

**Town of Hawley, Massachusetts**  
**Minutes of a**  
**Selectboard / Board of Health / Zoning Board of Appeals Meeting**  
**in Person & via Zoom**  
**August 26, 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  
Lark Thwing, Lloyd Crawford, Suzanne Crawford,  
and via Zoom Rob Potter and Madison Schofield

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

1. **The group looked over the ZBA application for a variance from Ellen and Scott Purinton.** Hussain moved to schedule a hearing on the issue for Tuesday, September 23, at 7 p.m. Bob seconded the motion, and all voted in favor.
2. **Lark Thwing joined the group on behalf of the Historical Commission to discuss the possibility of raising the cost of the plots in town-owned cemeteries.** He noted that all the members of the commission were in favor of raising the price from \$350 per plot to \$500 per plot. He also noted that the Historical Commission needed younger members and asked that the Selectmen appoint Hussain to the group. Hussain said he was willing to serve but would not vote on the idea. Will asked whether there was a shortfall in the funds for maintaining the cemeteries. Lark explained that the commission was working with the maintenance person to keep within the budget. Hussain asked whether there had been any comments or correspondence based on the posting the plot increase on the agenda. There had not. He also noted that the Pudding Hollow Cemetery Association, which Tinky had explained was much more expensive than the town cemeteries, was private and was able to invest its funds. Virginia opined that town-owned cemeteries should be less expensive than private ones. She also explained that the current fiscal year was the first one in which maintaining the cemeteries had been put in the charge of the Historical Commission so judging the finances was hard. She added that the cemetery trust fund could also be used for some upkeep. Lark said that the commission wanted to keep the cemeteries looking nice and hoped that giving the mower flexibility would help with this. Hussain observed that it was hard to justify the increase in plot costs by saying that it would enable more upkeep.

Lark observed that there was a scary-looking tree branch at the Bozrah Cemetery that might endanger some of the headstones. Will asked Gary whether he could look at it, and Gary said that it would be difficult to get his equipment to it. Hussain suggested engaging a professional arborist. Lark said that would be expensive but promised to look into the matter. Lloyd suggested using the cemetery trust fund for this and wondered aloud whether it would be worth soliciting donations for it.

Hussain asked Tinky what people thought of the current plot rates, and she said she had heard no complaints.

In a return to the previous issue, Rob Potter joined via Zoom to make sure that the Purintons' hearing was scheduled. He was informed that all was well and thanked the board.

Talk returned to the Cemetery Trust Fund. Lark asked whether the fund had paid for the most recent tree work; Virginia said that it had. Lark said that the matter would be discussed at the next Historical Commission meeting.

Hussain suggested that if the plot price were raised, there should be some provision for installment payments. Will asked about how many plots were available; Lark thought perhaps around 100. Hussain noted that there were several people in town who were nearing the ends of their lives and had extremely limited assets. Lark suggested that family members or friends could help such people out. Hussain suggested an effective date of September 15 for the price hike. Virginia noted that if the town did ask for donations to the trust fund, it could also ask for donations for hardship cases. The group agreed that keeping those donations separate would be important.

Hussain moved to raise the price per plot to \$500 effective September 15, with an amendment to the policy to accept installment sales, provided that the plot was paid off by the time of interment. Bob seconded the motion, and all voted in favor. Will suggested that the Historical Commission work on the ideas for raising funds. Tinky said she would ask other towns how they handled these issues.

3. **In road and grant news,** Will reported that the town had not received the hoped-for MVP grant for culvert work at King Corner. He said he was trying to find out why the application had been denied, to avoid problems in future years. The problem might be that the proposed work was too costly. Hussain asked about a new procedure in which a culvert was encased in another one. Lloyd argued that that might just produce a smaller and therefore less powerful culvert, but Will noted that this design increased water velocity and consequently more volume under pressure.

Lloyd observed that whatever got done would cost quite a bit of money and that the town really needed a less expensive solution. Perhaps townspeople should just wait for an emergency. He noted that state money seemed to show up once things became a major problem. Will expressed frustration at the length of time involved in the process, and Hussain pointed out a lack of cooperation between state agencies. For example, the Department of Ecological Restoration's desire to turn the culvert into a 24-foot span technically would render the structure a bridge, and Mass DOT should pay for it. However, the Town was being pressured to make the project happen.

Will reported that at the moment work on Ashfield Road was scheduled to begin on September 8. It would probably take between five and eight weeks. Suzanne wondered whether the work would affect school-bus routes.

Tinky said she would check with the bus company and/or the school. Chris suggested that Arlene Lavalley's daughter might need to be rerouted through Ashfield.

The group moved on to road signage in the State Forest. Will said the road crew needed to figure out how many signs were needed. Lloyd asked whether the DCR was working on the road issues in the forest; Hussain said he was talking to them about this. Virginia suggested that all roads leading into the forest be labeled "Not a Through Road." The group agreed that perhaps "Local Traffic Only" should be added to that. Gary said he would work on obtaining yellow signs.

4. **The group moved on to capital equipment.** Will explained that with the new Chapter 90 formula, Hawley was being given more funds. He proposed formulating a plan to use these funds. In all, the town was getting about \$900,000. He suggested perhaps setting aside \$200,000 for reshaping and paving on East Hawley Road. Gary said that project could cost \$500,000-ish if shimming rather than paving were done; otherwise, it could approach \$1 million.

