

Town of Hawley, Massachusetts
Minutes of a
Selectboard / Board of Health / Zoning Board of Appeals Meeting
in Person & via Zoom
December 19, 2023

Present: Will Cosby, Hussain Hamdan, Robert MacLean – Selectboard
Tinky Weisblat, Gal Friday
Virginia Gabert, Treasurer and Financial Administrator
Gary Mitchell, Chris Tirone, Donna Lemoine, Lloyd Crawford, Wayne Lemoine, Dean
Desmarais, and (via Zoom) Leslie Clark and Jeff & Julie Carantit

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

1. **Will brought up the question of adding Juneteenth to the list of Town holidays.** He said he was in favor this addition to the calendar, as Juneteenth was an official Massachusetts holiday. Hussain asked whether this meant that the Town would schedule no meetings and would give employees a paid day off. Virginia confirmed this. After some investigation, the group determined that there were currently 12 holidays in Massachusetts. Hussain moved to follow the state by making Juneteenth a Hawley holiday, Bob seconded the motion, and all voted in favor.
2. **Gary reported briefly on Hawley’s trucks.** He began by stating that the town had “to wean some out.” He explained that he planned to move the dump body from the Ford truck to the Sterling. Will noted that the town should probably get rid of a pickup truck in the spring. Gary suggested that the GSA truck might go to the Fire Department. He speculated about the need of the Army truck for new tires, saying perhaps the town had no use for that truck going forward. Hussain said that the Fire Department probably would not want the dump truck and added that perhaps a buyer could be found for it. (Gary noted that Berkshire East seemed interested.) However, he suggested that the GSA truck should be used by the Fire Department.

Will said that a series of grants from the state were apparently “coming our way” soon, although it wasn’t clear exactly how much money Hawley would receive. He reminded the group that the Town needed a new front loader within the next couple of years and suggested that perhaps these funds might help pay for it. He talked about consulting David Stokes, the District One coordinator for the state Department of Transportation. Gary promised to get a quotation for a new front loader.

3. **Town Clerk Donna Lemoine reported on the expenses for her upcoming conference.** She noted that the combined hotel and registration costs came to \$493.88 and handed the Selectmen descriptions of the sessions she planned to attend. Virginia found that the continuing-education budget had \$2060 left. Hussain said he would support funding Donna’s trip; the continuing-education budget was there for a reason.

He also expressed appreciation to Donna for stepping up to take on this role. While she had the floor, Donna told the group that the state was about to give her new computers and a new system to learn. Hussain moved that her conference expenses be taken out of the continuing-education budget. Bob seconded the motion, and all voted in favor.

4. **Discussion turned to the King Corner culvert project.** At Will's request, Tinky handed out copies of the plans submitted by GZA, the engineering firm. Unfortunately, when printed out on 8-1/2-by-11-inch paper, they were too small to read properly. Using a color printer helped a little but not enough. The Selectmen agreed that it was hard to see what they needed to see. It wasn't clear, said Will, what would happen to the wing walls after construction, for example. Bob noted that it looked as though the wing walls would be removed but agreed that the maps were difficult to read.

Hussain said that it would be helpful for GZA to provide larger maps and also to provide a person to explain the project. Dean Desmarais, who owned adjacent property, said that the drawings needed to show clear property boundaries and to explain what would be done in relation to the berm. Hussain asked what the group needed to do that evening. Will replied that he thought the group needed to clarify some of the questions it needed answered. Hussain reiterated that it would be helpful to have larger drawings and a representative from GZA available. Will asked Dean whether he was available to come to the next Selectboard meeting, on January 2. Receiving a positive answer, he said he would invite GZA to attend with full-size drawings and answers. The meeting after that would be on January 16, said Will; he hoped to have the plans finalized around then. Lloyd discussed the importance of temporary coffer dam construction. Will promised to contact GZA.

5. **The group turned to unsettled issues from past months.** Discussing the Bob Stone property, Gary noted that renting dumpsters to dispose of the debris would probably cost over \$3000, and fencing the property would cost even more. Will asked what the Town could legally do on the property. Hussain observed that rightfully the property owners should take on the problem; the Town could take remedial measures, but was not obliged to. He had asked both Virginia and the tax attorney how close the Town was to getting possession of the property, he said. Virginia explained that she had no news; possession often seemed close, and then a possible heir's death would send the project back to the drawing board. Hussain said that he had proposed to the attorney that Hawley consider "service by publication," serving notice of imminent taking of the property in the newspaper since no heirs could be found. He recalled that the Stone property had been a problem for the town since its owner's death in 2011 and observed that a 12-year resolution of such issues was outside the norm. He urged forward movement. Tinky asked about the Barnhart family's water issues, which had spurred the Selectboard to consider cleaning up the property. Gary said he was pretty sure that the Barnharts once more had water. The group agreed that acting might endanger that water and put the Town at risk of liability.

Next, discussion focused on the trees behind the Town Office. Will noted that the propane tanks were adjacent to the trees, which might create a problem.

Tinky was asked to request permission from the abutters to have an excavator come onto their property to work on the trees. Gary said this would be done after the ground froze to minimize damage. Will stated that the Town would have to consider how it might dispose of the trees once they were cut down. Someone suggested having a bonfire; Hussain said that the Fire Department could be on hand for such a fire.

On the issue of disposing of surplus property, Gary suggested using Municibid. The issue was tabled for the moment.

Will said that he had an oral quotation for a new hot-water heater from Hartnett Plumbing but was waiting for written confirmation.

Hussain reported that the surplus books at his house had been either disposed of or, in the case of a few interesting ones, absorbed into his own collection as the Town Clerk had said she didn't want them back.

In other business, Tinky reported that she had received a query from a former (circa 1980s) teacher at the Mohawk School who had asked about a student named Merle from Hawley whose family had raised cows. No one had any certain knowledge, although Virginia suggested that the student might have been Merle Donovan. Hussain said he would ask his grandfather, David Rich, as well as Greg Cox, whether either was familiar with any bovine-related Merles.

Chris Tirone, as a member of the road crew, said he would like to put in a plea for keeping the military dump truck. He noted that the truck could work in off-road conditions, a capability that could come in handy, particularly in the state forest. Hussain observed that keeping the truck was worth considering although he advised not doing anything about the issue that evening. Will agreed that if the Town could find inexpensive tires for the vehicle, keeping it might make sense. Hussain reminded the group that a trucker connection of his had offered to transport tires that had been found in Alabama on one of his trips through that area without charging the town.

There being no other business, the meeting was adjourned at 8:03 p.m.

Respectfully submitted, Tinky Weisblat, Gal Friday

Williams Cosby

Hussain Hamdan

Robert MacLean