

Town of Hawley, Massachusetts
Minutes of a
Selectboard / Board of Health / Zoning Board of Appeals Meeting
in Person & via Zoom
July 29, 2025

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

The meeting was called to order at 7 p.m. The board signed warrants and approved minutes from a previous meeting. Then:

1. **The public-health nurses had indicated that they would prefer to come to a future meeting so discussion went straight to road and grant news.** Will noted that the Ashfield Road culvert work was slated to begin soon; he said a pre-construction meeting was scheduled for the next morning. He said he would be interested in others' takes on the paperwork (Bob's in particular) because Western Earthworks was a new construction partner for the town. Bob said he had looked at the paperwork and wanted to make sure that the materials used for the top of the road were consistent with what was there. Gary said he knew the size of pebbles being used and believed all was well. Will said he would check on this at the meeting.

Will told the group that he had received a call from the town of Leverett asking for a reference for Davenport Construction. His feedback was positive and he said he had found the company to be responsive.

Gary noted that the road crew had been busy mowing. Tinky and Will thanked them for working on the bank on Route 8A near the turn onto Pudding Hollow Road; visibility was much improved.

Hussain asked whether anyone had information about the DCR's plans for the State Forest. He and Chris Tirone had recently visited the forest and had noted that some work had taken place there, but he was concerned about brook erosion on Middle Road. Will noted that significant rain was expected later in the week. Will then relayed Lloyd Crawford's concern about a big stone hanging in the air above the brook; the stone posed a danger of falling into the brook and was a risk to anyone driving in that area. The group confirmed that the stretch of Middle Road between Pudding Hollow and Hunt Road was closed to traffic, although the passage from Hallockville Road to Hunt Road was open, as was Middle Road going toward Plainfield. Will explained that Lloyd believed that a culvert might have moved. The Conservation Commission would have to be involved in any work. Will asked Hussain whether he had looked at the beaver pond while in the forest; Hussain said he had not. Will said when he had looked at the pond a few weeks ago, it had looked as though the beavers had done a little work but needed much more material to rebuild their dam.

Hussain said he was concerned about crowding in and around Mill Brook, especially where Sprague Road was formerly located. He said the brook ran very close to the road there.

Will said he would get in touch with Luke at the DCR. Hussain said he would be happy to show officials the damage. He emphasized that repair work would only become harder and more costly with further erosion if the DCR waited to do the work.

Hussain brought up his ongoing concern that both Gould Meadow and Moody Spring were still gated off. He said that he understood that the state didn't want people camping in either of those areas, but the gating also kept out people who just wished to visit those locations but couldn't handle the walk around the gates to the sites.

Will observed that there was no other grant news at present.

In other business, Virginia shared information from the Hampshire County Insurance Trust, which handled insurance for Hawley. She noted that she was the voting member of that group for the town, and that it was scheduled to meet the next day. She explained that the Trust was in hot water financially because of an unexpected increase in claims, mainly due to the new GLP-1 (weight-loss) drugs. She said that a number of members had moved to discontinue funding these drugs for anything other than diabetes, but because of the actions of other members this was unlikely to happen before October 1. If things stayed the same, the trust would not last until October. One proposal under consideration was a 20-percent mid-year increase in the assessment to towns, which would run Hawley around \$6000.

Will suggested looking at another provider, perhaps MIIA (the Massachusetts Interlocal Insurance Association). Virginia said that the trust to which Hawley belonged generally gave the town much better rates than it would get by itself. Discussion was unclear as to whether MIIA would be an improvement over the Hampshire trust, but Will urged looking into the former. He also noted that the Hampshire County Regional Council of Governments had abruptly folded some years earlier, wondering whether a similar situation might be in the works.

Virginia explained that one of the problems was that the trust had spent several years with no premium increases and had in fact even returned money to communities one year. She noted that different options were being explored, including breaking the trust up into smaller and larger communities.

Will suggested that Virginia share all this information with Lloyd Crawford. He asked whether the town would have to appropriate the rate increase at a special town meeting. Hussain said that this wouldn't have to happen immediately since the Town wouldn't actually run low on funds until closer to the end of the fiscal year; the meeting could await other planned activities. Virginia said for the moment she had just wanted to let the Selectmen know about the meeting the following day and to encourage them to attend remotely if they could. (Unfortunately, they were all busy.) She would report back, she said.

Tinky brought up the letter the board had previously discussed writing to support some residents in the town of Oakham in opposition to a large battery-storage unit being proposed for that town. She said that the Oakham Selectboard's assistant had told her that that board would welcome such a letter. Will said he would like to do more reading, noting that the state had already passed legislation that would override local control over this issue. Hussain said he was agreeable to writing to the state. However, he might like to add language objecting to the fact that the legislation imposed a huge liability on small towns (he cited information about the difficulty of putting out battery fires) without providing funding to help mitigate the liability. Will noted that although battery-storage or solar-array installations might be put in nearby, they were unlikely to come to Hawley.

Tinky reported that a new round of opioid funds was coming in and asked whether the Selectmen would like to accept Hawley's share or pass it on to others. Hussain said that it might be useful for training new emergency personnel in the use of Narcan. He asked how much money was in question; Tinky said that wasn't clear yet but promised to try to find out.

Tinky said that Superintendent Sheryl Stanton had proposed talking to towns in the School Districts about what they had in mind for their school buildings if all schools were moved to the Mohawk Trail campus.

Hussain clarified that although the old high-school building and the land under Hawlemont belonged to Charlemont, the new school building was owned by the Hawlemont School District (ultimately, Hawley and Charlemont). All the Selectmen appeared to feel that the question was coming awfully early in the process but said that they would be happy to meet with Sheryl and her colleagues to see what they had in mind.

Tinky asked about scheduling a special town meeting. She was asked to consult with Planning Board chair Kimberly Orzechowski about the relative urgency of bylaw language about ADUs. In general, the group decided it would prefer to schedule the meeting for the spring. Hussain felt that the proposed bylaw was really just a restatement that the Town complied with state law although new projects had to comply with the town's other zoning rules; it therefore didn't differ much from the status quo. Virginia asked whether perhaps proposed bylaw changes could include restrictions on battery storage and solar arrays. She was told that the new legislation gave the state, not towns, control over such issues.

Tinky said that she had heard from Bob Ide at National Grid that progress was being made on preparing poles for fiberoptic cable. Will asked her to keep pushing.

Tinky also said that her new computer was constantly needing to re-download emails. Virginia suggested that maybe archiving was necessary. Hussain said he would try to make time to help Tinky figure out the issue soon.

Bob said that he would be away for the September 9 meeting. The group decided to invite Sheryl Stanton to visit either on August 26 or on October 7.

There being no other business, the meeting was adjourned at 8:25 p.m.

Respectfully submitted, Tinky Weisblat, Gal Friday

Hussain Hamdan

Robert MacLean