

**Town of Hawley, Massachusetts**  
**Minutes of a**  
**Selectboard / Board of Health / Zoning Board of Appeals Meeting**  
**in person & via Zoom**  
**March 26, 2024**

Present: Will Cosby, Hussain Hamdan, Robert MacLean – Selectboard  
Tinky Weisblat, Gal Friday; Virginia Gabert, Treasurer and Financial Administrator  
Mike Tatro, Nick Brown, Bob Ide, Ian Seaver, Georgette deFriesse, Richie Gould, Jacob  
Desrosiers, Gary Mitchell, Chris Tirone, and via Zoom Lloyd Crawford

**The meeting was called to order at 6:30 p.m.** Warrants and minutes from a previous meeting were signed.

- 1. The evening began with a hearing for three proposed pole changes from National Grid and Verizon.** Mike Tatro and engineer Nick Brown represented the utilities. Nick explained that the reason for the changes was to accommodate higher voltage in East Hawley; National Grid wanted to install thicker wires and have the poles separated by shorter distances. He noted that he had tried to account for people's driveways in the plans. Will said he hoped the new poles would be high enough for fiberoptic cable when the town got better broadband. Nick said that the height should be sufficient but promised to keep fiber in mind.

Will asked whether any Hunt Road residents wanted to say something. Richie Gould asked whether the engineers could cut down on the reflectors on the pole in front of his house. Nick said he would see whether anything could be done. (Someone in the back suggested that Richie just take down the reflectors.) Jake Desrosiers said he had a few tiny questions; he consulted the map with Nick and Mike. Georgette said that her neighbor was in Europe but that she believed that the neighbor would ask the company to retain pole 6-1 on the map; it was in fact being used as a boundary marker. She asked whether the voltage change would affect the long service line to a pole on her property but was told that it was not affected. Will noted that a housing installation was being considered on Hunt Road going off East Hawley Road and asked whether that possible construction could affect the plans. Nick said there should be no impact from these poles and noted that once the housing developers put in a service request, they could get power. Richie observed that he had heard that quite a few houses were being planned and suggested that the road had to be widened. Hussain said that the town couldn't make decisions based on speculation; at the moment, the town knew of no concrete plans for new houses.

Will opened discussion up to East Road property owners. Ian Seaver, who had recently purchased land on East Road, said he would like to have flexibility about where he could put his driveway. He said he had marked the planned driveway with stakes. Nick said he would look at the stakes and indicated they could probably work this out. He gave Ian his card so the two could be in touch. Hussain asked whether they could resolve this themselves, and both confirmed they could do so.

With no further discussion, Hussain moved to approve the new pole locations. Will seconded. All voted in favor, and the hearing was closed at 6:52 p.m.

**2. Bob Ide, the new senior manager of community customer relations at National Grid, introduced himself to the Selectboard** and gave an overview of some of the projects on which the power company was currently working. He talked about storm response, noting that for people with good cell-phone service there was a National Grid app but also encouraging people to call in to report power outages. He stressed the importance of taking to a person at National Grid, not just a recording; he said the company was working on getting more staff. Speaking of outages, the group thanked Bob for rescheduling the power outage that had originally been planned to coincide with the primary election. Bob also briefly discussed a plan to make safer, reliable service that he called "Future Grid," along with developing Smart Meters. Will and Hussain noted that the reliance of those meters on cellular service could make the meters difficult to implement. Bob said that perhaps cellular technology would improve. He also discussed a program intended to pinpoint problem areas and promised that his company would be hosting a customer-savings event (at which rate payers could consult with energy-efficiency experts and learn more about financial-aid programs) in the near future. He said he had enjoyed his brief visit to Hawley and hoped that the board would reach out with any questions.

Hussain offered a specific question right away: Did the company's resilience plans include solar storms? He went over the history of such storms' disruption of transmission lines. Bob said he believed there was a working group for that sort of issue and promised to get more information. Will brought up another issue, recalling that the previous year the road crew had had faced significant delays getting poles relocated for a culvert project. Bob asked to be called if a similar situation developed in future.

