

Town of Hawley, Massachusetts
Minutes of a
Selectboard / Board of Health / Zoning Board of Appeals Meeting
in Person & via Zoom
January 16, 2024

Present: Will Cosby, Hussain Hamdan, Robert MacLean – Selectboard
Tinky Weisblat, Gal Friday
Virginia Gabert, Treasurer and Financial Administrator, with Benny the Dog
Gary Mitchell, Wayne Lemoine, Lloyd Crawford,
and via Zoom Magnus Thorsson, Courtney Bourns, and Jessical Collins

The meeting was called to order at 7:04 p.m. Warrants and minutes from a previous meeting were signed. Then:

1. **The application of Magnus Thorsson and Courtney Bourns for a common driveway** was the first topic of the evening. The ZBA hearing on their application was supposed to resume that evening. The two asked for a continuance so that they could finish revising their plans. They asked that the discussion take place in four weeks, on February 13. Courtney said that the couple's engineer was working on a new survey to that would have a maximum grade of 14 percent. When Lloyd Crawford said that the Conservation Commission would have to post the new date in the newspaper, Courtney and Magnus confirmed that they would pay for the posting.

Hussain moved to continue the hearing on Tuesday, February 13, at 7:15 p.m. Will seconded the motion, and all voted in favor. Lloyd said he would check with the other members of the Conservation Commission to see whether that date worked for them. If not, the commission would meet separately from the ZBA.

2. **Discussion moved to the question of purchasing a new bucket loader** for the Highway Department. (It was moved up from new business to this spot on the agenda because Virginia, the expert on finances, had to leave early.) Road boss Gary Mitchell shared a quotation from Quality Fleet Service for a new (2023) fully equipped machine. After a \$39,000 trade-in credit for the old John Deere, it would come to \$158,900. Gary explained that because Quality Fleet Service had a contract with the state, it would be unnecessary to get additional bids.

Will said that the price (and particularly the trade-in) looked reasonable. He asked whether information was available on either additional Chapter 90 funds or free cash. Gary said no to the former; Virginia said no to the latter. Lloyd observed that Hawley had to look at the big financial picture and asked whether the road crew could wait until Annual Town Meeting. Gary said he wasn't sure that it could. Hussain asked about paying for the loader using only Chapter 90 funds. Gary said that that would probably work. Lloyd again cautioned that Hawley might have other uses for the money. No decision could be made without further information so Tinky was asked to email the salesperson, Erick Poirier, to ask how long the offer would last.

On the topic of machinery, Lloyd asked what was happening with the old one-ton truck. Gary said that it was sitting in the garage as it was having trouble again and could only run at four miles per hour because of an electronic/emissions issue. Will said he was ready to let the truck go. The other members of the board agreed. Gary suggested that it might make sense to fix it before putting it out to bid. If it was barely moving at the time of the sale, it wouldn't bring in much money. Hussain agreed that it wouldn't be a lucrative sale. He asked whether the Town would make more by selling the plows and sander separately. Gary said that might be the case.

Will asked Gary what it would cost to put the truck back on the road. Gary said that the bill would probably come to about \$800. Hussain said that the defect would have to be disclosed. Will said he could be convinced to repair the machine if it would bring in more money. Hussain expressed concern that if the issue to be repaired were a recurring issue, it might be deceptive not to disclose it was likely to happen again. Gary argued that if the new owner drove the truck at higher speeds, the problem would be less likely to recur. Unfortunately, the road crew hadn't been able to do this; its work was mainly slow. Gary said he would do a little research and report back.

3. **The next topic was broadband.** Tinky said that she had learned from John Maher of Charter Communications that that company had applied to wire all four towns in the FHMS system. Will said that it might take until March to find out whether Charter had been awarded a contract. Tinky said that she had been in touch with Charlemont and Plainfield about setting up inter-selectboard meetings to discuss Whip City. Hussain said he wanted to go ahead with those discussions just in case Charter fell through; even if it won the grant, it might not deliver as promised.
4. **The group considered renewing the agreement with FRCOG for the purchase of construction materials.** Gary explained that having this contract helped the road crew. Hussain moved to approve the agreement, Bob seconded the motion, and all voted in favor. The board signed the paperwork, designating Virginia as the contact person.
5. **Hussain said that his contractor friend had looked at the Town Office and had recommended a hot-water heater with a small tank rather than an on-demand system.** The friend thought a tank could be had for \$200 to \$300, and he was willing to donate his time. Will and Hussain looked up some tanks online (which were consistent in cost with that estimate) and looked at the bathroom to try to determine where the tank might go. Hussain suggested they should probably wait to see what his friend recommended. The group agreed to take up the topic again at its next meeting.

In other business, Hussain described an incident earlier that day that underlined the need for better road signage. A woman using GPS to try to get to Berkshire East had gotten stuck in East Hawley on a dirt road. The State Police hadn't known what to do and initially were unable to get a tow truck, so a trooper had called Tinky, who had in turn called Hussain. Stagecoach Auto Repair had eventually extricated the woman's vehicle, and the Fire Department had led her to safety, but she had been stuck multiple times with children in her car.

Hussain asked about the status of East and Labelle Roads. Gary said that the road crew was working on them. If it rained the following week, as the forecast predicted, perhaps he could make some repairs.

Will asked whether the road crew had “road closed” signs. Hussain also suggested designating private ways. He said ideally the town could designate some roads as seasonal. There was some talk about the cost of signage.

Gary said that some Massachusetts prisons made signs and offered to get prices. Hussain noted that the signs were necessary for public safety and ideally would be paid for by grants. After the subject of police grants came up, he said he was planning to talk to police chief Jason Pelletier soon and would ask him for ideas.

Tinky brought up tick report, a service recommended by FRCOG through which the Town could help subsidize tick tests for residents. Will and Hussain said they weren’t sure anyone would use this service. It had not been used the previous year and the two argued that most people bitten by ticks went to their own health providers anyway. Nevertheless, Will and Hussain both acknowledged there might be broader goals to this initiative. Tinky said she would ask Maureen O’Reilly at FRCOG for more information.

Hussain said that it was almost time to renew the I Am Responding (cellular emergency-services paging system) contract. He reported that it had been very helpful in the past year, giving EMS workers information about medical calls rapidly, providing necessary emergency details quickly, and avoiding putting certain sensitive information on the radio. It was also useful for training and for announcing meetings. He recommended renewing it for one year using the Fire Department budget. He made a motion to that effect, Bob seconded it, and all voted in favor.

Lloyd reported that the Finance committee was starting to work on the budget for the following year. He said that knowing about free cash as soon as possible would be helpful.

Will told the group that he would participate in the next meeting remotely.

There being no other business, the meeting was adjourned at 8:07 p.m.

Respectfully submitted, Tinky Weisblat, Gal Friday

Williams Cosby

Hussain Hamdan

Robert MacLean