

Town of Hawley, Massachusetts
Minutes of a
Selectboard / Board of Health / Zoning Board of Appeals Meeting
in Person & via Zoom
January 13, 2026

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,
and via Zoom MacKenzie Greer, Luke Labenz, and Mark Jester from the DCR

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

- 1. Will called on the representatives of the DCR to open discussion about the roads in the Hawley State Forest.** They introduced themselves: Mark Jester was the district manager, Luke Labenz was the field-operation-team leader for the Mohawk District, and Mackenzie Greer was the legislative and municipal liaison. They were there, Mackenzie explained, to answer questions about the temporary closure of Middle Road in the forest and any other queries that might come up. (She added that she might have to answer some of the latter later after doing some research.)

Hussain thanked Mackenzie for her email response, explaining to the group that she had sent him photographs of the barriers used in the forest and that they had been acceptable to emergency services in Hawley; the barriers indicated that the road was closed but left a way for emergency workers to get in.

He noted that he had another issue he would like to mention. The memorandum of understanding between the DCR and the town had been signed in 2017; it would expire in 2027. He said that the matter didn't have to be hashed out that evening but should be addressed fairly soon. Will said that he would appreciate a timeline of design and repair for Middle Road and wondered when the DCR would need to contact the Conservation Commission about wetlands issues. Mackenzie replied that after the beaver-dam breach in the summer the department had begun evaluating what was needed. Design work was underway. Once it was a little further along and the department had an idea what might be needed, they could work on a capital-improvement plan. Will asked who the design consultant was; Mackenzie said she didn't yet know but should soon. Will emphasized the importance of getting that information; Middle Road received a lot of visitors.

Hussain brought up another issue. He explained that several gates existed inside the forest, not just at the forest entrances. He expressed particular concern about those near Moody Spring Road and the Gould Meadow shelter, which had been locked recently. He observed that these gates might be meant to discourage long-term camping, but they had unintended consequences. People who were elderly or had poor mobility could have difficulty accessing these sites without vehicles.

Mackenzie said that Hussain's point was noted and asked her colleagues about the gates. Luke explained that those gates had been installed before the DCR had had staff on site; they were meant to deter long-term camping and litter. The group agreed to wait and see what happened and thanked the DCR representatives for their responsiveness.

2. **The next point of discussion was the District Local Technical Assistance questionnaire from FRCOG.** Tinky explained that the Planning Board wanted to discuss this issue at its meeting the following week; she therefore suggested that the Selectmen discuss it but not finish filling it out right away. Lloyd said that he believed that continued help with grant applications would be important. Hussain observed with pleasure that the idea of forming a West County EMS consortium was in the questionnaire; he suggested it be highlighted. Will noted that the emergency services section of the questionnaire also mentioned needing a succession plan for the Fire Chief and asked whether Hawley might need help in this regard. Hussain said he had not heard that Greg Cox had any immediate plans to retire, but he noted that several qualified people were in place should Greg bow out. Will pointed out that the section on cemeteries mentioned mapping (which had already been done in Hawley) but not maintenance, which was the real issue in Hawley. Tinky was asked to ask FRCOG whether that could be included somehow. Tinky said that John Sears had asked about the possibility of getting help with a digital-equity grant to get Hawleyites up to speed with technology when Hawley's broadband finally arrived. Will said that he had investigated this question and that it appeared that the grants were mostly geared toward larger communities with libraries and more staff. He suggested that Tinky ask Michael Baldino at MBI whether he had any ideas for towns like Hawley in this regard. He noted that she should probably also ask how the make-ready plans for the broadband were proceeding.

Virginia explained that she would need new accounting software soon, a process complicated by the fact that most software was designed for use on the cloud, which didn't necessarily work in Hawley. Hussain affirmed that Hawley would want storage that was offline and local although Will argued a cloud based option might end up being inevitable or at least more cost effective. He suggested that Virginia ask Bob Dean at FRCOG whether he had any ideas about this. Hussain also observed that the town and FRCOG had previously discussed the idea of a regional software project, although it hadn't gone anywhere.

3. **The group briefly talked about floodplain information.** Lloyd said he had recently attended a workshop on establishing new floodplain bylaws; the process sounded fairly simple. He noted that although help with the bylaws was an option in the FRCOG list, the town could probably manage without help. The problem of figuring out which houses might be on the new floodplain maps was still hard to solve, however, and townspeople needed that information. Hussain said he thought it might make sense to put something in the e-news warning people who lived near a body of water that they might be affected by changes. He suggested that Tinky get in touch with the owners of a certain property very close to the Chickley River to alert them that FEMA might put their property in a floodplain.

