

**Town of Hawley, Massachusetts**  
**Minutes of a**  
**Selectboard / Board of Health / Zoning Board of Appeals Meeting**  
**in Person & via Zoom**  
**November 4, 2025**

Present: Will Cosby, Hussain Hamdan, and Robert MacLean – Selectboard  
John Sears, Suzy Groden, and Hussain Hamdan – Historical Commission  
Tinky Weisblat, Gal Friday; Virginia Gabert, Treasurer and Financial Administrator  
Chris Tirone – Highway Crew; and Lloyd Crawford

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

1. **John Sears began the discussion on behalf of the Historical Commission.** He reminded the group that a large limb was hanging from a tree at Bozrah Cemetery. He said the commission had received two bids for removing it. Jonathan Winfisky had said he would charge \$3200 to \$3800. Woody Lanoue had said he believed that the whole tree needed to go; he would ask \$5800 for cutting it down. Hussain said he had spoken to road boss Gary Mitchell about taking the tree down; Gary had indicated that he couldn't do it. Hussain added that there were certainly other trees in town-owned cemeteries that might be dangerous.

John said he believed the commission should be proactive. He added that he would like to see the road crew handle any trees it could, adding that it was hard to control the path of the trees that were being felled. He noted that it would be hard to evaluate the health of most of the trees in the fall when they had no leaves, suggesting that that task might be better tackled in the spring or summer. He mentioned that special equipment would be needed for the Bozrah tree; that extra cost made the estimates particularly high as the tree vendors would need to rent the equipment.

Will asked how urgent the limb removal seemed to be; apparently, it was reasonably urgent. Hussain asked Virginia what the cemetery trust fund balance came to at present; that figure was \$10,097.

Will asked John to get a bid for removing the entire tree from Winfisky so the two estimates could be compared. He also expressed dismay at the possibility of head-stone damage. Hussain expressed concern that the current job could eat away more than half of the trust fund. Will stated that he thought it would be important to make a list of all the tasks that needed doing in the cemeteries. He also mentioned Mark Mizula's complaints about potential damage to Mark's shed, which had been built right next to the property line of one of the cemeteries. Will expressed concern that the cost of tree removal could get as high as \$100,000 ... and then there was the issue of the headstones. He asked for a count of trees and headstones that looked as though they needed repair.

John suggested that for FY27 funds could be added to the trust fund from, say, stabilization. He also noted that the Sons & Daughters of Hawley had set up a fund that would allow people to contribute to the cost of work in the cemeteries. He noted that multiple sources of money would probably be needed.

Hussain said he would ask the road crew to work on the trees its members could remove safely. Will asked whether perhaps a tree hearing might be needed, like the one for Ashfield Road months earlier. Lloyd noted that Ashfield Road had been a special case as that road was designated a scenic byway.

Will asked what could be done in the near future. Will suggested that a plan to plant new trees near the cemeteries was needed. Hussain suggested smaller trees, like apples, instead of the old maples that were giving the town trouble at present. John said he would get the desired new quotation from Jonathan Winfisky. Hussain asked about a plan to put money back in the trust fund. Virginia noted that it took a while to build that fund up. Hussain said he wasn't averse to spending money on cemetery work, but he was dismayed that one tree could eat up so much of the current fund. Virginia suggested applying for grants, and John recalled getting a grant in years past to train members of the commission to take care of headstones.

Will expressed concern that the town could be getting in over its head taking care of the fragile headstones. Hussain countered that doing nothing would lead to cemeteries looking like bomb sites. Will said that he understood the need to work on trees but didn't want to get involved with headstones. He was concerned about increasing numbers of unfunded mandates.

The group talked for a while about whether it was necessary to take care of everything in the cemeteries. John pointed out that they represented the history of people who had lived and died in Hawley.

Hussain reminded John that the vendors for tree work didn't have to remove the wood; the road crew could take care of that.

The group agreed that it was important to make an inventory of the cemetery work needed. Meanwhile, Hussain moved to allow the chair of the Historical Commission to make a contract with the lowest bidder for the Bozrah tree removal. Bob seconded the motion, and all voted in favor.

John said the inventory of stones could start in the fall, but that of trees should wait until spring. Hussain said that lots of factors affected tree health; a tree that appeared to be living and have leaves could still be rotted inside since the living part was the bark. At 7:34, the Historical Commission part of the meeting ended.

2. **Hussain brought up recent legislation that would affect the sale of town property.** He added that the tax taking discussed at the previous meeting might not be possible in light of this legislation, which (among other things) limited the time the town could wait to sell property it had taken, had no apparent provision for grandfathering old properties, mandated selling property for at least two thirds of its appraised value (and required hiring an appraiser). The law didn't explicitly grandfather previously taken parcels, but Hussain said this was something worth checking about with DOR. The impossibility of retroactively applying the law's time limits to previously taken parcels and guidance barring former owners from making claims for excess equity on land taken prior to 2021 created an unspoken implication that those properties were grandfathered, he believed; however, the legislation did not state this. It also did not appear to exempt those properties from the new sale restrictions and requirements, including one that persons affiliated with the town could bid on land. He found this difficult to manage in a town in which so much of the population was affiliated in some way or other with town government, even in volunteer capacities.

Hussain said he had reached out to the town's state legislators. Paul Mark had suggested that Hawley was a good candidate for home-rule legislation on this issue (that is, creating a special legal exemption for the town through the legislature) and that he would be happy to help if the town wished to pursue legislation. Hussain explained that the town would have to vote on this idea at a town meeting; then it could be submitted to the legislature. He said he would be happy to draft something for town meeting. Will asked Hussain to draft something for the Selectboard's review. The group agreed that having town counsel look this draft over wouldn't hurt. Hussain promised a draft by the next meeting.

- 3 **In road and grant news**, Will noted that a big meeting was coming up in two days for STRAP grant recipients. The group also discussed applying for the paving program from the state Department of Transportation. Lloyd said he was going to talk to the MVP people about the King Corner culvert replacement. He also reminded the group that tree planting behind the town garage was coming up.

Will said that the town was waiting for the STRAP contracts about the Dugway design project, adding that he hoped to ask Matt Chase to come to a meeting soon. Lloyd reminded the group that FRCOG could be very helpful in helping the town decide the specifics of what was needed.

Will noted that a meeting about rural-school funding was coming up in a few days. He cited the chart Tinky had sent out about rural aid. Hussain credited former school superintendent Michael Buoniconti with helping rural-school aid go through the legislature. Will expressed concern that the aid figures from the legislature were insufficient. Hussain said they were generous as there had previously been no aid of this kind and observed that people in Boston perceived rural western Massachusetts as resistant to cost cutting measures such as consolidation and larger class sizes, even though these were common in urban areas. He was not endorsing those views, but he thought people should be aware they existed and that he had heard them expressed by education officials in the past.

The group sighed that there were way too many upcoming meetings.

There being no other business, the meeting was adjourned at 8:02 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