

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

November 22, 2022

Present: Will Cosby, Bob MacLean, Hussain Hamdan - Selectboard
Tinky Weisblat, Gal Friday
Virginia Gabert, Treasurer and Financial Administrator
Gary Mitchell, Chris Tirone, Georgette deFriesse, Lark Thwing (via telephone)

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

The Selectboard discussed appointing Emily Stockman to act as a special municipal employee for the purpose of doing a peer-review of the Hawley Preserve wetlands report, conditioned upon the Conservation Commission's voting at its next meeting to engage her services. Will explained that Stockman was a wetlands biologist whom the town had used before and that if appointed and approved she would be responsible for making sure that the wetlands expert engaged by the Hawley Preserve (the entity created by Jane O'Connor and her business partner which has expressed interest in developing houses on the old Yates property in East Hawley) did correct mapping of the area, with the Preserve paying her fee. Hussain moved to appoint, Bob seconded, and all voted in favor.

Discussion moved to the topic of the town website. Tinky presented an email from Jorma Kansanen, an Ashfield resident who had been referred to the town by Jane O'Connor, in which this web/publicity expert analyzed the current website and described changes he might make. Will said he had also looked at the Buckland website, which he found very readable. He said that while the board was mulling over proposals for working on Hawley's site, something would need to be done in the interim as current webmaster Rick Kean wanted to retire at the end of the year. He suggested that Tinky contact both Liz Billings (who had offered to help out) and Rick to see whether they could do a little training and maintenance in the meantime. He also noted that Rick should be asked to educate the board about how the current files were backed up. Hussain said he was pretty sure they were backed up on some form of hard drive and suggested that the files could either be transferred to drives owned by the town or the town could reimburse Rick for the current drives to acquire them. He also noted that although he had contacted Suzer IT, another tech company, he had not yet heard back. The board asked Tinky to contact CivicPlus, the company that designed the Buckland site, for information, perhaps using Jorma's proposal for information. Hussain noted that Jorma seemed to know what he was doing, in terms of the suggestions he made which were quite similar to suggestions received from similar providers. He said he would be interested to see Jorma provide some references, as he is not familiar with him or his work product.

Virginia said that free cash was going to be certified soon (perhaps freeing up some funds for the website) and that the Finance Committee would soon begin reaching out to various committees and boards about the 2023 budget. Will observed that the town might be able to use ARPA funds for the website, and Hussain noted that that was a definite possibility.

The group moved on to discussion of the request from the four-town internet group to lend Hawley's road crew and equipment to make the road up Borden Mountain in Savoy navigable for a truck trying to install a pole. Will explained that although the installation of the pole had been planned for some time, the state had only just granted permission for the actual installation. Savoy's road crew was either nonexistent or insufficient, he said, and so WiValley (the installer) had asked Hawley for help as the road up the mountain was extremely icy.

Will said that the purpose of the pole was to provide redundancy for WiValley poles in Hawley. Gary observed that he had looked at the road in question and that he thought sanding it was possible and "not much riskier" than much of the work that his crew did regularly. The project would need chains and quite a bit of sand.

Will explained that WiValley would install the pole in May 2023 if Hawley turned down the proposal. Hussain said that given how long Hawley had lived without wireless backup, he would need to have a good reason to support WiValley's current proposal and not waiting until May.

The Selectboard then talked to Lark Thwing, the town's WiValley coordinator, by telephone. Lark explained that the Borden Mountain pole would be "one of the kingpin poles" of the system. Will asked how much sand would be needed; Gary said at least two loads. He speculated that about \$1000 worth of sand was needed for the task, plus labor. He estimated that the job would require about \$3000 in all.

Lark said that he didn't have that kind of budget (he had about \$500) but that customers were waiting for the pole to get service (in other words, the installation was not just for redundancy but also to hook up additional customers) and that some of them might decide to go to another service such as Starlink, from Elon Musk's SpaceX. The risk was that customers who had to wait longer to be hooked up to the four-town network might go with a different vendor and be lost forever. Hussain asked whether Lark had any idea what the impact might be of waiting until May. Lark replied that people were very happy with Starlink, although it was becoming harder to get signed up there.

