

**Town of Hawley, Massachusetts**  
**Minutes of a**  
**Selectboard / Board of Health / Zoning Board of Appeals Meeting**  
**In Person & via Zoom**  
**September 12, 2023**

Present: Will Cosby, Hussain Hamdan, Robert MacLean – Selectboard  
Lloyd Crawford, ZBA alternate  
Tinky Weisblat, Gal Friday  
Virginia Gabert, Treasurer and Financial Administrator  
Gary Mitchell, Chris Tirone, Lloyd Crawford, and Wayne Lemoine

**The meeting was called to order at 7:03 p.m.** Warrants and minutes from a previous meeting were signed. Then:

1. **The Selectboard talked with road boss Gary Mitchell and Finance Committee chair Lloyd Crawford about replacing the ailing red plow truck.** Gary reported that, according to the dealer, the part needed for the truck wouldn't be available until mid-November at the earliest. He added that he didn't have a lot of faith in the other, older plow truck. Hussain asked whether the town could get rid of the red truck if it were replaced. Gary said that he would like to hang onto it for the moment. He explained that Mike Schofield, who had contracted with the town for snow plowing, might not be able to help during the coming winter. Will reported that according to the dealer, if the red truck couldn't drive onto the lot, it wouldn't be sellable; therefore, he said, it needed to be repaired no matter what. He added that Mike Schofield had done a fantastic job for the town and would be hard to replace. The red truck required only a regular driver's license, whereas the other trucks required a CDL, so it might be easier to find a part-timer to run it. He suggested arranging to fix it and keeping it through Town Meeting in May but purchasing the replacement in the meantime. Lloyd asked how long it would take for a new truck to arrive. Gary estimated it would take about a month.

Hussain asked what the Finance Committee had to say. Lloyd reported that the committee recommended raising and appropriating the funds for half of the truck purchase and using the highway stabilization fund for the remainder. He noted that the stabilization fund could be replenished with free cash after the free cash was certified. He added that the committee had realized that the Town had not been putting aside enough money for future heavy-equipment purchases (several elderly pieces of equipment were scheduled for replacement in the next few years) so the group was reluctant to pay for the truck exclusively with stabilization funds.

Will reminded the group that the red truck wasn't in great shape; it had needed many repairs in the past few years. Hussain asked about the tax consequences, which Virginia stated could affect the budget by about four percent if the expense were split between stabilization and raise/appropriate. Will agreed that if the new truck cost \$80,000 to \$90,000, and it were paid for solely with raising/appropriating, it would be hard for people to face the consequent tax increase, which could come to much as eight percent.

He suggested that if the red truck were sold, the revenue could be added to stabilization. Virginia said that the money couldn't be added until next May's Town Meeting because it fell under the category of surplus revenue, and therefore wouldn't be available right away. Tinky asked whether the old truck was worth enough to warrant repairing it, and Gary said that it should sell for \$20,000 to \$22,000. Meanwhile, Virginia noted, there could be a few cash-flow problems in the near future.

Hussain inquired whether the Finance Committee had thought about taking out a loan for the purchase of the replacement plow truck. Virginia replied that the committee had talked about and hadn't taken to the idea. Interest rates were a little high, she noted, and the Town would probably be taking out loans for future equipment. It might be an undue hardship for Hawleyites to be paying off this loan while borrowing more funds.

Will asked for a motion to schedule a Special Town Meeting. Possible dates were discussed and the consensus was for October 2. Hussain moved that the town call a Special Town Meeting for Monday, October 2, at 7 p.m., and that the Selectmen be authorized to sign the warrant for the meeting outside of their regular meeting. Bob seconded the motion, and all voted in favor. Virginia gave the wording for the warrant to Tinky, who was appreciative. The group decided that an article to raise and appropriate funds be listed first, followed by one to transfer funds from stabilization. Both should be up to \$100,000, as it was unclear precisely how much the truck would cost. The split between stabilization and raise/appropriate, and the correct dollar figures (as long as they are lower), could then be worked out by floor amendment. Will said he had a quotation for around \$80,000, which didn't include accessories or painting the town's name on the truck. When asked, Gary confirmed that the new truck would need a sander.

2. **Discussion moved to the question of the Sears Road culvert work.** Will explained that the town had "run into a bit of a SNAFU." The project was dependent on National Grid's ability to move electric poles at the site. Unfortunately, he said, National Grid had been so busy responding to recent storm damage that it had been unable to do this. It had projected maybe doing the work as late as December, which would postpone the actual project until the spring. He had appealed to the Department of Transportation, he said, which had put pressure on National Grid. It didn't look as though the work would be done during the current week, however. He promised to keep up the pressure. On the topic of roads, there was brief discussion of evidence of a guard-rail accident on Pudding Hollow Road as well as a piece of guardrail behind the guardrail over the bridge. No one knew anything about the accident; Hussain said Hawley Fire and EMS had not received any word of the incident, suggesting that whoever was involved had left the scene relatively uninjured. Gary said he would move the piece of guardrail.
3. **The group turned to the extension of the agreement with Adams Ambulance.** Hussain recused himself from voting (since he worked with Adams) but said he would be happy to describe the paperwork, which extended the previous year's agreement for one year, beginning retroactively on July 1, the start of the fiscal year. The fee for service was exactly the same as for the previous year. Will and Bob agreed that they had heard of no problems with Adams, and that the town did need an ambulance service..