**3. Discussion turned to the budget for the following fiscal year.** Lloyd summed it up by saying that although the school assessment was going up less than he had feared, the levy was going to go up about 7.5 percent. He noted that some cushions had kept taxes low in the past (including ARPA funds, which had been used to offset taxes to some extent). Consequently, tax bills were expected to go up.

Hussain asked why elected officials were getting a pay raise. Lloyd reported that all town employees were slated to get a three-percent cost-of-living adjustment. The total change came to about \$2000. He said he thought that the town's employees were an asset and deserved to be recognized. Hussain said he was fine with hourly employees getting the raise but wasn't sure about elected and appointed positions. Virginia went briefly through the history of the raises for employees like the Selectboard and said that the raises were an attempt at equity. She noted that the raises were just a proposal, however. Lloyd said that the question of raises was the Selectboard's call but that the actual sum of money involved would make little difference.

Lloyd went on to explain that the finance committee would like to propose rolling over the legal-services budget from year to year, although that might take a town-meeting vote.

Carrying the balance over from year to year would recognize and accommodate the variations in legal help needed from year to year. Hussain approved of the idea. Virginia asked whether all the board members were comfortable with this change. All three agreed.

Lloyd said that the budget in the account for an audit seemed insufficient. Virginia said that \$14,800 had been carried over in this account from past years. However, she said, the cost of audits appeared to have gone up to around \$20,000. She said she was trying to get ready for an audit after FY25 and would like to transfer \$2500 from free cash into that account. Lloyd noted that the assessors' budget was going up a lot since that board was expected to do its revaluation very soon.

Lloyd asked Virginia to explain tax-title and foreclosure expenses. She noted that she had been waiting until the property of the late Bob Stone was all set; then she hoped to hire an auctioneer. Hussain agreed that hiring an auctioneer was an excellent idea.

Lloyd asked about the tax collector's computer. Hussain explained that he had worked with Betty, the collector, that afternoon. Her computer appeared to be trying to connect via both cable and Wi-Fi and was working very slowly. He said he planned to reset the system. If that didn't work, he said, the computer would need to be replaced. He said that Betty would like a Hawley-dedicated computer. He suggested setting her computer account at \$500; more funds could always come out of the computer account.

Lloyd asked about the website budget. Tinky explained that Bill Tuman had suggested keeping Dreamhost for town emails; it seemed to be the least expensive option, and moreover a changeover might result in the town's losing some old emails. Hussain agreed. Tinky said that Bill Tuman would give some help for the \$450 site-hosting fee he was charging. She was asked to find out how much help that was – that is, how much he would have to work before changes began to crop up.

On the topic of technology, Hussain questioned the town's need for two separate phone lines (one for phone, one for fax), noting that fax machines could identify incoming faxes so the same line might be able to be used for both. He asked how many faxes came into the office. When Tinky said she wasn't sure, although she didn't think the number was large, he suggested keeping a logbook to monitor fax use. Virginia said that she didn't think the second line was worth getting rid of. It cost the town only \$5 a month. Hussain agreed that that lower cost made a difference and dropped the issue.

The group moved on to the town clerk's expenses, noting that they were going up. Virginia explained that this was a combination of increased election expenses in 2024 (with four separate elections) and the need to pay for the state to update the AutoMark.

The group then touched on building maintenance. That account carried over, Lloyd explained. He wanted to add \$500 more to one part of it, however. Lloyd asked whether the insurance estimates Virginia had given him were from quotes. She said that the insurance had increased seven percent. Lloyd asked whether everyone was comfortable with the employee benefits, and the board members agreed that they were.

Hussain noted that the AFG grant would come around again; it just wasn't needed for the FY25 budget. A match for the airpacks grant would not be needed for the next fiscal year.

Lloyd asked about the ambulance assessment. Hussain agreed with him that it was a wild card. Hussain noted that there were possibilities of working with Colrain and Shelburne Falls as well as with Adams Ambulance if it were to be reinstated. Now, however, nothing was certain. He agreed that increasing the line item to \$10,000 (as the Finance Committee had done), was a wise idea, given the uncertainty.