Lark said that he had assumed less sand and labor than Gary was suggesting and that given the costs and WiValley's budget, at this point the group might have to wait until spring. Hussain noted that Virginia had suggested that perhaps ARPA money could be used for this project, given that it would help Hawleyites with connectivity. He noted that he believed the expense would be acceptable and that he felt the most appropriate procedure would be for the Town to allocate some of the ARPA money to the four-town group to cover cost overruns in building out the broadband network and then have Hawley bill the four-town group for the cost of sanding to install the pole.

Lark said that he would know by Monday whether the sanding was needed; it all depended on the weather. Virginia asked whether Hawley would have any liability if its crew sanded in another town. Hussain said there was always liability. However, he felt that given the existing inter-municipal agreement, this was a legitimate action for the Hawley DPW to take.

Hussain moved to make a sum not to exceed \$2500 available from Hawley's ARPA funds to the four-town wireless group to mitigate cost overruns for broadband connectivity. Bob seconded. All voted in favor. Hussain further moved to permit the Hawley Highway Department to assist with sanding and salting in Savoy. Bob seconded, and all voted in favor. Lark promised that someone would get back to Gary Monday morning to let him know whether the work was in fact being requested.

In other business, Tinky noted that she would be on vacation around Christmas and would be attending the December 20 board meeting via Zoom. She also brought up two items that had arisen in recent conversations she had had with acting Town Clerk Pam Shrimpton. First, the two recommended that the salary for the town clerk be increased if possible, given the greater number of hours needed to run elections under new state regulations. Second, they wondered whether the town clerk's \$1 share of dog licensing fees could be given instead to the town's dog officer, given that this position was unpaid.

Virginia observed that the latter idea would probably not be feasible as the share of licensing going to the town clerk was mandated by the state. She noted that in considering the budget for 2023 the board might suggest a salary or stipend for the dog officer.

Hussain recalled that some years earlier he had done a survey of different town positions and had discovered that there were large inconsistencies between the time people put into their town work and the money they were paid. Prime examples, he noted, were the School Committee and the Conservation Commission, both of which entailed long hours and considerable expertise but paid virtually nothing. Although he recognized that there had been comparisons of compensation for the same position across different towns, he felt that the situation is different in places like Hawley because volunteers and committee members did a lot of the heavy lifting themselves, whereas they were assisted by staff in bigger municipalities. Virginia chimed in that elected officials' salaries were often compared with those in other towns via FRCOG but that a lot of appointed officials didn't get paid at all. Hussain promised to bring in the survey for his fellow Selectmen to look at. He added that he wasn't sure much could be done in the short term about this problem, however.

Virginia said that she hoped to have a classification hearing with the assessors about the next year's tax rate at the next Selectboard meeting. She indicated that the assessed value of most property had gone up, which meant that the tax rate might go down. Tinky said she would be the hearing on the agenda for December 6.

The board went into executive session at 8:05 and left that session at 8:50.

At the end of the executive session, the group considered payment for Mike Schofield, who had recently requested a raise for his work plowing snow and mowing cemeteries for the town. The board agreed that his request for \$100 per hour for plowing using his own equipment seemed reasonable. Virginia reminded the group that the budget was tight and asked Gary to be careful how many hours he requested from Mike. The consensus was that the group should approve the raise but have Gary monitor Mike's hours, and that the question of cemetery mowing be taken up in the spring. Gary said he would get in touch with Mike and explain this.

Virginia reminded the group that when it had spoken with Magnus Thorsson at its last meeting it had asked him to come back to its meeting on December 13 ... but that there was no meeting on that date. Tinky said she would get in touch with Magnus about December 6 or 20. If necessary, Will said, the group could call a special meeting on December 13.

There being no other business, the meeting was adjourned at 8:58 p.m.
Respectfully submitted, Tinky Weisblat, Gal Friday

Williams Cosby

Hussain Hamdan

Robert MacLean