

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

May 23, 2023

Present: Will Cosby, Bob MacLean, Hussain Hamdan - Selectboard
Tinky Weisblat, Gal Friday
Virginia Gabert, Treasurer and Financial Administrator
Gary Mitchell, Chris Tirone, John Sears, and via Zoom Jonathan Eisler and Che Tarah

The meeting was called to order at 7:02 p.m. Initial warrants and minutes from a previous meeting were signed. Then:

1. **The group looked over the contract from Tuman Design for the website re-design.** Hussain moved to authorize the chair to sign the contract. Bob seconded the nomination. Will said that he was a little concerned about the estimated length of time it would take to get the new site up and running and asked Tinky to expedite anything she could. Meanwhile, Tinky said she would investigate putting things up on the site in the meantime once Rick Kean returned from his trip, perhaps asking Wayne Lemoine to help. The group voted to have Will sign the contract and signed a separate warrant authorizing Virginia to send Bill Tuman his initial payment. Will expressed the board's thanks to the Communications Committee: Rick, Peter Beck, Hussain, and Wayne – and to Tinky.
2. **The board discussed the proposed easement for Tedd White's property** on West Hawley Road, which Will said would help with the Sears Road culvert work. Will noted that Tedd had granted permission for this and that Tedd and the conservation commission had asked for help in keeping the intermittent stream bed on the property free of debris; the best way to get to that bed was over Tedd's driveway. Hussain promised to look over the draft to see whether an easement was needed or merely a contract with indemnification.
3. **John Sears joined the group to talk with Jonathan Eisler and Che Tarah of Perspectives,** a company the Personnel Committee was hoping would mediate between the two full-time members of the highway department. The two explained that Jonathan was at the company's headquarters in Chicago while Che was a consultant based near Hawley in Williamstown. Jonathan said that Che had been with the company since 2013 and that, although Che had no expertise in the machinery Gary and Chris ran, he was well versed in interpersonal dynamics.

Hussain asked for an overview of the mediation process. Jonathan and Che explained that there would be several steps. First, Che would meet with the Selectboard to discuss their hopes and expectations for Gary and Chris. Second, he would meet with Gary and Chris individually. Third, he would meet with the two together to work on establishing an agreement about their relationship going forward. Finally, he would debrief the Selectboard.

Hussain asked about how long the process would take. Che estimated that it would take about two weeks, depending on scheduling. Hussain asked about similar cases the group had handled. Jonathan said that the range was wide.

First, he described two people who had worked together for 17 years but were no longer getting along. The analysis of their relationship had revealed that the cause of their rift was an accidental omission on the part of one of the two to invite the other to a party. The second example he gave involved three people in a public-works program who had had to come up with a list of actionable changes and ways to get community support for their work. Jonathan noted that his company had worked with over 170 municipalities.

Hussain asked about confidentiality in the mediation, wondering who had access to what information. Che said he honored confidentiality in people's statements but felt free to share the feelings behind people's words. Jonathan said that the Selectboard would be informed of what it would take for Gary and Chris to work together in the future. Gary and Chris said that they had no questions. Will asked what would work in terms of timing for Gary and Chris, noting that Monday through Thursday times would be best since the road crew worked only four days per week in the warmer months. The group moved on to setting up an executive session in which the board could have its initial talk with Che and settled on Tuesday, May 30, at 7 p.m. John said that he was pleased with the meeting.

Hussain moved to engage Perspectives and draw \$2500 from highway-department funds for the purpose. Bob seconded the motion, and all voted in favor. Jonathan promised to send the contract to Tinky the following day, and Che promised to send the link for the Zoom session with the Selectboard.