When Hussain asked about the reduction in matching funds for fire department grants, Virginia said that these funds had been covered in other ways in the past. Hussain noted that it might be good to put the deleted \$1,200 back into the budget. He said that the fire department now had someone with good computer skills and several individuals paying attention to grant opportunities and might be applying for more grants. Lloyd said that if the fire department or anyone else needed a large amount of matching funds, the reserve fund might be used. Virginia said that that fund was for unintended expenditures but noted that a special town meeting could always be called if Hawley needed more matching funds. For the moment, all agreed to return the \$1,200 to the budget.

The group moved on to FCCOG and highway-department expenses. Lloyd said that snow roads were always an issue but that the finance committee preferred not to pad that account. Virginia noted that although the snow-road account was usually overspent, in general the town worked things out by using other highway funds. Lloyd pointed out that fuel was a big ticket item, an uncertain expense the finance committee had increased in the budget to be safe. He said that there was no money currently in the budget for new highway equipment and accessories. He added that he knew that Gary wanted a new mower but said he would rather not add to the budget. Virginia said that the finance committee had proposed transferring \$10,000 from stabilization funds for a rotary mower. Lloyd added that the stabilization fund was being added to in the current budget.

Lloyd said that several changes had been agreed to that evening. Virginia said she had made a note of them. Meanwhile, the question of increasing the pay of elected officials had still to be decided. Will said he wanted to leave the increase in the budget. Hussain said he was opposed. Bob reminded everyone that "elected officials" included more than just the Selectboard.

Hussain expressed his concern that the pay scale in town was inequitable. He referred to a survey of work he had done in the past that showed that school-committee members had a similar hourly workload to selectmen and were paid much less. None of these people were doing the job for the money, he acknowledged; however, he found such disparities unfair. Virginia noted there had been past attempts to look at pay for town personnel. After a bit more discussion of this issue, Tinky suggested leaving the pay increases as they were but revisiting the issue at a less busy time of year, before the next budget was considered. Hussain said he wanted to do further study.

He said he could support the current budget if his colleagues would examine this issue in more depth later in the year. They agreed to do so.

The group briefly discussed whether the highway stabilization fund was sufficient, talking about the current road disaster at the corner of Route 8A and Pudding Hollow Road. Lloyd said that the town should do its best to get help from outside for such problems. He also reminded everyone that the town should continue to set aside funds for future road equipment. Meanwhile, he said, the budget wasn't very flexible, but the group was doing the best it could. Virginia said that if she was correct, the tax rate for the coming year would be about \$18, resulting in a probably increase of about \$330 per household per year. State aid might make a difference, of course. Lloyd noted that the finance committee needed to keep an eye on the excess levy capacity, which had gone down. Will observed that the excess-levy capacity went up and town. Hussain said he was concerned that in the long term the financial situation was not sustainable in a town with many residents on fixed incomes. Will said that this problem couldn't be solved that evening and that everyone in the State was facing the same issue. Hussain countered that the fact other communities were dealing with this issue did not make it less of an issue for Hawley or less necessary to resolve. He said Hawley needed something it could tax. Chris suggested building a power plant. Will moved that the board adopt the budget as presented and amended, and Bob seconded. All voted in favor, Hussain doing so with reservations.

4. **Regarding the mini-splits,** Hussain said he didn't have the right contact information for the company that had installed them. Will and Virginia supplied that information, and Hussain promised to investigate. Hussain also noted that the Town Office should have its new hot-water heater before the next meeting.
5. **Hussain explained that the board of health had new training requirements.** These requirements were technically mandates, but were mostly unenforceable. Nevertheless, they did affect the town's ability to get certain grants. The Mohawk Area Public Health Coalition (MAPHCO) had been pushing its members, including Hawley, to get up to date with trainings because it was pursuing such grants. While this was not critical for Hawley, Hussain pointed out that the requirements, including FEMA Incident Command System (ICS) classes, could affect certain grants Hawley might later pursue as well. He said he wasn't sure how involved the entire board wanted to be but suggested that Randy Crochier be consulted about useful classes. Virginia observed that all main officials had been required after Hurricane Katrina to take the basic incident-command-system course, which could help in case of a disaster. Hussain again advised inviting Randy to visit. Will suggested that this happen on an off-week, perhaps May 14 or 28.
6. **The group discussed the proposed change order to the tri-town landfill agreement.** Hussain said that he had talked to the engineer involved. PFAS testing had been mandated by the DEP, and that testing could be expensive and complicated. Further, if PFAS were found, the tri-town group might have to pay for filtration for nearby wells. Hussain noted that the engineer had informed him that the Massachusetts standards were among the most stringent around (requiring zero detectable content in water), even compared to developed nations like New Zealand (which set acceptable limits).

