

**Minutes of a
Selectboard / Board of Health / Zoning Board of Appeals Meeting
in person & via Zoom
October 22, 2024**

Present: Will Cosby, Hussain Hamdan, Robert MacLean – Selectboard
Tinky Weisblat, Gal Friday; Virginia Gabert, Treasurer and Financial Administrator
Gary Mitchell, Chris Tirone, Lloyd Crawford, Robert Sears,
and via Zoom Pamela Shrimpton

The meeting was called to order at 7 p.m. Minutes from previous meetings were signed. Virginia had a question to ask before the warrant could be signed. She noted that the Mohawk Trail Regional School District had billed the town a little over \$150 for an expense in FY 2024; it involved the town's share of hiring FRCOG to handle bid solicitation for vocational transportation. Hussain asked her to make sure that this was part of a pooled bidding situation for VEAC and the Mohawk district; the Town shouldn't be assessed if VEAC had handled bids separately. Virginia read the letter of agreement, which mentioned that VEAC had signed on to sharing the cost. She said she hoped it was acceptable to charge the expense to the current fiscal year's transportation account. The group agreed. Virginia also noted that Brandon Root had proposed to pay for an item using the Fire-Department donations account. Fire Chief Greg Cox had agreed to the expense but suggested using the regular Fire-Department account. Virginia said using the regular account made sense to her; the donations account could carry over to the next fiscal year. Hussain and the group agreed to this idea, and the item on the current warrant was corrected to reflect the use of the regular Fire Department account. Hussain also noted that Greg had asked him whether an earlier uniform purchase had come out of donations (which had been the intent) or the regular budget (which the paperwork suggested it had). Virginia said it had initially come out of the regular budget, but she had corrected this. The warrant was signed.

1. **The group discussed the Town Clerk opening.** Will said a couple of people had expressed interest, but there was no one willing to step forward at present. He said he hoped the situation would change within a month or so. He suggested revisiting the issue in mid-November. Hussain said he had understood that a potential candidate might want to spend some time "shadowing" Pam Shrimpton (the interim clerk) to learn about the position. He asked if this would be okay. Pam, who was present via Zoom, said she would be happy to have someone shadow her. She added that Thorne Palmer, the Charlemont Town Clerk, had offered to help the new clerk learn the new software about to be put in place.
2. **The next topic was cybersecurity.** Will reported that he just attended a conference on the topic, which had included an illuminating role-playing game. He said that Hawley was different from most towns in that its computers weren't connected via a network. Nevertheless, he said, the town appeared to be at some risk. He reminded the group of the cyber-health checkup conducted a couple of months earlier, noting that he had not yet heard about the grant for which the town had applied, which would replace the Town's computer stockpile with updated systems. He was hopeful.

Hussain thanked Will for his work on this important issue. Will reminded the group that there were several old computers in the Town Office, which needed to be checked for any unduplicated data and then disposed of. Tinky said that, according to Pam, Pam's husband Craig would be happy to take old computers. Pam corrected this, explaining that Craig only needed one old computer and would be happy to take the old Town Clerk's computer, which had already had all its data moved to the new computer. Tinky apologized for misunderstanding. Hussain suggested that he and Tinky work on checking all the old computers for important data. Tinky said she would be happy to do this but not right away.

Pam suggested that perhaps someone would be interested in the state's old black-and-white laser printer. Hussain said that the Fire Station wanted a printer but would prefer a color printer. He asked about the color HP printer on the Tax Collector's desk. Tinky said it wasn't a great printer (it smudged) but said she would ask Betty, the Tax Collector, whether she needed that printer and would let Hussain know.

3. **The group addressed the question of compensation planning**, particularly with reference to the Town Clerk. Lloyd, the head of the Finance Committee, said that that group had not met lately. He said that the tricky question was how many hours people worked, particularly the Town Clerk. He also wondered whether the town was considering compensation for volunteers, some of whom did receive (very small) stipends. Will asked Pam whether she could estimate how many hours the Town Clerk worked. She said that the new clerks' system being instituted by the state would complicate any estimate she could give. She added that she was keeping track of her current hours and offered to ask the former clerk, Donna Lemoine, about her hours. (Donna had apparently been counting them.)

Hussain recalled the survey of town employees and volunteers that had been compiled six years earlier and suggested that it might be worth conducting another survey. Lloyd agreed. Hussain said he would share the old survey with Lloyd so they could collaborate on an updated one. If it went out in November, results should be available as budget planning for the next year began. Speaking of surveys, Hussain also noted that the following year's street listing should include a public-safety questionnaire.

