

Town of Hawley, Massachusetts
Minutes of a
Selectboard / Board of Health / Zoning Board of Appeals Meeting
In Person & via Zoom
November 7, 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, Peter Beck, Ken Bertsch Wayne Lemoine,
and (via Zoom) Brian Foucher and Leslie Clark

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

1. **The Selectboard began with a discussion of road work in town.** Will noted that Verizon had finally arrived to realign wires and add a new line at Sears Road. The company was hoping to be done by the following Monday. Davenport, the construction company, had removed the old culvert and hoped that the new culvert would arrive by the beginning of the next week. If the weather cooperated, the culvert would be in place before Thanksgiving, Will said, and maybe even filled and covered with blacktop. Guard-rail work and the restoration of Tedd White’s yard would come later.

Hussain pointed out that it would be helpful for both residents and emergency personnel to know whether there might be telephone-service outages during the work on the lines. Will said he wasn’t sure how many lines might be affected. Hussain noted that the timing was awkward; coincidentally, there would be work going on in the same timeframe at the regional 911 dispatch center (Shelburne Control), during which time emergency calls were going to be rerouted to a different location. Will agreed to talk to the field engineer at Verizon about possible down time.

2. **Brian Foucher from WiValley had arrived via Zoom to discuss broadband possibilities** so the board suspended the road discussion. Brian said that he would soon have a major announcement to make and would certainly be able to make it at the Four-Town Broadband Group meeting the following week. WiValley was getting ready to be acquired by a new company, he explained, although at this point he couldn’t disclose who this vendor was; he said that it had a presence in 40 states and had been active in Berkshire County. The combined companies hoped to apply for broadband funding in December on behalf of the four towns, building out a fiber optic system, while maintaining and leveraging the existing wireless one to provide redundancy between certain links in the network, although some of the wireless sites might eventually be decommissioned. Before the December 11 application deadline, he said, he hoped to meet with the Selectboards, show them the application, and solicit letters of support from the individual towns. He promised to come back with more details at the board’s next meeting on November 21.

Hussain asked Brian to verify that by the 21st he would be able to identify WiValley's mystery partner; Brian confirmed this. Will asked who would own the network, and Brian replied that the service provider would own it as the applicant for the funding.

Hussain observed that the current network was owned by the four towns. Brian explained that the towns owned the poles but that the equipment on the poles belonged to WiValley. He also noted that if the town wrote a letter of support for the WiValley proposal, it was not obliged to use WiValley for broadband; the letter only indicated that the town didn't actively oppose the application.

Will asked Brian why so much of Hawley's internet had been having service issues of late. Brian said that he hadn't heard about these issues (Will ventured the opinion that Hawleyites had gotten tired of making calls about their internet). He added that GoNetSpeed would not be part of the WiValley arrangement going forward and promised "dramatically changed support" in the future. Lloyd asked whether the town would be able to examine the WiValley application; he was promised that Hawleyites would be able to see everything, including costs and maps. The board thanked Brian for coming in. After he left, there was brief speculation that perhaps WiValley's mystery partner was Spectrum/Charter Communications.

3. **Discussion returned to road and culvert work.** Lloyd said that he had received an email from Holden Sparacino at the Department of Ecological Restoration confirming that the DER was agreeable to going ahead with the culvert work at King Corner without dealing with the dam nearby. Lloyd said he hoped design work would be done soon there so that the town could apply for construction funds to do the actual work.
4. **Road boss Gary Mitchell reported that the town's new plow truck was ready.** He promised to take a photo of the truck for the e-news as soon as lettering was painted on it.
5. **The board considered the roster of election workers proposed by Town Clerk Donna Lemoine.** It consisted of Melanie Poudrier, Gloria Decker, Christine Hicks, Lorraine McCarthy, Paul Norcross, Anne Hamilton-Kean, Juanita Clark, Suzy Groden, Tinky Weisblat, Trina Sternstein, Jane Grant, Wayne Lemoine, Peter Beck, and Peggy Travers.

Hussain moved to accept the list, Bob seconded the motion, and all voted in favor. Tinky noted that Donna had mentioned that the list of election workers was much smaller than in previous years. Tinky said she would put out a plea for volunteers in the next town newsletter.

In other business, the group touched on the topic of fees for permit applications and other town services. Virginia and Lloyd noted that some fees were set by the state, while others were determined locally. Lloyd suggested that the Planning Board update its regulations to establish fees. He volunteered to look for a template for such updates and to reach out to the chair of the Planning Board. Virginia said that the Assessors had formerly charged for services such as preparing lists of abutters but had not done so recently as the information was easily available online. A suggestion was made to keep the fee nevertheless in case the situation arose again.

Tinky promised to write to the town's committee chairs to ask about their fee structures (if any). Chris said that as dog officer he charged fees only if he had to kennel dogs.

Will asked whether the road crew had made any progress at the home of the late Bob Stone.

Gary, who had been on vacation for the last meeting, was informed that the property had officially been declared an attractive nuisance. He said he believed dumpstering the debris and filling in the hole was doable and might be the safest option since no one could ever fall into it then. Hussain reminded him not to dig around the water line. Gary said he would investigate the cost of using a dumpster versus that of erecting a fence and would report back. He noted that there were a lot of junk tires on the property. Bob and Hussain asked him to stick to the building as the tires were located elsewhere, were unrelated to the current issue, and did not constitute the same kind of public hazard. Someone suggested the tires could be turned into planters.

Chris reported that the Sterling truck had returned from being repaired. Gary said that the sander was now on that truck and noted that eventually it would serve as a dump truck for the town.

Hussain announced that a couple of new people had joined the fire department.

Tinky reported that the student filmmakers from Brandeis had almost finished their video about the town and had fallen in love with Hawley. They had had an impromptu opportunity to speak with some members of the fire department. Tinky made it clear that at the completion of the project the students will return certain books and materials borrowed from Town Hall.

Gary provided an update on the Berkshire East shared driveway, noting that the drainage and culvert had been put in place. He said that finishing touches would be added at the end of construction. Lloyd asked whether the promised barriers were in place between the culvert and the wetlands; Gary said he would look.

Will informed the group that the Buckland Snowmobile Riders and the Indianhead Snowmobile Club had replaced the snowmobile bridge crossing Mill Brook on Middle Road. The new bridge looked very sturdy, he said, and the old temporary bridge might be repurposed in another spot.

There being no other business, the meeting was adjourned at 7:54 p.m.

Respectfully submitted, Tinky Weisblat, Gal Friday

Williams Cosby

Hussain Hamdan

Robert MacLean