

**Minutes of a
Selectboard / Board of Health / Zoning Board of Appeals Meeting
in person & via Zoom
November 19, 2024**

Present: Will Cosby, Hussain Hamdan, Robert MacLean – Selectboard
Tinky Weisblat, Gal Friday; Virginia Gabert, Treasurer and Financial Administrator
Gary Mitchell, Chris Tirone, Robert Sears, Peter Beck, Ellie Van Iderstein, Lloyd
Crawford, Suzanne Crawford, and via Zoom Jen Soper

The meeting was called to order at 7:01 p.m. Minutes from a previous meeting and warrants were signed.

1. **The meeting began with a tax-classification hearing.** Virginia explained that the revaluation had concluded and the property values had been finalized. She noted that the tax rate for the next year wasn't certain, but she estimated that it would be around \$16.38 per \$1000. That figure was lower than the current one since property values had gone up. She recommended that the board establish a single tax rate, as it had traditionally done. Hussain moved the adoption of a single tax rate, Bob seconded the motion, and all voted in favor.

Virginia added that she had a question. The tax-rate forms required a signature by the Town Clerk attesting to the fact that the board had approved the single rate at its meeting. She wasn't sure who should sign it since Hawley was more or less in between Town Clerks. Hussain said he believed that Tinky could do this as assistant town clerk. Virginia said she would explain the situation to the Department of Revenue and ask whether the assistant clerk could sign.

Chris Tirone asked how the rate could go down if taxes were not expected to be significantly lower. Virginia explained that the tax rate and value were multiplied to come up with the taxes levied. If values went up, that action could bring the rate down without significantly changing the actual assessment.

2. **The group discussed the Mohawk Trail Regional School-Committee opening.** Tinky observed that Suzanne Crawford, who was spearheading the effort to find a candidate, had not arrived. Peter Beck said that Suzanne had asked him whether he would work on the committee until the election in May, adding he was willing to do this. Hussain moved to appoint Peter to the School-Committee seat vacated by Scott Purinton, Will seconded the motion, and all voted in favor.
3. **Discussion of the Town Clerk opening followed.** Hussain said that he understood that someone was coming in later in the evening to talk about the position. He noted that Robert Sears, who had expressed an interest in being Town Clerk at one point, was in the room. He asked what Robert had to say. Robert explained that he was still interested but was unable to commit to the position immediately. If someone else would take on the position until May, he could probably run for the seat in the election.

He added that he would like to shadow the interim. Hussain thanked him for his interest. Discussion of this topic was suspended until later in the evening.

4. **The group spoke about the DCR's interest in acquiring land** on West Hill Road abutting Stump Sprouts. Jen Soper of the DCR explained that the property also abutted Maynard and Palmer property. She said that Lloyd Crawford had told her that no one had lived there for years. Hussain asked what she needed from the town; she said that the DCR was required to notify the town of its interest. He asked whether the property would be subject to PILOT payments. She said that it would. She noted that although PILOT was seriously underfunded by the state, the road to the property was bad. If someone purchased the property for residential use, the town would need to work on the road, which would probably cost more than it lost from PILOT. Hussain said he was encouraged to know that at least some money would be coming in. Some state and charitable programs didn't pay anything.

Virginia asked about an abutting parcel of land, which had recently been purchased. With the boundaries that had recently been clarified by a survey, the new owner suddenly didn't have enough access to his land. Could the DCR move the property line to help this person? Jen said that once the DCR purchased the land, it was protected in perpetuity without a two thirds legislative vote. Not even a tiny bit of it could be removed. Hussain asked whether an easement for this new owner could be included in the agreement. Jen replied that this was not allowed. Hussain proposed putting the easement in before the land was sold; however, the land that the easement would go over already belonged to the DCR. Jen said perhaps the new owner could obtain his own survey, which that might change the property line. Lloyd explained that based on past use, the new owner had assumed he had access and had been surprised. The group thanked Jen for answering their questions. Lloyd noted that even if the property were re-surveyed, there might be a wetlands problem. Putting in a driveway would be doable, but expensive. He suggested that perhaps the new owner could sell his property to the DCR and get some of his investment back. There was brief discussion about why the value of the purchased property had gone up so much in a few years.

5. **The group returned to the School Committee opening** as Suzanne Crawford had arrived. She said she was pleased to hear that Peter had volunteered. She observed that although the committee's work was time consuming it was not unpleasant. She said that all the people she had approached about the opening had been gracious and that she would keep them in mind for the future.