Bob moved that the extension be signed, and Will seconded the motion. Both voted in favor. Hussain said he would take the two originals of the extension to be signed by Adams and return one to Hawley.

4. **Tinky reported that the new website was coming along well**, except for the emergency services section, for which content was slow in coming. She suggested that the website could go live except for that portion within the next couple of weeks. Will said that he was anxious to put something in the “how do I?” section that would detail the complicated nature of development in Hawley, citing such issues as getting special permits for common driveways; getting permission from the ZBA if the slope were too steep; and consulting with such diverse people as the Conservation Commission, the Fire Chief, and the Planning Board.

Virginia remarked that such an explanation had been considered in the past but that it was very complicated; the group might want to wait to post a full explanation. Hussain explained that different projects fell within different regulations; the permits and entities that applied to one project (for example near a wetland) might not be applicable in another. Meanwhile, Tinky said she would write a description that said that building and subdividing were complicated issues that MIGHT require consulting a variety of people. Lloyd suggested that she caution people to hire professional help.

Meanwhile, Tinky said, she had a question about email hosting. According to Virginia, Hawley was paying Dreamhost, the current website/email host, about \$100 per year. Switching to another email server could cost significantly more and would entail moving all the past emails to the new host; she noted that web designer Bill Tuman said that this could be tricky, as emails were sometimes lost. The group agreed to keep Dreamhost for the emails. Hussain asked why Dreamhost was insufficient for the website. Tinky said she would get an explanation of this from Bill, although the explanation might be relayed to the board after the website moved to the new host.

Tinky asked about progress on the broadband front. Hussain noted that Brian Foucher of WiValley wanted to come to the next meeting to report on WiValley’s possible proposal for use of the new upcoming rounds of funding. Tinky noted that Lark had sent out an email about MBI listening sessions. Will said he and Wayne Lemoine planned to go to the session in Greenfield on October 3.

Will reported that he had heard from Whip City, which had found a mistake in its proposed budget for Hawley; the project was estimated to cost just under \$4 million, not \$2.6 million as originally thought. Lloyd said he wasn’t surprised; the representative from Whip City hadn’t seemed to know much about Hawley. Will noted that even so Whip City had an impressive track record, and that since fortunately the state hadn’t yet been in touch with what it might be able to contribute, the company might still be a possibility. He said that he would be happy to hear what Brian had to say on September 26; it appeared that WiValley was getting ready to partner with another company that had more personnel and trucks.

Hussain noted that according to Brian, WiValley would be able to take advantage of the existing network as backup using the wireless towers to relay a signal between areas of fiber in the event some of the fiber optic cables were damaged in a storm. Nevertheless, he said, he was open to hearing what Whip City had to say as it had been good for nearby towns. Will said that he had been in touch with a couple of other companies, with no success so far.

**In other business, Tinky brought up a letter from State Rep. Natalie Blais asking for support at a hearing on a municipal-and-safety-building-authority bill she was co-sponsoring.**

Hussain reported that Greg Cox was working on something to submit to Natalie.

**Tinky noted that two races, one on foot and the other on bicycle, wanted to enter Hawley in part between September 29 and October 1.** Hussain asked her to forward their information to him to share with the emergency-services team.

**Lloyd reported that the Conservation Commission was scheduled to meet the following day** to discuss the Thorsson/Bourns property. He said that in general he had found the property owners responsive; they had put in some erosion structures and were talking to abutters about a shared driveway. He promised to report back. Meanwhile, the commission wanted the Zoning Board of Appeals to know that erosion control was being addressed, and the owners were moving forward. He was inclined, he said, to cut them some slack.

**Speaking of property, the board asked Tinky to ask the Velazquez family how they were progressing on the clean up and sale of their property.** Hussain suggested that if the land were offered for sale, it could be an excellent location for relocating town property that was subject to flooding (for example, the Garage and perhaps a public-safety complex). Chris remarked that this could allow for more office space.

**Finally, Tinky brought up an email she had received that day from National Grid offering to do an assessment of the town's automotive fleet** with the eye to helping Hawley (through grants, etc.) purchase an electric vehicle. Will asked her to forward the email to him. He said he would be happy to talk about this. Gary and Hussain said they were hesitant about the idea of electric highway and fire trucks.

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

Respectfully submitted, Tinky Weisblat, Gal Friday

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Hussain Hamdan

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Robert MacLean