

**Town of Hawley, Massachusetts**  
**Minutes of a**  
**Selectboard / Board of Health / Zoning Board of Appeals Meeting**  
**in Person & via Zoom**  
**February 25, 2025**

Present: Will Cosby, Hussain Hamdan, Robert MacLean – Selectboard  
Tinky Weisblat, Gal Friday  
Virginia Gabert, Treasurer and Financial Administrator, with Benjamin Gabert  
Brandon Root, Emergency Management Director  
Gary Mitchell, Chris Tirone, Lloyd Crawford, Greg Rowehl, and Jeffery Hoyt

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

1. **The group discussed feedback from the storm the previous week**, which had interrupted power and internet in some spots for two days and in others for a longer time. Hussain began the discussion by saying, “I think we got caught with our pants down.” He noted that no one had predicted the level of wind and damage that came with the storm, particularly along the Hawley-Plainfield line. He added that he thought that National Grid had been overly optimistic in its projections and that even people with generators had encountered some problems keeping them running for so long. A state of emergency had been declared on Tuesday morning, but more help had certainly been needed. He suggested that more training was needed, in the Town Office (particularly regarding the generator) and elsewhere. He also noted that the robocall system probably should have been used. He observed that the emergency-needs questionnaires had been helpful at the Town Office but that they should be organized into the database as quickly as possible.

Hussain went on to characterize the broadband performance as atrocious, recalling that WiValley had promised to provide backup batteries for the towers used to broadcast the signal through town, which it clearly had not. Greg Rowehl said that his internet power supply had a small battery; even so, he had had problems and was still having problems with reception. Tinky observed that several people in town had called her to complain that they had no internet; she had called Gonetspeed, the company that had taken over maintenance from WiValley, but had received little help.

Will asked what the town could do to act for the future. He reiterated that training was important. He now knew how to start the generator (the instructions had not mentioned the all-important choke), but others should learn this task and be familiarized with how to set the switches in the fuse box. Greg said that he had two automatic transfer switches he could give to the town, but Will said that unfortunately those would not work with a portable generator. Virginia suggested that someone write out instructions for setting up the generator and place them in an obvious place, perhaps above the switch.

Hussain brought another matter to the group's attention: Several fires had broken out before, during, and after the storm, one induced by a generator that was being used inside a shed. Fortunately, no one had been hurt. The residents had been fortunate because the Fire Department's ability to respond up steep snow-filled driveways could be limited. He said residents needed to be educated about preparedness and safe practices. He suggested that, using a model from the past, EMD Brandon Root and Tinky work on an insert for the Town Report that would remind people how to deal with storms and avoid fires. A lot of language already existed that could be recycled.

Brandon said that he needed more volunteers to help with response in situations like the storm. Hussain said that although the town didn't have much of a budget for emergency response, it did have radios it could distribute to people who were willing to act as volunteer coordinators for their neighborhoods. Tinky said the group needed to have more water on hand and perhaps some snacks safely stowed away. Virginia noted that the Town Office still had some military MREs on hand.

Will wondered aloud whether setting up the Town Office as a shelter made sense, especially in a severe storm, in which it might be dangerous to travel there.

Tinky noted that she had asked Randy Crochier of FRCOG for some ideas about testing the water in the Town Office. Having potable water would make the building much more convenient in emergencies. She also relayed Randy's offer to come (or send someone in his office) help in future storms. The group agreed that if water was being tested, the water at the Town Garage and Fire Station should be included.

Virginia stressed the need for more volunteers in an emergency. Brandon said he had gotten a couple of offers from townspeople. The group discussed the plight of people who relied on their internet connection for too many services; Hussain suggested that a landline still seemed to be the most reliable means of communication in an emergency.

Will commended the community spirit Hawleyites displayed in times of stress. The group discussed suggesting that people have water and radios nearby and that no one use a portable generator indoors. Tinky said that several people in town didn't have a woodstove, a landline, or a generator. Will said that the town couldn't accept responsibility for people who couldn't manage country living. Virginia said the town should encourage drills and education among residents.

Asked how the road crew had fared, Gary said they had held their own. Hussain expressed his thanks to the crew, particularly Gary and Brandon Reynolds, for help provided to the fire department by clearing roads and sanding a driveway where an incident had taken place.

Brandon Root said he needed more people to help; he pointed out that the radio in the Town Office did not work. Hussain explained that the DPW radio did work, but the 800MHz base unit had never been hooked up by the vendor.

