

**Town of Hawley, Massachusetts
Minutes of a
Selectboard / Board of Health / Zoning Board of Appeals Meeting
In Person & via Conference Call**

January 31, 2023

Present: Will Cosby, Bob MacLean, Hussain Hamdan (via Zoom) - Selectboard

Tinky Weisblat, Gal Friday

Virginia Gabert, Treasurer and Financial Administrator

Gary Mitchell, Chris Tirone, Georgette deFriesse, Ken Bertsch, Peter Beck, Donna Lemoine,
Wayne Lemoine, Kimberly Orzechowski, Lark Thwing, Lloyd Crawford, and James Heroux

The meeting was called to order at 7:01 p.m. Warrants and minutes from a previous meeting were signed. Then:

1. **James Heroux of Labelle Road spoke to the board and the highway department about possibly changing the route for plowing his road.** James expressed his concern that during three recent storms the way in and out of his home had been cut off by trees that had fallen on power lines. He was particularly concerned, he said, because his two small children had to be picked up from childcare in Conway. He said that he knew that snow-plow routes could be a contentious issue, but he suggested that perhaps the town could plow his area by coming in via East Road. He said that the new route might be hillier but that it didn't have power lines – so if necessary he could clear downed trees himself instead of waiting for the road crew and/or power company.

Gary observed that changing the route might work, particularly in future years. He said that if the plows came via Forget to East Road, the crew might need to put in a snow fence. James said he didn't expect an immediate reply and added that he would be happy to talk to his neighbors about the issue if that would help.

Kimberly, who lived near the route in question, noted that mud was a severe problem there in the spring.

The selectboard said that establishing an alternate route was certainly worth considering and promised to mull it over in the coming weeks. James thanked them for listening and thinking about the issue.

2. **Will called on Lark Thwing to report on the recent deliberations of the Communications Committee.** Lark briefly went over the minutes from the committee's most recent meeting. He summed them up by saying that the group recommended staying with the WordPress platform but hiring someone to tweak the website to make it as simple and as inexpensive to maintain as possible. Hussain, who was on the committee, said that it was seeking the Selectboard's blessing to talk to a few vendors it had identified to find something affordable and workable. Will noted that he wasn't impressed with the list of vendors but had no problem sticking with WordPress.

He said he wanted the town to allocate funding for maintaining the site, adding that he was unsure that the \$800 suggested by the committee would suffice. Tinky pointed out that that figure had been a very rough estimate. Will said he was in favor of a total redesign. Lark and Hussain disagreed, arguing that a modification of the existing platform was workable. Hussain felt it was premature to immediately seek redesign before the Committee did its due diligence with the vendors.

Lark stated that he thought determining how much the site was used was important in calculating its complexity and expense. Tinky argued that the current usage didn't necessarily indicate what traffic might be if the site were more navigable.

Will asked the committee to come up with a proposal and return with a presentation. Lark noted that he was retiring from the committee and that Rick Kean would become a member emeritus. He asked the board to appoint Peter Beck and Wayne Lemoine to the committee, and the Selectmen complied.

- 3. The group listened to a report from Ken Bertsch of the Hawlemont School Committee.** Ken began by noting that the two-district school agreement had just been extended by three years. He also shared the good news that the Mary Lyon Foundation had signed a contract to ensure that the school could offer a before- and after-school program. He noted that the lack of such a program had been one of the reasons some families had moved their children to other schools.

He said that the school was still considering adding a solar array. He reported that he had been told that the Fire Department's concerns about rooftop access for firefighters could be addressed. However, he added, nothing would happen soon. The roof would need to be replaced within 10 years, which made putting a solar array on it unlikely. Furthermore, the electrical grid in Charlemont was not prepared to accept that much activity. He said there were other possibilities being discussed, including having a small, home-sized system and putting a system on the kindergarten/pre-K roof with the possibility of a battery backup. But nothing was happening soon, he concluded. Will suggested the group might think about a geothermal heating and cooling system.

Finally, Ken turned to the topic of the rural-schools report that had been issued the previous summer. He noted that the school committee was particularly impressed with 15 of the report's recommendations. He said that the town of Charlemont was writing a letter in support of some of the recommendations and asked that the Selectboard consider doing the same. They asked him to work with Tinky on drafting a letter for them to sign. They also thanked him.

- 4. The board conferred with Lloyd Crawford of the Finance Committee about possibilities for the FY 2024 budget.** Lloyd said that the committee had just met with Virginia and was trying to get input from every group in town about what was needed. He noted that Greg Cox had invited the committee to tour the fire station to see how town funds were used there, and he suggested that visiting the highway department might be a good idea as well.

Hussain brought up the need for additional emergency-medical-service training. If the agreement with Adams Ambulance were extended, it might be possible to reduce the in-house EMS training line, he said, since Adams had agreed to include Hawley personnel on its training roster.

He also brought up a new, cell-phone based paging system Hawley's emergency-services personnel were adopting on a trial basis (known as I Am Responding). If the group adopted the system, it would cost \$300 per year, he explained. That cost might eventually be picked up by the state police, who had suggested they might do this, (but funding remained unclear), but for the moment he and emergency-management director Dean Desmarais endorsed adopting the system, as did Greg Cox. He noted that Hawley's Dispatcher, Shelburne Control, favored this system, as it enabled a lot of traffic to be kept off the limited radio frequencies. Hussain explained that although Greg thought this was affordable in the current budget, Hussain and Dean thought it should have its own new budget line.

