

**Town of Hawley, Massachusetts**  
**Minutes of a**  
**Selectboard / Board of Health / Zoning Board of Appeals Meeting**  
**in Person & via Zoom**  
**January 14, 2025**

Present: Will Cosby, Hussain Hamdan, Robert MacLean – Selectboard  
Tinky Weisblat, Gal Friday  
Virginia Gabert, Treasurer and Financial Administrator  
Gary Mitchell and Chris Tirone

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

1. **Discussion began with the draft cable-television agreement with Charter Communications.** Hussain noted several issues he had with the agreement. They included the minimum distance between houses, the competing entities section (which he understood when it dealt with other businesses but felt should exclude any possible town projects), the question of going directly to court for disputes instead of trying mediation, making sure Hawley was named rather than another town, and more. He promised to send a list of requests to Tinky to send along to Charter. The other Selectmen endorsed this idea.
2. **Tinky presented a letter from the Upper Pioneer Valley Veterans' Services group asking for changes in the tax breaks afforded to veterans.** Hussain noted that these changes would require a Town-Meeting vote. The consensus was that Tinky should ask the group to create a warrant article (or two) as needed, along with an explanation of the issue, by sometime in February.
3. **The group examined the contract for upcoming FRCOG highway-supply fees.** The fees appeared to be rising about five percent. Hussain asked when the fees had last increased and noted that it would be important to keep an eye on increases in future. For the moment, he moved that the contract be signed. Bob seconded the motion, and all voted in favor. Will signed the contract.
4. **The group discussed designating Chris Tirone as animal-control officer once again.** Chris agreed to do the job, Hussain moved the designation, Bob seconded the motion, and all voted in favor.
5. **Discussion turned to the contract for getting new computers.** Hussain asked Will how many computers the grant was covering as he found this unclear in the documents. Will explained that the Town would get four desktop computers (one for the Fire Station, one for the Highway Garage, and two for the Town Office), along with four laptops for the Town Office. Hussain took issue with language in the contract, particularly the requirement that Hawley not publicize events connected with the grant without permission from Mass Tech.

He believed that the requirement raised issues with the First Amendment and Open Meeting Law. He observed that talking about the issue in a public Selectboard meeting might count as publicity. He asked that this language be taken out. If not, he noted, the board could ignore it since it was required to discuss things in open meetings by law, but he said he would prefer to push for striking the language. He said he would be happy to draft language about this issue; his offer was accepted. Will asked about reporting for the grant (which didn't seem terribly onerous). Will and Tinky agreed to take care of these reports.

6. **Will briefly discussed MVP grants.** He said that he had had a phone call on the issue that afternoon. Apparently, the state was considering a trial period of waiving the matching-fee requirement for small towns. He said he hoped to obtain as much as \$3 million from this grant, which might help with the King Corner issue. He added that he was still waiting to hear from GZA about its response to the state's critique of the engineering plans for that project. Will mentioned a couple of additional changes in the MVP area. He said that the Town needed to use a 25-year floodplain plan, not a 100-year one. Hussain asked whether the project would still be built to withstand a 100-year flood; there was brief discussion of Hurricane Irene. Will said the town would be required to perform some kind of community-engagement activity about King Corner. He suggested that coffee and doughnuts in the DCR parking lot might take care of that requirement. Applications for the MVP funding would be due in March or April.
7. **Next on the agenda was the question of stickers such as bumper stickers on town-owned vehicles.** Will asked whether the town had a policy regarding these stickers. Hussain explained there was no policy but added that State and Federal laws would preclude stickers that would be considered political activism. Hussain said any policy had to be carefully written as banning all stickers outright might have unintended consequences: for instance, it would prevent public-safety vehicles from displaying tributes to fallen heroes. Will suggested that displaying certain personal stickers might cross a line, however, and wondered aloud whether it would be a good idea to formulate a policy. Hussain reiterated that it would be important not to ban emblems meant to show respect. Virginia wondered whether a vague policy against defacing public property might not work. Chris asked what had prompted this discussion, and Will explained that he had seen some surprising decals and stickers on town property. Hussain offered to draft language for the next meeting
8. **The group moved on to roads.** Gary reported that he had restocked sand, which had been getting low given recent mild snowstorms that had made it difficult to plow the roads but had prompted a lot of sanding. Gary reported that in general fuel usage had been good. Will asked whether something could be done about difficult roads like Labelle and East Road. Gary and Chris noted that Labelle Road had 21 culverts over 1-1/2 miles. The group discussed strategies like renting a larger excavator. Gary said that most of the Labelle culverts flowed into Cooley Brook. Various problems with that road were mentioned, including the ledge on the side of the road, the difficulty of replacing the culverts with same-size ones instead of larger ones, and the general lack of room on the road for construction.

Will asked Gary to ponder possibilities and bring ideas to the next meeting. Bob stressed that equipment rentals could be expensive and asked Gary to figure out which culverts would need hammering. As for East Road, Gary said it was more or less stabilized at present; Labelle Road was much trickier.

**In other business, Tinky reported that Ellie Van Iderstine seemed to be doing well as town clerk** and that the street-list mailing might be slightly delayed because of issues with the state computer. Tinky added that she was going to help the Council on Aging apply for a small grant.

**Will asked whether information about the COA was on the town's website.** He added that he had been asked about the senior lunches in Charlemont and hadn't found them on the website. Tinky promised to make sure that all relevant material was on the website. She also promised to fix the fee listed for the foot clinic, which was out of date.

**Will said he might be out of town for the next meeting** but promised to be available by email. He wasn't sure whether he would Zoom into the next meeting.

There being no other business, the meeting was adjourned at 8:12 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