

Town of Hawley, Massachusetts
Minutes of a
Selectboard / Board of Health / Zoning Board of Appeals Meeting
in Person & via Zoom
December 30, 2025

Present: Will Cosby, Hussain Hamdan, and Robert MacLean – Selectboard
Tinky Weisblat, Gal Friday; Virginia Gabert, Treasurer and Financial Administrator
Gary Mitchell, Chris Tirone, Lloyd Crawford, Kimberly Orzechowski,
and via Zoom 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 discussed a request from the residents at 108 West Hawley Road to put speed-limit signs near their home.** Hussain explained that the request had been prompted by a recent single-car accident in front of the house, which had necessitated closing the road and had served to remind them of all the speeding on the road. Gary had shared a 1979 memo setting speed limits throughout Hawley, putting the limit in this vicinity at 30. The memo indicated that the speeds were approved by the State. Hussain believed this allowed Hawley to put up signs without further approval. Will and Bob were inclined to agree. Hussain observed that new signage might not deter speeding, but it would give state troopers a case to make when they stopped speeders.

Will asked about putting a sign and perhaps barriers near the unmaintained section of Savoy Road, where a Dish TV van had recently become stuck in the snow. Kimberly said she thought barriers were a bad idea as they could cause problems for others on the road. She also noted that there was little police presence in Hawley, saying that she had seen a lot of speeding in East Hawley on Buckland Road. Hussain agreed that enforcement had long been an issue.

The group discussed the locations of speed signs at present, and Hussain told the group that he found the Savoy Road issue annoying; the road was clearly not in sufficient shape for motor-vehicle traffic, yet maps and GPS often showed it as a shortcut to Savoy. Will asked Gary how much signs would cost; he said about \$50 each. The board members found this a reasonable price to pay, although Bob noted that someone who was willing to drive over a snowbank (like the driver of the Dish TV van) might not be dissuaded by signage.

2. **The next question was the state's proposed designation of Hawley as a seasonal community;** according to the letter from the state, townspeople would have to vote to accept or reject the designation at a town meeting. Will suggested that the special town meeting tentatively planned for the winter or spring might be a good time to take this vote. He proposed setting a date for that meeting relatively soon; the meeting had to coordinate with the spring election so that the town could vote both by voice and by ballot to make the position of Town Clerk appointed rather than elected.

Hussain checked the relevant law, which stipulated that the special town meeting had to take place at least 60 days before the election, which was scheduled for Monday, May 4.

Will suggested scheduling the meeting for either Monday, February 23, or the following Monday, March 2. He asked Kimberly in her position as chair of the Planning Board to prepare some points to make to residents about the seasonal-community question. She agreed that some of the language might need explaining and said she would work with Tinky to put something on the topic in the e-news.

Hussain opined that the Town could accept or reject the designation; the consequences were probably immaterial unless the town also followed up by implementing some of the measures the designation made available. Several in the discussion opined that the designation appeared more tailored to the housing situation on the Cape and in some parts of the Berkshires than in Hawley. The state had suggested that full-time residents might be asked to pay lower taxes than part-time ones. Virginia and Hussain both observed that in a sense they already did pay lower taxes as part-time residents paid personal-property tax on items that were exempted for full-time people. The board agreed, noting that part-time residents didn't cost the town a lot; they generally didn't have children in the schools, for example. Hussain specifically said that these residents tended to cost the town less, often were not in town in the winter, and, were essentially willingly being taxed without representation.

There was a brief discussion of Accessory Dwelling Units; their status under the new zoning laws did not exempt them from compliance with the septic and health codes.

Tinky was asked to talk to the Town Clerk and Moderator about the possible meeting dates.

3. **The group discussed the recently released floodplain maps.** Lloyd, who had studied the maps, did most of the talking. Will said he liked the maps from FRCOG, which showed the differences between FEMA's old maps and the new ones. Lloyd said he was still trying to decipher the maps completely but thought that only a few Hawley homes were affected. One belonged to Charles Cutler, whose bank insisted on his maintaining flood insurance for his mortgage because his home had been in a floodplain on the old maps; it looked as though Charlie would be able to save himself those insurance payments with the new maps. On the other hand, a couple of other homes **not in the old** floodplains might now be required to get the insurance because they might be in floodplains according to the new maps. These were the home of Jackie Miller on West Hawley Road (now mostly used by her son, Huw Roberts) and the home of the late Jim Manilla on East Road, now occupied by Alan Spooner and Christine Kimball. Hussain said he believed that anyone who might be affected should be alerted to the possible changes. Lloyd said he would check the maps again. If these homes were indeed counted as being in a floodplain, he would give Tinky screen shots to send to the homeowners so they could be warned. Lloyd and Hussain noted that the maps were still in the "comment" stage at FEMA so people could weigh in. If anything were to change, the town would have to adopt a new bylaw; the old floodplain bylaw was tied to the old maps.

