Clark asked how they got to the number asked? Mr. Sheets said it is 33% of all salaries, not 33% of the budget.

Mr. Sheets said they plan to break ground in the spring for the new electric facility. This will give the Police more room once completed.

Mr. Bourgeois asked if they plan to expand to any other areas? Mr. Sheets said no, having received a request from Highgate already, they need to be loyal to Swanton.

Mr. Fournier made a motion to approve the Police budget for the Town Report for 4-1-2026 to 3-31-2027 in the amount of \$574,114.00, seconded by Mr. Bourgeois. Motion carried.

c) Presentation of 2026 Budget Request of Swanton Fire Department with possible adoption

Mr. Sheets and Ms. Kelleher came before the board to discuss the 2026 Swanton Fire Department budget.

Mr. Sheets said the dispatch fees are out of the budget.

The total operating budget is \$410,657.00, taking out the interest and PILOT income 77% of the amount to be paid by the Town in \$309,299.00.

Mr. Sheets said they currently have 26 members in the department.

Mr. Sheets updated where they stand with the trucks and where they are will equipment.

Mr. Clark thanked the Fire Department for what they are doing in the community.

Mr. Bourgeois said he is thankful they do not have to pay for a full-time Fire Department because the cost would be considerably higher.

Ms. Draper made a motion to approve the Town Fire assessment for 2026 for a cost of \$309,299.00, seconded by Mr. Fournier. Motion carried.

d) Town Report Dedication

Mr. Clark said they do not have much time, they cannot wait until the next meeting.

Mr. Fournier said he thinks they should honor Jim Pratt for his years of service to the Town.

Mr. Clark said they should consider the Fire Department. Mr. Bourgeois said he likes the group idea that Ms. Draper put together last year. Mr. Clark said it would be good for the moral and what they have done in the community.

It could encourage others to want to join. Mr. Bourgeois thought it would be good to get the Fire Department's input in the write-up.

Mr. Clark said they have the cover and back both sides.

Mr. Fournier said they should also mention Mr. Cheney. Ms. Kelleher said they should also include Mr. Bouchard. They are the only centenarians from WWII.

Mr. Clark made a suggestion to put the two centenarians on the back cover and Jim Pratt inside the back cover. The front cover and the back side of the front cover will be for the Fire Department.

Mr. Clark made a motion to dedicate the 2026 Town Report to the Fire Department, Jim Pratt and the two veterans that are centurion and centurion plus, seconded by Ms. Draper. Motion carried.

7. Community and Economic Development

a) Update on Promote Swanton

Mr. Fournier said they are still waiting for Ecopixel to finish the website updates.

Ms. Draper shared shirts are available if anyone would like Swanton swag.

Mr. Clark said he is getting a couple of estimates for a new sign for the park approximately the same size so that they can possibly have a logo on the side of it.

Mr. Fournier asked Ms. Candels if she is limited on what she can put on the sign? Ms. Candels said yes only so many words/letters of space. A new sign may be different.

b) Industrial Park Listing

Mr. Clark asked if they have a list of occupied and vacant space in the industrial park?

Mr. Clark thinks they should keep track of that.

Ms. Draper said FCIDC should.

Mr. Fournier said he has seen Economic Development on other Town's websites. When speaking to local businesses they said they didn't know where to look for assistance.

Mr. Clark said this is something he would like to work on after the budgets are completed.

Mr. Savage said the only vacant building is the cheese plant. Mr. Bourgeois said they have to be careful they don't have any space to sell.

The Southern Growth District should be highlighted.

A list of businesses and how many employees would be helpful.

Mr. Fournier said some of these businesses have participated in information for the website.

8. Any Other Necessary Business

a) Lister information

Mr. Clark asked Ms. Candels and Mr. Savage to do some more research on the Listers positions from the discussion at the last meeting. VLCT research shows the Town does not need a charter for this. Ms. Candels called several towns to survey the number of parcels and hours required for an assessor and or assistants. This is just for review.

b) Correspondence

Mr. Savage shared a card received for the Selectboard.

The card was a Thank You card for the Christmas gift card from Ms. Kelleher as the Health Officer.

9. Items for Regular Selectboard Agenda of January 20, 2026

a) Employee Reviews/Plan

b) Budgets

c) Update on the PILOT program for the State garage
Mr. Savage said he is waiting for information from the listers for this and has asked multiple times.
Mr. Clark said if this is not received as a Selectboard they need to send a letter about what they need and what the plan is.
Mr. Fournier asked if there is a due date for this from the State? Ms. Cathy Fournier thought it was when they closed the grand list. Ms. Draper looked it up online and said the recommended deadline is December 31st.

10. Public Comment (Reprise)
None

12. Upcoming Events
a) Tuesday – January 13, 2026 – Planning Commission – 5:00 pm – Town Offices
b) Monday – January 19, 2026 – MLK Holiday – Offices and Operations – CLOSED
c) Tuesday – January 20, 2026 – Selectboard Meeting – 6:00 pm – Town Offices
d) Thursday – January 22, 2026- DRB Meeting – 6:00 pm – Town Offices

13. Adjourn
Ms. Draper made a motion to adjourn at 7:47 pm, seconded by Mr. Fournier.
Motion carried.

Respectfully Submitted by
Christina Candels-Assistant Town Administrator

Received and filed by:

Cathy Fournier, Town Clerk

Date