

Town of Hawley, Massachusetts
Minutes of a
Selectboard / Board of Health / Zoning Board of Appeals Meeting
in Person & via Zoom
October 7, 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
Sheryl Stanton, Martha Thurber, Suzanne Crawford, Lloyd Crawford
and via Zoom Madison Schofield and Jake Eberwein

The meeting was called to order at 7 p.m. The board signed warrants. Then:

1. **Sheryl Stanton, Martha Thurber, and Suzanne Crawford provided an update on the sustainability study working group, with particular emphasis on what would happen to decommissioned school buildings if the effort to consolidate all schools in the local systems succeeded.** Sheryl began by reminding the group that the aspirational goal was to combine all schools on a single campus at Mohawk Trail Regional School, both to help students thrive and to control expenses. She explained that the plan would entail closing four elementary schools, not an easy task but one that seemed necessary given dwindling class sizes. She reported that representatives of the Massachusetts School Building Authority had toured the schools and seemed interested, although in some ways the project didn't fit their usual criteria: most of the schools were in good shape. Nevertheless, she thought the MSBA people had understood the situation. Issues that had come up in discussion with community members included transporting students to the single campus, how to handle preschool, and facilities.

Martha explained that the group believed that the projected system could create a more robust experience for the elementary students, bringing special programs (like Hawlemont's HAY) to students from all the towns and perhaps enabling the school system to offer a foreign-language program at that level. The group was also hoping to ask community members what they wanted the new school to offer with an expanded curriculum.

Sheryl brought up facility re-use, saying that Heath had learned from the closure of its school the importance of having a plan for school buildings. She said that she knew that ownership of Hawlemont School was complicated, since the old high-school wing belonged to Charlemont while the newer school building belonged to the school district, giving Hawley a share of ownership. Martha noted that the group was encouraging partner towns to get together to begin discussion about future building use.

The two provided some scheduling information, explaining that the MSBA was expected to announce around December 11 or 12 whether the district would be in its queue for the year. If not, the group would have to reapply. Even if waiting was necessary, the group would forge ahead with plans; it couldn't afford not to.

Will asked whether the proposed renovations at Mohawk Trail School would take place while children were in school. Apparently, they would.

Martha predicted that a number of things would have to happen in the next year or so. The district towns would be asked to pay their share of the cost of the feasibility study; much of this money would probably be reimbursed by the state.

At the same time, special town meetings would be needed to amend the regional agreements. A year later, the town would have to vote on its part of construction work.

Hussain expressed concern about what he saw as short sightedness at the MSBA, which had earlier seemed unwilling to support a project that would be large enough to allow for increases in enrollment. He spoke of the failure to anticipate declining enrollment in the 1990s and stressed that the reverse could also happen and that it was important to build sufficient capacity to absorb changes in, say, 40 years. Sheryl observed that although MSBA would have a lot of say, the group could plan for some expansion in class sizes – that is, build rooms based on current small class sizes and absorb additional students by increasing class size later if the need arose.

Will asked whether the group had any recommendations about hosting community discussions. He was told that there were some on the website for the sustainability study. Jake Eberwein, who attended via Zoom, said that there were various case studies about dealing with buildings. He said that Shelburne was considering using its school for housing. Cummington's was being retooled for entrepreneurial and artist space. He said that the website had a white paper that might help.

Hussain noted that Hawley probably owned less than 25 percent of Hawlemont. A couple of ideas earlier considered – using the building for public safety and for records storage – would not work as the school was in a floodplain. It was currently in use as an emergency dispensing site for vaccinations; Hussain thought that role should continue. He added that perhaps the school could be used to house much needed primary-care doctors. Perhaps a variety of public services could be shared there. Martha said that if pre-K flexibility was needed, parts of buildings might be useful for that.

Sheryl said that the group planned to meet with Charlemont on October 20. She suggested the towns confer and then go to the public. Hussain said Hawley's Selectmen would reach out to Charlemont after the 20th to plan a conversation.

Martha said her group also hoped to facilitate a meeting of the eight towns involved to discuss the regional agreement. Perhaps the towns would like to discuss changing the ways in which they were assessed for students. Hussain suggested that since many changes were already in the works, adding another one might just complicate the process. Sheryl and Martha saw the point of this but also gave information about the two different systems of assessment just in case the Selectmen wanted it. They were foundational enrollment (assessing the cost of educating each child in town) versus the current plan, counting the students in each school. In the current system, the district (as opposed to each town) paid for out-of-district placement.

Hussain said he didn't think a change was needed. Will asked how many students at Hawlemont had chosen to go to other schools. Sheryl said she would get that information.