It was observed that adopting a bylaw would help affected residents; without one, they could not avail themselves of the National Flood Insurance Program and would have to resort to more expensive private insurers.

4. **In road and grant news,** Will reported that he had not yet received the signed Dugway contract from the state. Hussain said that he had looked at the proposed contract from VHB, the engineers, and had some quibbles. He objected to the provision on page 1 that gave VHB sole copyright on the product it produced for Hawley; he said that Hawley should own the work if it paid it. He was less worried about the provision on page 2 that capped the risk for VHB at \$50,000. He noted that this might not be awful since no risky on-site labor was involved, but he thought he should mention it. He was more concerned about the provision on pages 2 and 3 that required Hawley to pay for potential legal fees of the contractor. He also objected to the clause on page 3 that required the town to pay any taxes or fees VHB incurred. He offered to write this information down and send it to Will so Will could share it with VHB. Lloyd said he and Will had met recently with representatives from VHB to discuss their work.

Moving ahead on the agenda, **Will asked Gary whether he had heard anything about the state's plans for Middle Road in the State Forest.** Will explained that he had heard from Steve Howland of Buckland, whose snowmobile group was interested in figuring out the best routes in the forest in winter. The DCR had apparently told the group, the Buckland Riders, that it was planning to put up barriers on Middle Road above the Poverty Square Trail because of erosion. The Poverty Square route would then become a bypass. The group discussed possible ways around the barriers. Overall, Hussain said that he strongly disapproved of immovable concrete barriers, which might make it difficult for emergency-services personnel to get in to help people in the forest. He said he would prefer a gate or tape. He added that he would prefer that the DCR consulted the town, its partner in maintaining the forest, before taking any action. He remarked that there had been confusion over the intersecting responsibilities in the memorandum of understanding between the town and the DCR over the roads. Will suggested that Luke Labendz of the DCR be asked to attend the next Selectboard meeting, at least via Zoom, to respond to the town's concerns. He promised to give Tinky Luke's contact information so she could invite him.

5. **The next topic was the town's possible participation in FRCOG's highway program for FY 2027.** Gary noted that he had been having trouble getting sand from the program's current supplier, Northeast Paving. No one at the company or at FRCOG had been answering his calls. The sand had also been of a lower quality than the Town had come to expect. Hussain said that if Gary had to go to another supplier for sand, he should. He added that the decision about the highway program should be up to Gary. Gary said that, despite the sanding issues, in general it seemed easiest and most financially sensible to renew the FRCOG procurement program for items other than sand. He noted that he could choose which supplies to get from the program; perhaps the town should get its sand elsewhere. Hussain asked how much the town spent on highway sand per year. Virginia said that in the previous year it had spent \$40,000.

Following a discussion in which Bob and Hussain expressed the view that it would be advantageous for the town to solicit its own bids for sand for the next year, the Board arrived at this consensus while also agreeing to remain with FRCOG for other items. Hussain moved to authorize the chair to sign the highway-program agreement (with no sand!). Bob seconded the motion, and all voted in favor. Hussain reminded Gary that if funds were leftover in the sand budget at the end of the snow season, he could fill the salt shed so the town would be ahead of the game for the following year.

Will said he had emailed FRCOG about the current year's sand problems but reiterated that if no one responded Gary should find another vendor for sand. Board members agreed that the absence of adequate sand in winter weather constituted an emergency.

In other news, **Lloyd said that he had heard nothing about the proposed culvert work at King Corner.** He noted that a new grant deadline was approaching and that he hoped to get an application in to this new program. He was trying hard to get cooperation from GZA, the engineering firm, and the state DOT. He added that GZA was supposed to have finished its work a long time earlier. He said he would report back on the King Corner issue.

Virginia asked Will whether he had the final documents for the Ashfield Road work. All seemed in readiness so she only needed his signature, which he supplied.

There being no other business, the meeting was adjourned at 8:33 p.m.

Respectfully submitted, Tinky Weisblat, Gal Friday

Williams Cosby

Hussain Hamdan

Robert MacLean