

Town of Hawley, Massachusetts
Minutes of a
Selectboard / Board of Health / Zoning Board of Appeals Meeting
in Person & via Zoom
January 30, 2024

Present: Will Cosby (via Zoom), Hussain Hamdan, Robert MacLean – Selectboard
Tinky Weisblat, Gal Friday
Virginia Gabert, Treasurer and Financial Administrator
Gary Mitchell, Chris Tirone, Donna Lemoine, Lloyd Crawford,
and Kimberly Orzechowski

The meeting was called to order at 7 p.m. by Hussain, who was chairing because Will was participating remotely. Warrants and minutes from a previous meeting were signed. Then:

1. **The group signed a letter of support for a grant that could fund a shared conservation agent with nearby towns.**

2. **Discussion moved to Town Clerk Donna Lemoine’s requests for election help.**

Hussain noted that he had looked at the relevant legislation and interpreted the statutes to give the Selectboard and Town Clerk discretion to assign a “sufficient” number of police officers and/or constables, as opposed to being an outright mandate. In the past, Hawley had generally not had police at elections but had appointed a poll constable from time to time. This was an election officer whose sole job was to keep an eye on the general order of things. Lloyd recalled being a constable at an election 40 years earlier and having to deal with wasps in the outhouse.

Hussain suggested that Donna might talk to the Selectboard about asking for a state police officer for the presidential election in November if the rhetoric leading up to that election seemed to warrant such action. He indicated that he would not approve of paying for such a detail right now, or of using police for events like the local elections. Will agreed that the policy could be changed as needed. Donna said she would work with that framework.

In response to Donna’s request that the board authorize early voting, Hussain moved that the board approve it. For the primary election, this would mean that the Town Office would be available for early voting on Saturday, February 24, from 11 a.m. to 3 p.m.; and on Tuesday and Thursday, February 27 and 29, from noon to 4 p.m. Bob seconded the motion, and all voted in favor.

The group discussed the servicing/readying of the AutoMark voting machine as required by state law. Virginia noted that the cost for this should be included in budget requests for subsequent years. After the group discussed this question briefly, Donna suggested that more information was needed. She offered to contact Anne Hamilton-Kean, an election officer who knew about the machine.

Donna said she would update the group at its meeting on Monday, February 26; she explained that she would be out of town from February 8 through 17.

- 3. The group discussed priorities to send to Anne Gobi**, the governor's director of rural affairs. Hussain began by putting in "a big plug" for emergency-medical service regionalization. He noted that he had spoken with the EMS directors in Colrain and Shelburne Falls, who had promised to come to Hawley's aid for the moment but urged the town to find long-term coverage elsewhere. He noted that the director in Colrain agreed that what was needed was a West County regional solution, given the expensive equipment and training required, which tiny towns could not handle. Hussain added that recent events had shown that the state didn't seem to grasp how rural emergency services worked and must work.

Will said that he strongly supported mentioning the EMS situation as well as roads and culverts. He asked about other ideas. Hussain noted that broadband was still a goal, but Will reminded everyone that the Massachusetts Broadband Institute was working on that issue. Will mentioned aging and Payment in Lieu of Taxes as issues the state could address. Tinky reminded him that Anne was looking for ideas for grant applications, not offering to lobby the statehouse.

Hussain noted that the dugway was a big issue, one that could be covered under roads and culverts. He argued that a public-safety building or complex was worth fighting for as well. He noted that although inadequacies at the Conway Fire Station had recently receive a lot of attention as needing upgrades, that building had many more amenities than Hawley's Fire Station. Will and Bob agreed to support that argument.

- 4. Discussion turned to the pre-contract form for the Ashfield Road MassWorks grant**, the paperwork of which was due the following day. Unfortunately, according to Virginia, Tinky, and Lloyd, the original letter announcing that deadline in November had gone astray so they had learned of it only a few days earlier. Virginia explained that she had started to fill out the form but needed some guidance. The group provided her with ideas for figures, generally finding that the ones she had seemed solid, with a few slight changes made here and there in consultation with Gary. Virginia said that she was particularly anxious for the board to look at her drawdown schedule, which had the final payments due at the end of the calendar year in 2025. The group noted that if something delayed the schedule, the timeframe be renegotiated later. Virginia submitted the form online and received a receipt right away.