Virginia asked about frequency of pay. She noted that some people were paid hourly (every two weeks), some monthly (including the Town Clerk), and some every six months. For her purposes, she explained, it would be easier to pay the half-yearly people every quarter. The paperwork for the Town's employment reporting needed to be filed quarterly, and the current system made it wildly inconsistent. She asked the Selectmen's permission to write to the half-yearly people and propose that she do this. The board agreed. Hussain said that many Fire Departments were paid every other week, not every six months. Will noted that he would like the Clerk to continue to be paid monthly.

4. **The next topic was the construction situation at Ashfield Road.** Will observed that some of the difficulties with the road appeared to have stabilized to some degree. In the center of the road, the stones had been compacted. He reported that the Town had received authorization to fix the rest of the road, and that he, Lloyd, and the Highway staff had met with Davenport, the construction company, and GZA, the engineers. He noted that the road still had two problems. One was the fact that people drove excessively fast. The other was that the tire issues caused by the large stones used in construction might recur. Unfortunately, Davenport had moved on to other projects and was unlikely to return before spring. Will said that snow-plow work over the winter might affect the road and mentioned the possibility (not currently in the funding) of turning Ashfield into an oil-and-gravel road. He added that it was important that the road not be too onerous for the Highway Department to maintain. For the moment, he suggested leaving the construction signs up and asked about the possibility of putting up speed-limit signs.

Lloyd explained that Davenport would devise cost estimates for the various solutions and then the group would figure out the budget. Will noted that the town had received a grant for installing a new culvert on Ashfield Road and was investigating the best type of culvert to use. He said that he would prefer to have the culvert in place before finishing the road.

Will, Lloyd, and Virginia spoke briefly about upcoming webinars and meetings relating to construction.

Bob asked whether the town could legally put speed-limit signs on Ashfield Road. Hussain and Gary agreed that such an action could not legally be taken by Hawley; speed limits were set by the state. The group agreed that signs that cautioned drivers to drive slowly and at their own risk could and should be put up.

In other business, the group discussed work at King Corner. Lloyd said he had met with representatives of GZA. The Chapter 85 review of the proposed project had finally started. Lloyd noted that it was possible that the borings done earlier at the site might not work for the state Department of Transportation. Holden from GZA had suggested that the DER might be able to come up with additional funds to address this issue. Holden was also looking into a contract extension; the current contract was supposed to end in December 2024. Some options might require matching fees. Lloyd suggested consulting Anne Gobi or her assistant Mallory Sullivan for funding ideas.

Lloyd said that he had already answered part of the local-flooding survey but had only covered west Hawley. He suggested that others respond to cover other areas. Tinky was asked to forward the email about the survey to the board.

Tinky announced that Scott Purinton had submitted his resignation from the Mohawk Trail Regional School Committee. Will moved to have Tinky draft a thank you-letter, Hussain seconded the motion, and all voted in favor. Tinky was asked to invite Suzanne Crawford to the next regular Selectboard meeting so she could discuss ideas for a successor.

Lloyd noted that Scott had kept an eagle eye on finances while on the committee. Will observed that Scott's departure was a big loss for the school district and the town. He said he had spoken with Scott, who had suggested that his replacement would need plenty of time (the committee met at least 70 times a year, and members needed to read a lot of material) and should have a four-year college degree, preferably finance related. Obviously, replacing Scott would be a challenge. Hussain asked that Tinky invite Scott to the next meeting as well. Hussain moved to accept Scott's resignation (reluctantly), Bob seconded the motion, and all voted in favor.

Tinky mentioned that Leslie and Paul Cooper had offered to help replace the Town Office's broken shutter. Will looked up a possible replacement, and the topic was tabled until the next meeting.

Tinky presented a form from the state to appoint her burial agent at Pam's suggestion. Hussain moved to appoint Tinky burial agent, Bob seconded, and all voted in favor. Tinky said she might have another form to be filled out soon; she wasn't sure. The group agreed that the appropriate party (Will for SB or Hussain for BOH could sign if necessary).

There being no other business, the meeting adjourned at 8:17 p.m.

Respectfully submitted, Tinky Weisblat, Gal Friday

Williams Cosby

Hussain Hamdan

Robert MacLean