

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

Present: Will Cosby, Hussain Hamdan, Robert MacLean – Selectboard
Tinky Weisblat, Gal Friday
Virginia Gabert, Treasurer and Financial Administrator
Gary Mitchell, Chris Tirone, Kimberly Orzechowski, Peter Beck, Ken Bertsch, Lloyd
Crawford, Suzanne Crawford, Robert Sears, and on the telephone Nancy Clark

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

1. **The group discussed the new draft cable-television contract from Charter Communications.** Hussain said he had looked it over and was inclined to approve it. Will expressed his continuing concern that several addresses in town, including his own, were not on the MBI map for broadband. Hussain noted MBI had frequently relied on mistaken maps, even believing there was a cable running through the state forest. Nancy Clark from Charter joined the group by phone, having been unable to get through by Zoom. Told about this situation, she asked Will to have Tinky send her a list of the relevant addresses.

Hussain said that aside from the address problem, he was pleased with the contract and appreciated Charter's efforts to take the town's concerns into account. He said he was ready to sign the contract. Nancy said she was in no hurry and suggested the group get her the list of addresses and consider signing at its next meeting on April 8. The board agreed to this and thanked her.
2. **Suzanne Crawford presented a brief report from the Mohawk Trail Regional School Committee.** She reminded the group that the Sustainability Study organizers were still looking for feedback. Will told her that he had seen in the *Recorder* that enrolment was up at the school; he asked whether that increase might affect the study. Suzanne said that, although the numbers were gratifying, in the long run the schools were projecting declining enrolments. She summed up some of the current doings at the school. MCAS season was going on; parent-teacher conferences were coming up, along with an orientation ice-cream social for incoming Seventh Graders; the school had produced a video about its internship program; the Smithsonian exhibit "Museum on Main Street" would arrive soon in the school library; athletic season was gearing up; and performances by the band and young actors were scheduled. She finished her report by thanking Robert Sears for taking out papers to run for school committee and thanking the town for the support she and her husband had received after her son's accident.

3. **Kimberly Orzechowski of the Planning Board explained that her board was hoping to add language to the bylaws** regarding ADUs (accessory dwelling units) to comply with new state law. She asked Hussain to look over the proposed wording with his legal eye so that it could be placed on the warrant for Annual Town Meeting. Hussain said he would be happy to look at it but couldn't offer an instant opinion; he could give her feedback by the next Selectboard meeting. Will asked how ADUs would affect septic regulations. Kimberly noted that the new structures still had to comply with existing bylaws. After some discussion about the timing to get things on the warrant for Town Meeting, the group agreed that it made sense to bring up the language at a special town meeting later in the year. Kimberly agreed to this. The board members thanked Kimberly and the Planning Board for taking on this project.
4. **The group turned to the Town Report for 2024.** Will said he thought Hussain had produced a fine draft report for the board, and Hussain thanked Tinky for her contribution. After some deliberation, the group decided to dedicate the report to Ann Falwell, who had chaired the Council on Aging for a number of years and had put in a great deal of hard work.
5. **The budget for FY2026 was discussed.** Lloyd, the chair of the Finance Committee, said in general things were looking good, particularly in the school budgets. He noted that the committee hoped to build up stabilization funds in the coming year. He touched on Fire Chief Greg Cox's request for funds for planning an addition to the Fire Station, observing that most of the money necessary to do this had already been set aside, including some funds originally allocated for a paving project at the station which would be imprudent to carry out without knowing what the new layout would be).

Lloyd reported that the Finance Committee had discussed what to do about the Town Clerk's compensation extensively, finally coming up with the suggestion that it be treated like the assessors' account; in busier years it would get larger. Funds would also transfer from year to year. Virginia noted that several budget categories were being carried over; Hussain mentioned cemeteries as one of these. Lloyd told the group that the Finance Committee was hoping to transfer some funds from free cash to an account to be used for grant matching, as many grant applications required the town to commit to a match. Calling a special town meeting on short notice wasn't always feasible. Hussain said this policy would give the Selectboard flexibility. Virginia said there were no other updates on budget requests.

Lloyd explained the increased budget for the shared conservation agent. Virginia estimated that Hawley would owe \$1955 for this person in FY26 (the first year had been covered by a grant). The committee suggested raising and appropriating \$1400 for this purpose and taking the remaining funds from notice-of-intent fees.