While she had the board's attention, Suzanne updated the group on a couple of other matters. She said that the sustainability study had held more sessions and that its next step was to present detailed models of its most promising ideas. She also talked about a recent successful endeavor to involve students and their families in evaluating the school system, which had found improvement overall. Hussain asked her about a proposed capital expenditure, and she explained that it involved a new boiler, estimated to cost about \$25,000. She noted that Bill Lataille had sent out information about it to keep ahead of the curve.

Hussain asked her to confirm that the expenditure would be relatively small for Hawley, and she agreed that Hawley would pay about 3 to 3-1/2 percent, probably less than \$1000. Hussain said that it sounded as though the school district was in a good place. Suzanne agreed, noting that several other districts were having major financial problems, having relied on federal COVID funds heavily in recent years.

6. **The ambulance situation was passed over** as no news was available.
7. **Will shared a letter he had drafted for the governor** about school funding. He explained that School-Committee chair Martha Thurber had told him that the governor was preparing to make budget cuts in the face of lower-than-anticipated revenues. He acknowledged that Hawley didn't have a lot of power to make the state keep promises it had made and sometimes abandoned over the years. Tinky said that she had not understood that context from the text of the letter and asked that it open by saying that the Selectmen knew that budget cuts needed to be made but asked the governor not to take funding away from rural schools. Hussain noted that the Student Opportunity Act had failed to help rural areas. Will agreed. Hussain said he would be happy to authorize Will to sign the letter on behalf of the board once it was revised. Bob agreed.
8. **While waiting for the Town Clerk candidate**, Hussain gave Will information on an EMPG grant application. He added that the regional Massachusetts Emergency Management Agency representative wished to conduct a tabletop exercise with the Town about the scenario of the Dugway collapsing. The meeting should include the board, Tinky, Virginia if possible, the road boss, EMD Brandon Root, Fire Chief Greg Cox, and perhaps others. The MEMA representative would take meeting minutes, which might help the town secure grants in the future. Hussain said he would contact Brandon and the MEMA person and get back with a possible date. He added that he would not be present at the December 3 Selectboard meeting and asked that if he was needed for a specific agenda item, that item be deferred.

Tinky noted that the Mary Lyon Foundation had dropped off emergency supplies. Hussain observed that Adams Ambulance had also donated quite a few pieces of equipment and supplies to the Town. The board asked Tinky to draft a letter of thanks to the Ambulance people; Hussain promised to give her information for the letter. Meanwhile, Tinky presented letters of thanks to Mary Lyon, as well as to Pam Shrimpton (for helping with the election) and to Greg and Gaby Rowehl (for donating food to the election), for the board to sign.

Suzanne said that she had been given a box of Narcan and wondered if anyone in town could use it, especially emergency services. Hussain declined, telling her that the Fire Department was drowning in Narcan. Gary said he had Narcan in his truck.

9. **The board spoke with Ellie Van Iderstein of Charlemont, who was interested in the Town Clerk position.** Ellie explained that in recent years she had become interested in local government. She was working as the administrative assistant to the Selectboard in Williamsburg and would like to learn about the duties of the Town Clerk. Will explained Robert Sears's situation.

Ellie said that she understood that the position might not last beyond the spring election. She also said that she would be happy to have Robert shadow and work with her. Hussain asked what Ellie knew about the budget for the Town Clerk. She said she understood that the pay was not vast; she was interested more in community than in money, she explained. She said she believed that rural towns needed to stick together. Will noted that with changes due from the Secretary of State's office, there was bound to be a huge learning curve. Hussain offered to help answer questions where he could.

Virginia said that if Pam trained Ellie, the funds to pay Pam would have to come out of the Town Clerk's budget, reducing that budget. Will said he thought Pam's work would be minimal, perhaps less than a day. It was more orientation than training. The group asked Tinky to ask Pam to resign as of November 30 and to schedule a special Selectboard meeting on November 26 to pre-accept that resignation and appoint Ellie.

In other business, Tinky asked who might participate in an upcoming statewide call about the drought situation. Hussain suggested that she sent it to Greg Cox.

There being no other business, the meeting adjourned at 8:16 p.m.

Respectfully submitted, Tinky Weisblat, Gal Friday

Williams Cosby

Hussain Hamdan

Robert MacLean