

**Town of Hawley, Massachusetts**  
**Minutes of a**  
**Selectboard / Board of Health / Zoning Board of Appeals Meeting**  
**in Person & via Zoom**  
**January 2, 2024**

Present: Will Cosby, Hussain Hamdan, Robert MacLean – Selectboard  
Tinky Weisblat, Gal Friday  
Virginia Gabert, Treasurer and Financial Administrator  
Gary Mitchell, Chris Tirone, Wayne Lemoine, Dean Desmarais, Maria Desmarais,  
Georgette deFriesse, John Sears, Jacob Desrosiers, and Nate Russell

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

**1. John Sears reported on bus expenses for the coming year for the vocational schools.**

The news was not good, he said. The schools' five-year bussing contract was up for renewal in the fall of 2024. The school district and the Vocational Education Advisory Council had looked for both single bids and bids pooled with other districts. The only company that had responded was Kusmeskus. Even with a pooled bid, the overall costs were going up, and the vocational costs were particularly exorbitant, an average of 30 percent higher than the current year.

John noted that VEAC was slated to meet the following Thursday. It had hoped to try separating itself from the district contract and solicit a price only for vocational students. However, of the four companies John had contacted, three had said no. He was waiting to hear from the fourth but had his doubts. The companies cited a shortage of drivers and rising costs in general. Hussain asked whether John had talked to the Dufour bus company. John said that that was the company he was still waiting to hear from. He said he was afraid there was no way out of large increases in cost.

John reminded the group that the state had increased its funding for school transportation, but not enough. He suggested that the town go back to its legislators and ask for more aid. "We're the biggest geographical district in the state," he sighed. He said he had a feeling that Kusmeskus, the current bus provider, had lost money on the district in the past year.

Hussain observed that the Mohawk School District tended from time to time to discuss establishing in-house transportation. Perhaps the time had come to revisit that issue, he said, as drivers might be more attracted to the benefits associated with public-sector jobs. John expressed concern that the district might face the same challenges as Kuzminskas. In any case, the district was due to vote on the contract in just over a week.

Will asked John whether he was willing to draft a letter of appeal to the legislators. John agreed to do so. Meanwhile, John said, the increased cost would have to be planned for in the next year's budget. The board thanked him for his report and his efforts.

- 2. The board heard from Nate Russell of GZA, a design firm, about ideas for the King Corner culvert project.** Nate summarized the project, noting that the existing six-foot culvert was failing and that the replacement had to be stream-crossing compliant, which meant a 25-foot span was needed. Showing off large-scale plans, he said that the crossing under the road would be widened on the downstream side and that something similar would take place upstream. The berm would remain.

Given that the plan called for removing the wing walls that were holding material up, Hussain asked whether the berm might be less robust once the wing walls were removed. Nate explained that the wing walls would be cut out, but reinforced diagonal embankments would still lead back to the berm. Hussain suggested concrete might be a good idea due to its strength. Nate said he would recommend large rocks instead; however, those should be robust enough.

Dean asked that the narrative of the agreement state that the owners' berm would be restored to its original condition. He said he and Maria wanted the water level to stay the same.

Hussain said it looked as though the support for the berm should work. Nate said that the plan was to limit any work on the berm itself. He reiterated that he preferred natural stone to concrete. He said that some kind of bypass would be installed during construction.

Dean said that made him more comfortable. Hussain said he thought the plan looked good and suggested that the fire department would be comfortable with having the dry hydrant temporarily out of service during construction as long as it was aware of the timetable.

Nate informed the group that it might be necessary to close the road for a short period of time (perhaps two weeks) during construction; otherwise, the project would take much longer. Hussain said that closing the road would be difficult but not impossible; details would need to be worked out, particularly for commuters to Berkshire County and for emergency vehicles. A great deal of advance notice would be required, and temporary mutual-aid arrangements for ambulance service to West Hawley would also be needed (since closing the road would compromise Adams Ambulance's route). He suggested that if the project took place in summer, Middle Road and Hallockville Road might be fixed up enough to provide an alternate route.

Dean stated that he assumed that the town would have to make a proposal for egress to abutters. He said that he was comfortable with temporary change to his property, just not long-term change. Hussain asked what would happen of the berm were damaged in construction, asking whether it would be put back. Nate agreed to that.

Hussain noted that Nate had given everyone a better sense of the plans. Dean suggested that the ball was now in the town's court. Will brought up financing, saying that the construction might require the town to apply for multiple grants. GZA would provide an estimate, Nate assured the board.

Virginia asked whether there was any consideration of erecting a smaller crossing if the town couldn't raise sufficient funds. Will replied that unfortunately there didn't seem to be any wiggle room as far as the DER was concerned.

Dean asked whether the town would have to meet the DER standard if it did the work itself. Hussain noted that legally this was a bit murky as that the state was pushing for implementation of the stream-crossing standards regardless of the source of funding. A waiver might be possible but was by no means guaranteed. He noted that the regulations were so onerous that one town had waited for a culvert to wash out so it could replace it with a similar sized one to the original as an emergency measure, thereby skirting the standards entirely. Will observed that the new culvert was working well at Sears Road. Dean pointed out that King Corner was less likely to wash out than Sears Road. Will said the town would do its best. If design figures were too high, changes would have to be made. Dean said he was comfortable moving forward but not yet completely ready to sign off.

3. **Regarding broadband applications**, Will said he had reached out to Charter and to MBI but had no news to report. Hussain said he would ask Brian Foucher of WiValley what his company's plans were.
4. **Discussion turned to replacing the hot-water heater**. Will shared a rather high quotation from Hartnett Plumbing. Hussain promised to ask his plumber friend for advice and suggested an in-person visit and inspection might be in order, to which all agreed. Dean noted that a 10-gallon hot-water heater with a tank would be his recommendation. Hussain noted that considering water's high heat capacity, a 10-gallon tank might be more efficient than the two-gallon one proposed by Hartnett.
5. **Tinky described Brandon Root's request for better road signage**, particularly for roads that were closed seasonally. Tinky said that Brandon and Hussain had also stressed the importance of having houses properly numbered. Virginia noted that a lot of Councils on Aging had offered to provide street numbering. Hussain said he would talk to the Council on Aging about implementing this idea in Hawley. Tinky asked if the Fire Department could designate the roads that needed better signage. Hussain said he didn't want to step into the DPW's purview, but that he and Brandon could probably put together a pretty good list of the conditions the Fire Department knew about.
6. **Hussain moved to nominate Chris Tirone as the town's inspector of animals**. Bob seconded the motion, and all voted in favor.

**In other business, Virginia asked about a new visitor to the meeting**. Hussain introduced the visitor as Jake Desrosiers, a recruit to the fire department.

**Tinky noted that several town-office employees had received mysterious unattributed Christmas presents**. She asked whether anyone knew who had provided them. No one volunteered any information. Tinky thanked the mystery elf publicly.

**Will brought up the expected extra Chapter 90 funding.** Given the number of unrelated new expenses on the horizon, he suggested holding onto the money until the following year's budget was in place. Hussain and Bob both supported this idea.

There being no other business, the meeting was adjourned at 8:19 p.m.

Respectfully submitted, Tinky Weisblat, Gal Friday

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Williams Cosby

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Hussain Hamdan

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Robert MacLean