There was some discussion about enabling people to make public comments to FEMA (although the group learned later that the comment period had expired). The board suggested that Tinky get in touch with Ryan Clary at FRCOG to ask whether he might be able to help identify houses, specifically on Savoy Road, Middle Road, East Road, West Hawley Road, and perhaps Buckland Road.

4. **In road and grant news**, Will said that the town had applied to the Department of Transportation community culvert program. Lloyd and Will had met with Francisca Heming at the DOT. Francisca had said that the department would put in a word for Hawley in terms of the King Corner grant so something there might be possible. Although the current grants were only available up to \$1 million, that money might be useful in raising the remaining amount needed. Will noted that since the King Corner project had been in the works for some time, the DOT was willing to waive reviewing the design again and would allow the design to conform to their its current (though now superseded) handbook.

Will said that he had returned to the engineering firm VHB with possible amendments to the contract for design services for the Dugway. He hoped to get the contract back soon, he said. Lloyd explained that the town would have to hold a meeting for stakeholders with VHB. Will suggested that this could take place in late February or early March.

Gary explained that he had received an email from the State Department of Transportation informing him that the bridge at East Road and Bozrah Road had been approved for possible replacement by the state, along with bridges in other towns. The group noted that if this project ended up being implemented, the trick would be making sure that residents could get to their homes, particularly in winter. Will asked Gary to forward the email to the board so everyone would have it.

5. **The group set a date for the upcoming Special Town Meeting**, deciding that it would take place on Monday, February 23, at 7 p.m. with a snow date of Monday, March 2. Will said that to keep things simple it might make sense to put only the change in the Town Clerk's position from elected to appointed on the warrant. Virginia noted that the town would have to pass a bylaw that allowed her to make payment agreements for tax-title properties. She asked whether that should be done at the special meeting or at the Annual Town Meeting. The group decided that passing it as soon as possible (at the special meeting) made sense. Hussain agreed to devise language for the payment plan bylaw using another town as a template; the town clerk article could be taken right out of the state law that authorized the change.

In other business Tinky brought up an email she had received from the Department of Transportation asking towns to apply for speed-feedback signs. The state would provide the signs (if the application were approved), but the town would need to install and maintain them. Gary suggested that the mobile units might be easiest to deal with; they wouldn't require electric hookups. The group decided that it made sense to ask for two units, one to go on the north end of the Dugway and one near 108 West Hawley Road.

Tinky said she would need to ask Francisca Heming at the DOT for permission to install the signs, which were technically going on a state route. Will noted that she should be sure to get confirmation by email.

The group signed a letter to State Representative Natalie Blais thanking her for her service; she was leaving the legislature to take a job at UMass.

Tinky noted that Martha Thurber was looking for a member of the Selectboard or the Finance Committee to come to a meeting about the school district's plan to consolidate on February 4 or 5. Lloyd said he could probably make either date to represent the Finance Committee.

Hussain brought up the question of ambulance payments. He explained that he and Fire Chief Greg Cox didn't see eye to eye on how to pay ambulance services: Greg thought the town should pay \$300 per call to any service that came to Hawley, believing this would keep ambulance services willing to come to Hawley. Hussain maintained that the town should pay only Colrain Ambulance, which currently served as Hawley's primary service. Everyone else was doing mutual aid on an occasional basis. He observed that in communities that had a primary ambulance agreement, mutual aid was typically not paid per call. He noted that the fact that there was no formal contract with Colrain muddied the waters a bit, but he argued that Colrain was nevertheless Hawley's primary provider. He noted that if and when Hawley did sign a contract with a primary service, towns that had previously been paid per call might be upset. Will noted that regionalization of the area would take time. Hussain noted that the fastest approach would be for the towns to contract with an existing service that was already licensed, such as Colrain. Will asked about Charlemont and Rowe, but Hussain explained that Charlemont was setting up a fire district and keeping the ambulance service separate. Bob ultimately agreed with Hussain's position on payments. Will said he saw both sides of the argument. Hussain moved that Hawley pay Colrain for calls made in the most recent quarter (ending in December 2025). Bob seconded the motion, and all voted in favor. Will asked how Greg would react to this. Hussain said he was not particularly worried.

There being no other business, the meeting was adjourned at 8:14 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,
Tinky Weisblat, Gal Friday

Hussain Hamdan

Robert MacLean