- 4. The board moved on to a discussion of appointments for the coming year.** Up for renewal (and approved) were Donna Lemoine as records-access officer; Gary Mitchell as tree warden; Greg Cox as fire chief, measurer of wood, surveyor of lumber, and forest-fire warden; Chris Tirone as animal-control officer and veterans' services representative; Dean Desmarais as emergency-management director; George Rice as constable; Jason Pelletier as police chief; Ashley Harrison as conservation-commission member; Suzy Groden as historical-commission member; the entire council on aging; Donna Lemoine as burial agent; Peter Mitchell as agricultural-commission chair; Lisa Johnson as the representative to the Nilman Scholarship Committee; and John Sears as personnel-committee chair.

New appointments discussed and agreed upon were Tinky Weisblat for the communications committee and possibly Brandon Root to the historical commission. (Hussain reported that Brandon had told him that he felt he wasn't being told about all the new responsibilities he supposedly had.)

Tinky noted that Ed Lairë of East Hawley had expressed interest in joining the conservation and historical commissions; she said she was waiting to hear back from the chairs about him. The board said that its members would like to meet and interview Ed before appointing him. Tinky noted that John Sears was looking for help filling out the Personnel Committee, that he was looking for someone with experience hiring employees. Hussain suggested Dean Desmarais since he had municipal human-resources experience; Tinky said she would forward the suggestion to John, who had already left the room. The group briefly discussed the historical commission and its responsibilities vis-à-vis the town-owned cemeteries. Lark Thwing, currently in a rehab facility, had been the commission's go-to person for cemetery mapping for some years, but he would obviously need help going forward. Chris suggested forming a separate cemetery committee. Virginia explained that in the past the Selectboard had handled the cemeteries; she recalled that she and Charlie Stetson had done some cemetery mapping. They had handed the job over to the historical commission because Jerry McCarthy had been on

the commission and had a lot of experience with cemeteries. Will wondered aloud whether Lark should be asked to step down from some of his positions in the light of his health issues. Hussain said that he found that topic inappropriate for the moment, that the board should wait at least a month before asking Lark about his level of interest. Tinky concurred, saying that Lark should be given time to recover and make his own decisions. The topic was tabled for the moment.

Tinky asked about reappointing the per-diem police officers on the list of town officials she had inherited from her predecessor. She was told that these officers were unnecessary.

Tinky read the list of current representatives and liaisons. She was told that most positions could remain in the hands of their incumbents. The group suggested that Kimberly Orzechowski take over as the representative to the Franklin Regional Planning Board; Will said he could do this if Kimberly was unwilling or could serve as alternate if two people were needed.

In other business, Virginia said she had a Winter Recovery Assistance Program reimbursement request for culverts and that two other requests were pending. The group signed the request.

Virginia said she had received two invoices for the King Corner Culvert work and asked whether she should pay them. Will and she agreed that she should and briefly discussed similar upcoming requests.

Chris Tirone noted that a family of red squirrels seemed to be living under the Town Office. Virginia suggested that the gaps in the foundation might be addressed when the front step was repaired by Dean Desmarais. She also suggested that mothballs might help.

The group asked about the Velazquez property across the road from the Town Office. Tinky said that Jason and Regina Velazquez had told her that they were making some plans for the property and would check in soon. Will asked Tinky to ask the Velazquezes to attend the meeting on June 6.

Tinky relayed a request from the state about the Palmer property up West Hill Road on the border with Savoy. The representative had asked whether the Selectboard knew of any accidents or incidents on the property. The group said that it had not, although the road and culverts on it were in bad shape.

Chris asked whether the town would consider taking down the trees behind the Town Office. The group was in favor of this, but Tinky was asked to find out whether the trees were on the property of the abutters, Peter Beck and Ken Bertsch. Hussain noted that some people would be upset by their removal and stated wryly that he didn't really want to hear their complaints. Tinky was asked to put the trees on the agenda for June 6.

The group briefly discussed the question of when the gates to the State Forest would be opened.

There being no other business, the meeting was adjourned at 8:24 p.m.

Respectfully submitted, Tinky Weisblat, Gal Friday

Williams Cosby

Hussain Hamdan

Robert MacLean