Will noted that he had asked for \$3000 in FY 24 for website redesign and hosting.

Discussion turned to two thorny technology issues. One was the need for someone to call when technology went amiss in the office. The other was the low level of internet service currently experienced around town and at town offices.

In regard to the technology issue, Wayne Lemoine noted that he used a reasonably priced computer consultant and promised to bring information about that person to another meeting. Hussain noted that the school district or FRCOG might be able to collaborate with the towns on a regional approach and that this had been mulled over in the past but had not gone anywhere. He said that although he favored a county-wide solution to this issue, it wasn't going to be found in the next two weeks.

In reference to the overall internet issue, Tinky noted that although the WiValley system was a great interim step, it was insufficient for anyone who wanted to run a small home business and couldn't reach everyone in town. She suggested that the budget should include a grant-writing consultant to find a way to use federal funds for digital equity.

Will returned to the big picture and asked the board what was not currently being done that needed to be addressed in the budget. Will asked whether the Board of Health or Zoning Board of Appeals had any expenses. Virginia said that there was a small amount of money for each in the budget, observing that before the pandemic the budget had paid part of the fee for the public nurse to hold office hours at the Federated Church. She wondered aloud whether the nurse had returned to the church; Tinky said that she had been back for some time. Virginia said that the continuing education budget looked okay; it hadn't been used lately because of the pandemic.

Chris asked whether the continuing education funds were available to all town employees, suggesting that perhaps his regular retraining to keep up his hoister's license could come out of that rather than the highway department budget. Gary said he thought the highway department could handle the fee, however, as it was marginal.

Lloyd concluded his presentation by asking whether it would be worthwhile for the town to get more help with grant writing, either by adding hours to someone who already worked for the town or by hiring someone with the appropriate expertise. (Will cautioned that such people were expensive.) Lloyd asked the board to continue thinking.

- 5. The group discussed the form from FRCOG asking the town to identify DLTA (Direct Local Technical Assistance) priorities.**

After some questions about whether the final version of the Google Doc Lloyd had created for this was online, Will read through the list as it currently stood. He asked Tinky to fill in the town's top three priorities (shared services, including paramedic-level regional ambulance service, connectivity, digital equity, grant management, and information technology; flood management; and rural policy plan implementation, particularly with regard to getting state help for transportation of out-of-district vocational students) and send the form to FRCOG the next day.

6. **Discussion turned to the status of highway-department equipment.** Gary reported that the one-ton truck had just come back from the repair shop and that an insurance adjuster was due to look at the red truck. Will asked whether Gary had an idea of what it would cost to replace the sander. Gary promised to get a price.

Will asked whether any other equipment issues had arisen. Gary said that the one-ton truck was a lingering issue. It was a 2015 vehicle, and in the past three years it had needed a lot of repairs. Virginia said that on the capital plan she had listed it as due for replacement the following year. Lloyd said that would work.

7. **The group discussed the proposed two-percent addition to the cost-of-living adjustment for county retirees.** The county retirement system had asked for a vote on this. After noting recent inflation, Hussain moved to approve the addition, Bob seconded, and all voted in favor.

In other business, the board welcomed incoming interim town clerk Donna Desmarais Lemoine.

Virginia asked Donna whether she and Pam Shrimpton had figured out how Donna was to be paid, and Donna said they planned to discuss that issue the following day.

Virginia reported that the town had been approved for winter road assistance and that it was time to file for reimbursement. Bob and Will signed the reimbursement form. (Hussain was attending virtually.)

Tinky said that public-health nurse Meg Ryan and Carol Foote from LifePath were hoping to talk to the Selectboard on February 28. Will said that would be difficult as that date was a busy one. He asked Tinky to reschedule Meg and Carol for March.

Will brought up complications with the Sears Road culvert grant. He reminded his colleagues that the engineering design had been performed by SVE. He said that the engineer in charge there had now moved to GZA, the company that was working on the King Corner culvert design. He said he was concerned that the SVE work might not meet state standards and cited the recent experience of the town of Wendell, where inferior work had led to enormous physical and legal problem. He said he would like to ask GZA to review the Sears Road engineering plan. He said that this would cost money, but he thought it would be worthwhile. Hussain asked how the town could be sure that the original engineer didn't just rubber stamp his own work now that he was at GZA. Will said that he would ask the engineer's supervisors to look at the work, and Hussain said it would be essential for GZA to know exactly what the town was looking for them to do and why. Lloyd agreed that this move would give GZA some responsibility for the plan. Will added that he had not been impressed by the former SVE engineer's responses (or rather non-responses) to questions posed. After some back and forth and speculation about what the additional work checking the engineering might cost, the board agreed to Will's plan. Lloyd noted that the town might have to look for more money for the project. The group agreed to continue discussion on this issue at another session.

There being no other business, the meeting was adjourned at 9 p.m.

Respectfully submitted, Tinky Weisblat, Gal Friday

Williams Cosby

Hussain Hamdan

Robert MacLean