

Town of Hawley, Massachusetts
Minutes of a
Selectboard / Board of Health / Zoning Board of Appeals Meeting
In Person & via Conference Call
July 18, 2023

Present: Will Cosby, Hussain Hamdan, Bob MacLean - Selectboard
Tinky Weisblat, Gal Friday
Virginia Gabert, Treasurer and Financial Administrator
Gary Mitchell, Chris Tirone, Georgette deFriesse, Suzanne Crawford, and Lloyd Crawford

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

- 1. The group discussed surplus equipment belonging to the Fire Department and the Highway Department, as well as personnel policy.** The Selectmen looked over sheets prepared by John Sears of the Personnel Committee about fire-and-highway department relations and protocols for the highway department in terms of brush cutting. (See attachments.) The group agreed that in general the suggestions made sense but that the items relating to highway department members who were also fire department members should be added to the town personnel policy. It was also agreed that certain specific discussions about emergencies and brush clearing were more appropriately handled as in-house protocols than town policies. Tinky was asked to convey that information to John Sears of the Personnel Committee. Chris Tirone spoke up to assure the group that he (a member of both departments) never left for emergency response unless the road boss said he could; he, Chris, didn't put the fire department ahead of the highway department, he asserted.

In terms of highway equipment, Hussain asked whether Gary intended to use the green dump truck. Gary said he was still using it. Will asked about fire-department trucks, water carriers in particular. Hussain said that the carriers were useful for supplying non potable water in emergencies (without using the supplies aboard the fire trucks) and that it meant sense to keep all three. Will suggested that Greg Cox and the other firefighters needed to make a decision about the cargo truck. He suggested that if this truck was still inoperable in a year, it should be disposed of.

The group talked briefly about surplus culverts. Virginia suggested that perhaps these could be used creatively. Will suggested that once the website was up and running, the town could advertise that they were available.

Hussain brought up the backhoe. He suggested that Greg wanted its bucket for snow removal. Gary said that the backhoe would need chains. Will said he felt that this piece of equipment could be kept at the fire station for a year but should be disposed of if not in use after that. Bob concurred. Hussain suggested that a plow could perhaps be put on the back of the brush truck. Hussain also suggested that the board could ask Greg to attend a Selectboard meeting before the winter to discuss disposal equipment. He reminded the group that the backhoe and cargo truck could be sold by the town; the old two-and-a-half-ton brush truck belonged to the Federal GSA and would be have to returned to that body. Tinky said she would ask Greg to attend a meeting in August or early September. Meanwhile, Hussain asked Gary about the white contact truck; Gary said it was doing fine.

2. **The group discussed personnel evaluations.** Will said he would conduct Gary's evaluation and asked Tinky to write to John Sears to request the form. He said that Gary had already conducted an evaluation for Brandon Reynolds, the new hiree, and that Brandon's evaluation would go in his personnel file. The group decided that after Will interviewed Gary, all the selectmen would discuss Gary's evaluation. Chris wondered aloud how the Selectmen could evaluate Gary's work as a boss since they were not out in the field observing him at work. Hussain noted that this was true of just about all employees, but the Selectboard was Gary's most immediate supervisor so there wasn't really an alternative. He said he saw the evaluation as providing an opportunity for constructive dialogue. Hussain asked Gary to congratulate Brandon on making progress toward his hoisting license. Gary noted it was pending completion of the exam.
3. **Suzanne Crawford gave a brief report on behalf of the Mohawk Trail School committee.** She noted that a change was being made at the administrative level; Bill Lataille was being named assistant superintendent of business and finance. This secured his services for two more years, showed him he was valued, and enabled him to step in for the superintendent when she was unavailable. She also reported that the district had received a \$250,000 community compact grant that would help it identify and determine the feasibility of potential options to consider. She added that the solar project at the Mohawk Trail School was complete and would be up and running the following week. It was estimated, she said, that solar energy could produce around 70 percent of the school's electricity. Finally, she said, the district had ended FY 23 with a budget surplus. This money would be put in the school-choice account and in the district's E&D account, (the equivalent of free cash) to offset expenses in the following year.
4. **Lloyd Crawford asked to put in a quick request as long as he was in the building.** He noted that the Zoning Board of Appeals was due the meet the following week and that the Conservation Commission was scheduled to meet shortly after that. He asked whether the ZBA could add the question of the Thorsson/Bourns/Sheldrick driveway on Middle Road to its agenda. The board agreed to this and asked Tinky to notify the owners. Hussain noted that Greg Cox should be invited to the meeting as well. While the ZBA was being mentioned, Tinky noted that the engineers for Berkshire East had asked how many copies of the site plan the town would need. She was told three.
5. **Discussion moved to the trees behind the Town Office.** Lloyd said that he was comfortable with their removal and asked whether they were at risk of falling. He added that taking only some down could be a problem. Will suggested that all the trees be removed by the highway department. There was consensus on removing the trees and some brief but inconclusive discussion of whether a bush might be planted to take their place.
6. **Tinky brought up the JAM charity bicycle ride planned for the following Sunday.** Hussain observed that with even more rain expected to join the recent torrents, the ride could be an issue, especially the area behind Plainfield Pond. He observed that if the route changed or if the ride were canceled, Hawley would need to know. The board members asked Tinky to let the organizers know that they preferred that the ride not use the part of the road that ran behind Plainfield Pond and to use 8A to 116 instead. She said she would get in touch with the organizers.
7. **The group briefly touched on the Dugway.**

Will noted that that area of road was now listed as a regional transportation priority by the county and the state DOT and that those two groups were working on planning and budgeting for repairs, although no schedule was available as yet. He added that a bridge at the intersection of Route 8A with Savoy Road had been condemned by the state; he said he was working on arranging signs and stoplights for what would now be a one-lane bridge. Lloyd observed that he thought the bridge in question was exempt from Conservation Commission oversight. Hussain said that the town would need specific weight limits for the bridge – and added that Chris Tirone had talked to the group about that bridge being an issue in the past and jokingly said “you told us so.”