Virginia explained that in order to gain access to the new funds, the town would need to put in a request and have it approved by the Department of Transportation. She said it wasn't possible to set funds aside officially. Will suggested the town just not spend all the funds.

Lloyd asked about other projects that might need funds. Will said he had asked GZA, the engineering firm, for an estimate for major culvert work on Labelle Road. That project could be tricky, he noted, since the road was on ledge.

Will added that the highway department had some equipment needs. Gary believed that the town needed a safe, high-volume wood chipper. Hussain asked about the chipper donated to the town by Dean Desmarais. Gary called it "an OSHA nightmare." Gary mentioned finding a used chipper for a little over \$100,000. He also talked about possibly getting a mini-loader (which could also attach a mower, among other things, although the mower itself wouldn't be covered by Chapter 90).

Lloyd observed that the town had been lucky to date and had not had to borrow money to purchase equipment. He said he didn't believe that Chapter 90 funds should be used to purchase equipment. Hussain suggested that the town could pad the stabilization fund with taxpayer funds that would otherwise have been put aside for equipment purchases if the equipment were bought with Chapter 90. He expressed concern that the state could claw back Chapter 90 money. Will noted that most clawing back was at the federal level, not the state, but Hussain countered that the state figures appeared unsustainable. Will agreed the concern was valid.

Lloyd argued that the town had to find a way to plan for spending on both equipment and road work and to prioritize. Virginia said that the town had a history of holding onto some Chapter 90 funds to pay for big road projects down the line. Will suggested getting up-to-date tools for the highway department and then seeing what funds remained for projects such as Labelle Road.

Lloyd noted that some funds should be saved for storm damage, and Hussain observed that up-to-date equipment saved money during such events because it reduced the need to bring in expensive contractors.

The group discussed shimming versus paving on East Hawley Road and the possibility of putting a yellow line in the middle of that road. Lloyd suggested that Virginia create a spreadsheet of projects and costs. Virginia reminded the group that the funds available for roads didn't all come from current Chapter 90; some were left over from the previous fiscal year. She said that it had been hard to plan road work in the past and suggested consulting the Finance Committee, whose members didn't always feel involved in town decision-making. Lloyd said the committee could work on a proposal and make recommendations.

Hussain once again stressed the need to use state funds while they were still available. Lloyd asked whether the MMA thought Chapter 90 funds could be clawed back. He said he would like to know the level of risk. Virginia said that the state had the funds and had never taken money back, although some projects had not moved quickly enough to please the DOT. Will asked how long it would take the Finance Committee to come up with a plan. Lloyd said it wouldn't take long, but he wanted priorities and a spreadsheet. Will and Hussain stressed the need to use the funds while they were available, and Hussain noted that if equipment were going to be needed in time, it made financial sense to purchase it now while funding was available.

Virginia said it would make sense to figure out how to divide funding., and Gary said the town could start with only some, not all, of his equipment needs. Lloyd noted that every six months the highway department seemed to have a new wish list; this was the first he had heard of the needs being expressed at present.

Hussain said that he and Gary had agreed for some time that if the town got funding for a new fire station, it would be nice to have a salt shed on the east side of the town. This would save money and trips between East and West Hawley. A new loader would help with that.

Lloyd stated that the Selectboard needed to prioritize, and Virginia agreed that otherwise a capital plan was pointless. Will and Hussain once again argued that it made sense to spend the funds while they were available, particularly since some of the funding was unexpected. After some discussion, the group agreed to have the Finance Committee meet with the Selectboard on October 7.

5. **Tinky shared information from the CHIP program about Good Neighbor Day,** September 28. The board declined to issue a proclamation about the day (Hussain pointed out that it was already a national thing) but agreed to have some kind of open house at the Town Office on the afternoon of Sunday the 28th. All agreed that food would help lure people to the event. Hussain said he would consult the Fire Department about participation.

6. **Suzanne Crawford updated the group on vocational-school busing.** She explained that six students were going to vocational school from Hawley: three to the Technical School and three to Smith Vocational School. Hawley owed four percent of the total cost, \$47,586.50, which would be billed in four installments. The price per student for busing was about \$8000. Hawley's transportation costs had been helped by the fact that some students were being picked up in central locations. She moved on to the regular public schools, noting that school was due to start the following day. She explained that Middle School and High School students were going to be on the same schedule in the coming year.

Suzanne also touched on the Sustainability Study, noting that the proposed single campus was five to seven years down the road but that the districts still needed to look ahead. She said that Superintendent Sheryl Stanton was hoping that Selectboards would help townspeople understand the financial implications of doing nothing.

Will asked when the new system would come up for a vote, and Suzanne said a vote was probably more than a year away. The School Committees had to make sure that the new campus was eligible for funding from the state.

Virginia said that the town was within its budget for vocational spending.

**In other business, the group asked Tinky to get an update on the Charter Communication work in town.**

**Gary and the board asked Tinky to write a letter for Frank Ullian** explaining that the road crew would be cutting brush near his property within the next few weeks.

Responding to the earlier request from the Historical Commission, **Will moved to appoint Hussain to that commission.** Bob seconded the motion, and both voted in favor. (Hussain abstained.)

There being no other business, the meeting was adjourned at 9:07 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