He said he could hook it up himself. For a long time, he explained, fixing it hadn't made much sense because the town wasn't coordinating responses on 800MHZ (this had changed) and because a portable radio worked just as well on site.

2. **The group discussed notifying abutters to Ashfield Road of upcoming construction.** Will explained that there were two types of notifications needed. One was an overall notification that work was going to recommence on the road; that could wait a month or so. He asked Tinky to get in touch with Arlene Lavalley and Donna Sumner (or the latter's relatives) sooner because a culvert was going to be installed very near their property, including a possible guardrail, and workers would have to venture onto their property. Ideally, he would like to ask Arlene to co-sign the Notice of Intent for the Conservation Commission. Tinky promised to take care of the notifications.
3. **The abandonment of Lower Forget Road was next.** Will said he had met with Bob Dean at the FRCOG. According to Virginia, the Selectboard had voted in 1985 to discontinue maintenance on this stretch of road. Bob Dean had pointed out that the road had existed since 1771 and was listed as a county road on some maps. Will explained that the town had three choices. It could ask the voters to fund to fix the road and recommence maintenance at Town Meeting. It could ask the FRCOG council to discontinue the road; in that case, the property on that stretch of road would revert to the abutters. Finally, the county could officially discontinue maintenance. The last option might be least expensive; it would cost around \$1000.

Hussain voiced his strong opinion that the board shouldn't go to FRCOG before putting the matter to voters. Lloyd asked how the property was taxed and wondered whether any other roads in town were in a similar situation. He was told that South Road had a discontinued area and that all the roads in the forest had been discontinued in 1982. Hussain expressed the opinion that FRCOG had not done right by Hawley in the past when it had officially discontinued the State Forest portions of Hunt and Middle Roads. Virginia noted that the town was not receiving Chapter 90 funds for the stretch of Forget Road in question so at least leaving it discontinued would not pose a problem financially. Will observed that the consensus seemed to be that the matter should be put before the voters, noting that an estimate of the costs involved in fixing the road would be needed.

4. **Next came road updates.** Gary noted that he had already reported on recent road work. Will and Lloyd revisited the question of applying for special MVP funding, again noting that GZA, the engineering firm, had to get to work on borings and so forth to make King Corner shovel ready. Lloyd said that if the project were shovel ready, he was prepared to work hard on the application at the end of March. Lloyd said that the MVP funding might also be used to prepare conceptual designs for the Dugway. He said he would try to apply for both projects.

Will noted that the town could not (as it had hoped to) use municipal paving money from the state for Route 8A; those funds were tied up until 2027. Lloyd suggested pursuing the money then.

5. **Tinky asked board members to send her their ideas for the Town Report** within the next week so she could draft something for the next meeting. She and Brandon would work together on the Emergency Management report.

**In other business, the group touched on the hard-to-read contract between Charter Communications and the state for broadband.** Will said he had looked at the state's map and had not been able to find his house. Hussain reminded everyone that Michael Baldino of the Massachusetts Broadband Institute had offered to talk. The group asked Hussain to invite Baldino to attend the board's next meeting via Zoom.

**Virginia asked whether someone wanted to contact New England Forestry to ask for some kind of payment in lieu of taxes.** She said she believed that that group had been particularly unfair to Hawley. She noted that the town did receive donations from another nonprofit. Hussain and Virginia agreed to talk soon about a possible letter.

**Virginia also noted that the recent storm had cost the town \$30,000 in materials and labor** The snow-roads account was now overdrawn by \$19,000. Overdrawing that account was legal (if worrisome) as long as she notified the Selectmen. If necessary, the extra expenditure could be added to the tax rate. She said she hoped not to change over to the general highway account until late March. Will suggested that the Winter Roads Assistance Program might help. Virginia said that the town might not get those funds this year.

**Tinky reminded the group that they were due to meet with the Charlemont Selectmen** and school officials the following Monday.

**Tinky also reminded the group that the legality of remote meetings was due to expire** at the end of March. Will said he had gone to a meeting at the FRCOG about this issue. The group recommended making these meetings possible but not mandatory. (In response to a question from Hussain, Will noted that several iterations of the extension with different consequences had been proposed.) Hussain asked Will to share any information he had on this matter.

**Tinky brought up a strange offer the town had received to plant an expensive "Tree for Trump,"** an elm tree with a plaque about the president. Gary voiced concern the elm would not do well in Hawley.

There being no other business, the meeting was adjourned at 8:40 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