Hussain said that he thought it made sense for Hawley to vote on school issues at Annual Town Meeting; people tended to get upset if "important" issues were dealt with at special meetings. Sheryl said that unfortunately the new plans would not be ready for a vote in May. She and Martha promised to share information as it came along. The board thanked them for their efforts.

2. **The group moved on to road and grant news.** Will said that he had looked at Ashfield Road with Lloyd and had been very pleased with the work there so far. He noted that a couple of small snags had been hit that would need further money but those were manageable since the project had still come in under budget. Lloyd recalled prior mistakes with one of the engineering firms and said he hoped FRCOG would help Hawley avoid those. Hussain said that the prior mistake was largely to do with an earlier contract specifying the wrong gravel; this was not the fault of anyone in the room, and had since been resolved. Gary confirmed that the road surface on the new section was correct.

Tinky shared an email report from Nate Gosselin at Western Earthworks that summarized the work done so far and predicted that the road could possibly be re-opened by the end of the following week.

Will produced a letter he had received from the State announcing that Hawley had been awarded \$362,000 under the "One Stop for Growth" program for preliminary technical planning and community engagement for the Dugway. Will and Lloyd said that Matt Chase of VHB had been very helpful in helping them come up with ideas and wording for the application. Hussain, Will, and Bob confirmed that they were comfortable going forward with VHB on the next phase of the project since the company was already involved and had done a good job so far. The services being rendered did not need to go out to bid. Tinky reminded the group that they had planned to use VHB if possible when submitting the grant application. Lloyd suggested that FRCOG could help the town execute a contract for VHB to sign. Will reiterated that community engagement would be crucial moving forward.

In other road news, Will suggested that a capital-projection plan was needed for roads in town. He also suggested that while the Dugway project was pending, that section of road could be repaved and given a center line. Hussain affirmed that the single line seemed to be what was needed. Will also said he had a list of various projects and that he hoped to line up extra materials for emergencies. Lloyd noted that Virginia was working on such lists. Lloyd added that Local Early Action Progress funds might be available to help.

Hussain observed that there was more grant news. He reminded the group that Hawley and Cummington had applied late the previous year for a FEMA Assistance to Firefighters Grant to purchase new airpicks. (This was the second time they had approached this issue; the application process the year before had run up against difficult deadlines.) Happily, they had received word that the two towns would be awarded \$260,000 to replace their aging airpicks. They had wanted \$312,000, but FEMA's estimates of airpick cost on average were lower than the prices the towns had been given. Nevertheless, Hussain said the \$260,000 was manageable, with a number of options to make this figure work, including working with the vendor to reduce cost and potentially buying fewer packs. Hussain said he was going to a meeting about the airpicks the following day, and they could be delivered very quickly. He noted that the funds and airpicks would be split equally between the two towns; Cummington had about the same number of firefighters as Hawley. He thanked Virginia, Greg Cox, Dean Desmarais, Brandon Root, and Cummington Fire Chief Adam Dragon.

3. **The group talked about delays in the status of the town's projected broadband roll out.** Tinky reported that she had heard from Nancy Clark at Charter Communications that the problem seemed to be the pole owners, Verizon and National Grid. She didn't have a contact at Verizon but was scheduled to talk to Brandie Long of National Grid the following morning. She asked whether a selectman could sit in on the call; Hussain offered to do so. Will expressed dismay at how long National Grid was taking to do repair work in Charlemont. The group asked Tinky to draft a letter to Michael Baldino of the Massachusetts Broadband Institute about the matter and cc the town's legislators. Will said as far as he could see all that had been done was some pole measurement. He bemoaned the need to have different contractors for every single step in the process.

In other business, Lloyd noted that the comment period was going to expire soon for small clean-energy-project regulations. He said that the issue was complicated. At the board's invitation, he promised to draft a letter asking for an extension of the comment period.

Tinky brought up the Continuity of Operations Plan, which the group had talked about reviewing at its next meeting. Hussain suggested that this discussion be postponed until the most recent plan was identified and reviewed. He noted that Nate at MEMA would work with him on this and promised to keep the group posted.

Tinky asked whether the Selectboard needed to decide about markers needed for veterans' flags. The group said Chris Tirone could manage this issue.

Tinky reminded that group that she was scheduled to meet the following day with John Rittall of Waterwright to talk about solutions for the water problems in the three town buildings. She asked whether anyone else was able to come to the meeting; Will said it was on his calendar.

Tinky reported that two Arts Council members, she and Peter Beck, planned to apply for grants. They would of course recuse themselves but needed to report the matter to the Selectmen. The Board acknowledged being informed.

Virginia brought forward a few bills that needed paying.

There being no other business, the meeting was adjourned at 8:36 p.m.

Respectfully submitted, Tinky Weisblat, Gal Friday

Williams Cosby

Hussain Hamdan

Robert MacLean