Lloyd turned to cemetery care, which had formerly appeared in the budget for the highway department but had now been moved to the Historical Commission. The suggested total from the Historical Commission was \$3500. Hussain added that the consensus was that there should be less cemetery mowing in FY26 than there had been in FY25.

Lloyd observed that the town's excess levy capacity had gone up, calling this a good thing, although he also noted that Hawley wasn't the sort of town to try to spend every dollar it was able to raise. He opined that Hawley was in fairly good shape financially, thanks to hard work and luck. Virginia corrected a couple of minor typos in the version the Selectboard was looking at which hadn't been updated since the last Finance Committee meeting. These pertained to the tax collector and the IT services accounts, both of which had gone down a bit. Hussain and Lloyd both gave special thanks to Virginia for all her work on the budget.

6. **Under road news** Gary reported "nothing exciting." The road crew was currently busy picking up brush. It had some firewood available in both East and West Hawley. The group discussed closing the gates to the State Forest for mud season. Will said DCR had told him closing the gates was Hawley's responsibility. Hussain maintained that the State had always handled gate closure and opening; the state owned the locks, and he believed that the agreement with the State made this their responsibility. He said at the very least the State needed to consult with Hawley about when to close the gates. He reminded the group that if the town closed the gates, it should be methodical and make sure no vehicles were trapped in the forest first. Bob and Gary offered to take care of the gates later in the week; Gary had a key. Will said he could write to Luke at the State for permission. Hussain also noted the MOA with DCR only covered Hawley's authority with respect to Hunt and Middle Roads. If there was a desire to close the other gates as well (which would be more convenient), he'd like to see that approved in writing by DCR. Will offered to ask about the other roads.

Will moved on to road projects, saying that the Ashfield Road culvert replacement documents would soon be finished; then a notice of intent would need to be filed with the Conservation Commission. The group talked about MVP grant applications. Lloyd reminded the group that if the engineering firm GZA could get the town all the necessary information, it made sense to apply for money for King Corner. If the town applied for two MVP grants, the King Corner one and a smaller one for preliminary work on the Dugway, it was possible it would be given only the smaller grant. The Dugway might also be eligible for STRAP funds so he was leaning toward King Corner. He said he would probably need some help from Tinky on the final stages of that application. The board thanked him for his hard work.

Noting the that the NOI for Ashfield Road was coming soon and would need the town's signature, Will asked for permission to pursue the culvert project there. Hussain moved to authorize Will to work on this, Bob seconded, and all voted in favor. Will said that Davenport Construction was hoping to finish work on Ashfield Road; he said Gary would grade the road before a top coat of gravel was applied. The road wasn't going to be perfect, but it would be better than it had been in the past.

In other business, Bob said he had received a complaint about mud on East Road. The road was beginning to dry up, however.

Tinky brought up the question of using FRCOG for fuel bids, observing that purchasing diesel through the council made sense; gasoline was less certain. The group agreed to try the diesel offering. Hussain reminded Tinky that she could always just call companies for quotes instead of going through the whole bidding process in cases in which the total expenditure was under \$50,000.

Tinky presented Ann Falwell's letter of resignation from the Council on Aging. The group agreed to sign a letter of thanks at its next meeting.

Tinky reported that although the final water-testing results had not come through, the testers had preliminarily reported that the Fire Station had a level 7.5 of coliform. The company had suggested having the well there chlorinated as soon as possible. Hussain said he would talk to the fire chief.

Tinky said she had heard back from Joseph Pellegrino, the person interested in purchasing land on Lower Forget Road, asking about the possibility of subdividing the land. She was asked to send the email to Will and Lloyd.

Tinky told the group that somehow or other the newspaper seemed to have arranged for her to speak to a women's club in Orange at the time of the next Selectboard meeting. She added that luckily Ellie (the interim town clerk) had agreed to take minutes at that meeting and expressed her gratitude.

Bob reported that someone was once again tapping trees at the Grove and the East Hawley Cemetery. Hussain said there was more evidence of who was doing this. He also indicated the camera at the firehouse covered the area and might have actual footage of the individual visiting the sap buckets. He was asked to look into this. The group said it would sign a letter at its next meeting telling the person that if he persisted the town would remove the taps.

Tinky suggested that the group put off writing a letter to local legislators about hybrid meetings. The current practice had been extended by the State to 2027. The group agreed to wait for now.

There being no other business, the meeting was adjourned at 8:34 p.m.

Respectfully submitted, Tinky Weisblat, Gal Friday

Williams Cosby

Hussain Hamdan

Robert MacLean