Moreover, there would probably be lots of other places that weren't tested that had them in the water, since these chemicals were everywhere. Hawley could reject this change order, but Hussain and the others felt it wouldn't go away. Will said that the responsibility for fixing the issue belonged to the three member towns, and the group agreed to sign the change order. Hussain crossed out the word Pennsylvania as choice of jurisdiction in the contract and wrote in Massachusetts. Later in the meeting, Hussain moved to sign the order, Will seconded it, and all voted in favor.

7. **The issue of the late Bob Stone's property was next on the agenda.** Will explained that Doug and Dan Hoyt had asked him whether the highway department could take the old Ford truck out of the garage there; the two hoped to use the truck's frame. Will had told them that the town was looking for Bob Stone's relatives to establish who might be responsible for the estate. The Hoyts had informed him that Bob's nephew lived in Colrain. Virginia said that the nephew had already been approached and had declined to be involved in the estate. Hussain explained that even if he were an heir, he had no authority to do anything until the probate process was pursued. The board asked Tinky to write to Douglas Hoyt to explain that nothing on the property could be touched or removed until the issue of the estate was resolved.
8. **The group moved on to the issue of the town's tree-tapping policy.** Will noted that during a recent review of the landscape on Ashfield Road, he had become aware that someone (probably Kevin Clark) was tapping some of the town's trees. Hussain explained that some of the town's historical experts believed that the tapping could injure the elderly trees. Hawley had adopted a policy that required permission from the Town to tap into trees on town land. No one had sought permission in this case. The group briefly discussed what to do about the issue. Sending a letter to Kevin wouldn't work, Hussain said, because no one was certain that it was he who had been tapping the trees. The board agreed that it made sense to put a sign on one or more trees asking whoever was doing the tapping to identify him- or herself to the town and to ask for permission. Hussain said he would take care of this posting.

**In other business, Tinky said that she had received a letter from the Franklin Land Trust, which was planning a bike ride that would touch on Hawley in August.** Lloyd said the he was familiar with the ride and that it sometimes used Ashfield Road. Tinky was asked to let the Land Trust know that there was a chance that that road might be under construction over the summer.

**Will brought up the troubling issue of the fissure in the middle of Route 8A** near its intersection with Pudding Hollow Road. He explained that the issue had worsened over the past weekend, with a five-inch difference between the northbound and southbound lanes. Nate Russell of GZA had inspected the problem and had written up a report to send to Francisca Heming at the Department of Transportation. She in turn had involved David Stokes, who had recommended emergency fill-in measures. The road crew had gotten to work with the help of cones, signs, a lot of hard fill, and a roller borrowed from Charlemont. Will noted that he had asked Francisca for emergency funding since the recent work at the intersection had clearly failed, and a culvert was pretty much broken. She had suggested using WRAP or Chapter 90 funds for the emergency work.

Virginia said that the pipe at Pudding Hollow Road was inaccessible, and the group briefly discussed who might be responsible for the problem. Will said he was looking for resources for this thorny problem. Hussain noted that the project itself had flaws.

**Virginia said that she was working on quarterly grant reports and had a few questions about Ashfield Road.** She was promised help.

There being no other immediate business, the meeting adjourned at 10:04 p.m.

Respectfully submitted, Tinky Weisblat, Gal Friday

---

Williams Cosby

---

Hussain Hamdan

---

Robert MacLean