Will thanked Virginia and Lloyd for stepping up. Virginia said that in future as grants piled up the group needed to clarify whose responsibility it was to fill out paperwork. Tinky observed that a case like this was tricky. She herself was technically responsible for filling out the paperwork, according to the state, but most of the information needed was financial data, which only Virginia had. Lloyd said it was important to make sure that no grant paperwork fell through gaps.

Will queried Virginia about her workload in the months to come and asked whether she thought this new grant would take about the same amount of work as the Sears Road paperwork. She reminded the group that the assessors, with whom she worked closely, were about to enter a busy season and said she needed to be aware of extra work before it landed on her desk. Hussain agreed that a more coordinated process was needed. The group agreed to discuss the issue at a future meeting.

In other business, Lloyd asked about the King Corner culvert plans, wondering whether the Desmaraises were okay with its status. Hussain said that Dean Desmarais had asked to be consulted before work began, but Hussain felt he was generally onboard with the drawings from the prior meeting and that GZA should move forward with designs. Lloyd offered to write to GZA to see how the plans were proceeding. He and Will offered to continue monitoring the issue if the other board members were amenable. Both Hussain and Bob said they were happy to have the two work on the issue.

Kimberly Orzechowski voiced her concern about the stretch of road connecting East Road and Labelle Road. She said she had visited the area during hunting season, when the road had appeared muddy; now it wasn't clear whether the area was being plowed or not. She perceived that a number of vehicles had gone through. Gary explained that the DPW was keeping the area open for emergency access but not for ordinary travel. Gary and Hussain shared the story of yet another vehicle that had become stuck there. Consensus was that signage indicating that the road was not maintained in the winter would be in order.

Gary reported that he had talked to someone in the state prison system about printing signs that would say something like "Seasonal Road: Not Maintained November 1 to May 1." He said that the printers had said that the price would be 15 percent above their cost. Hussain noted that the police chief had told him that he didn't have access to funding streams for such signs. Kimberly asked whether the town was liable for legal action in this amorphous area of roadway. Hussain said that he believed that having signs would greatly reduce the risk of liability. The group briefly discussed purchasing signs admonishing people that GPS didn't work on Hawley's roads, but Hussain noted this could be problematic. A sign notifying someone that a road was not being maintained should provide sufficient information to a reasonably prudent driver. Lloyd asked whether it would be possible to contact the people in charge of the GPS-based mapping. Hussain said he viewed this as a difficult prospect since many different companies were involved.

Kimberly asked whether, if the town maintained the stretch of road under consideration, it would get into trouble with the Wetlands Act for putting in roads and culverts. Gary explained that there was no intention to redesign the road to make it a year-round-throughway.

Tinky briefly noted that Mohawk Office Supply had given her a quotation for fixing the donated color printer, which was exceedingly high, around \$600. She noted that at some point soon, the tax collector would need a printer. Donna reported that the printer she had been using for state work would soon be available for office use.

Tinky also reported that Ellen Purinton had volunteered to represent Hawley in the group studying sustainability in the local school districts.

Tinky passed around paperwork about the now decommissioned tri-town landfill, which would need additional work. Lloyd observed that the Finance Committee would need to have new figures on that project for the 2025 budget.

Lloyd reported that comments were due by February 9 for flood-insurance mapping. He said he was happy to work on this but would like someone else to work on the issue and comment as well. He stated that it was possible that after all comments were in and policy was set, Hawley would have to update its floodplain bylaws. Hussain offered to work on this matter with Lloyd, who gratefully accepted.

Virginia asked whether any progress had been made in obtaining a new hot-water heater for the Town Office. Hussain said he would try to get information from his contractor friend before the next meeting.

Gary inquired about what to do now that Hawley had a vehicle that needed gasoline instead of diesel. He said he was reluctant to pay for gas at a service station since the town shouldn't need to pay the state gas tax. Will said that trucks from Rowe and Shelburne seemed to fill up at Davenport's in Shelburne. Hussain observed that saving the tax didn't necessarily offset the cost of driving to Shelburne. Tinky said she would investigate other options: getting the gas tank at the Town Garage filled, or setting up some kind of account at the convenience store in Charlemont. Gary said he would need about 300 gallons to start with, which didn't warrant getting bids for the service.

There being no other business, the meeting was adjourned at 8:35 p.m.

Respectfully submitted, Tinky Weisblat, Gal Friday

Williams Cosby

Hussain Hamdan

Robert MacLean