8. **Tinky explained that John Sears had sent a report about the recent information session at the Technical School**, which hoped to invite more towns to join the district in the near future. She observed that John had told her that no decision needed to be made yet; this whole matter was contingent on a building project that had yet to happen. She said she would leave John’s full report on the wooden table next to her desk so that anyone who wanted to could read it.
9. **Tinky reported that according to Holly Neipp, the person who had complained about the dog on Grout Road, there had been no incidents** since the Selectboard had written a letter to the dog owner. Chris noted that the dog in question was now confined by a fence. Will said that if there were further complaints, the board could schedule a hearing.
10. **Discussion turned to the hot water heater in the town office.** Hussain said that his contact had been unable to look at the heater yet. The merits of a new hot-water-heating system, especially an on=demand one, were discussed briefly. Will asked Tinky to let Christine Hicks, the former cleaner, know that if she wanted to clean again she would have to do so with cold water, at least for the moment.
11. **Will reported on a conference he and Wayne Lemoine had attended in Worcester on June 13 about digital equity.** He observed that there were two possible paths to better broadband. The closer one in time was to pursue state funding from the American Rescue Plan. He noted that just about everyone in Hawley counted as unserved, making the town eligible for help. He explained that a request for applications for this funding would come soon. Hussain added that Brian from WiValley had confirmed this. Will added that a second, later option might be to wait for BEAD funds from the Federal government; this funding could take several years to be available. Will stated his belief that the town should get ready to apply for the state funding and to look for a company that had the manpower and equipment to get Hawley hooked up efficiently. He said that he had met a representative from Whip City, which had wired Charlemont and Plainfield, at the conference, and he had been told that it would be advantageous to Whip City to get Hawley as a client, completing a loop for it. Whip City had needed to know how many electric poles Hawley had; the answer was 949. Will said he had also talked to someone from Charter Communications, whom it might be good for the town to talk to, although both Will and Hussain were skeptical of Charter’s work in Florida and Savoy, where the company had laid fiber optic cable only where it was convenient, leaving many residents stranded.

Hussain argued that the town should wait to talk to possible providers until the level of state funding was announced. Will countered that the town needed to be among the first to apply in order to secure funding.

Hussain said that many factors should be considered in making a decision about the town's internet future, foremost among them who was paying for the improvements. Georgette asked what people in Charlemont paid Whip City; she was told about \$80 per month. Hussain urged caution, saying that the four-town group was also looking at network improvements with WiValley (including fiber) and that it made sense for Hawley to coordinate its activities. He expressed his opinion that it was unhelpful to have one committee working on one project and another committee working on a different project independently. Will said he would like to have Whip City talk to the Selectboard and communications committee; Hussain said that a meeting was a good idea but that Hawley would need specifics and could make decisions without a clear financial picture. Virginia noted that if a town match were to be required, there might be a bidding threshold. Hussain recalled the debacle with Wired West a few years earlier, where projected cost estimates had been grossly under-figured. Will said he would find out when Whip City people could meet with the board and the communications committee; Hussain noted that Whip City should be prepared for questions and that advance notice of such a meeting would be required.

Chris brought up the question of Dodge Corner, wondering who wired the town of Buckland, which was closer to that area of town than Charlemont or Plainfield.

In other business, Will returned to road work. He noted that the town had received tentative permission from the Tafels of Meadowsweet Farm to put a snow fence along their property.

The group returned to the question of removing the trees behind the Town Office. Will moved that the highway department remove the trees with the help of the fire department. Chris and Hussain asked whether the fire department would be paid for its help. Will rescinded his motion, and Bob moved to have the trees cut down under the supervision of the highway department. Will seconded, and all voted in favor.

Tinky brought up the question of who would serve as Hawley's representative to the county council. Will agreed to continue in that position, and Tinky promised to get him information about the upcoming meeting.

Tinky noted that web designer Bill Tuman had suggested that the town pay an extra \$99 per year to purchase a calendar program for the website that would allow for repeat events of the same nature. The group seemed unwilling to do this; Hussain noted that Tinky would have to post agendas for each meeting individually anyway so she might as well just post the meetings individually as well; the recurring meetings feature would also have to be overridden if a certain meeting fell at a different time.

Tinky was asked to look for the town bylaws, which were missing from the current website. She said she would do so and let Will know. She was also asked to find out how long the website redesign might take.

Virginia suggested that with the website not functioning, the Town Office should be open more. Tinky said she would spend more time in the office after the next couple of weeks, which were very hectic for her.

Hussain brought up a number of books currently in his home, which had been sent there from the Town Office by the former administrative assistant and town clerk. The current town clerk, Donna Lemoine, had said she might like some of them back but not necessarily all. He said he would like clarification.

Hussain noted that the books took up a considerable amount of space, recalling that he had essentially taken them on as a favor. Some were historic and should have been kept by the Town but had been incorrectly disposed of. At one point during the cleaning of the office several years ago, he said, loads of boxes had just been left in his yard. He said that if he made the effort to take them back to town hall, he will not be taking them back a second time. Virginia said that there was a budget for maintenance and repair in the Town Office, which might pay for new shelves, but also noted that no one used most of the books in question. Will suggested that the town could get a waiver to dispose of the books but added that that decision couldn't be made that evening.

There being no other business, the meeting was adjourned at 9:28 p.m.

Respectfully submitted, Tinky Weisblat, Gal Friday

Williams Cosby

Hussain Hamdan

Robert MacLean