

Town of Hawley, Massachusetts
Minutes of a
Selectboard / Board of Health / Zoning Board of Appeals Meeting
(in part with the Personnel Committee)
in Person & via Zoom
March 10, 2026

Present: Will Cosby, Hussain Hamdan – Selectboard
Tinky Weisblat, Gal Friday (via Zoom); Virginia Gabert, Treasurer and Financial Administrator
Gary Mitchell, Chris Tirone, John Sears, Robert Sears, and via Zoom
Heidi Mahoney, David Allen, Madison Schofield, Lloyd Crawford, and Melanie Glynn

The meeting was called to order at 7:01 p.m. The board signed warrants and approved minutes from previous meetings. Then:

1. **While waiting for David Allen from Gonetspeed Will moved ahead to road and grant news.** He said things were moving slowly on the grant application for King Corner; he was waiting to get some information from the engineering firm. Meanwhile, he noted, he had met with representatives from FRCOG about the possibility of doing some culvert work on Labelle Road.
2. **The board spoke with David Allen and Heidi Mahoney of Gonetspeed.** David explained that the company was exploring alternatives to the wireless system put in by WiValley, which GNS had inherited. GNS was working with a Massachusetts based firm (Granite Telecomm, based in Quincy) that was able to wholesale different services. GNS was trying to select the best available options for the addresses the company served in Hawley. The process wasn't particularly profitable for GNS; in many cases, it was losing money. The company was slowly migrating the service addresses in order to fulfill its obligations to the FCC.

Hussain had questions for GNS, which appear below.

ViWalley had promised 96 percent coverage of our towns. It didn't get there. An example of an unserved area was Dodge Corner in East Hawley (e.g., 32 Dodge Corner Road). Would those residents be able to get service using the different systems now being installed? David could not provide an answer at the time.

WiValley had a 10-year commitment to us, through 2029. Would Gonetspeed keep the rates level through then? David said he couldn't commit on behalf of Gonetspeed at the time.

It was not clear what the methodology was for assessing which systems to install. For example, at Hussain's home, Verizon cell service was being offered. He had experience in these matters and knew that Verizon wouldn't be up to the job. Gonetspeed had apparently been conducting driving tests. Hussain cautioned Gonetspeed that any radio-technology analysis performed in March might not work once there were leaves on the trees.

According to Michael Baldino of the Massachusetts Broadband Institute, no one was being forced to change systems, but several people had said that they were not told their system would be changing. A service call was scheduled, and the new system was installed. (Hussain had examples of places at which this happened; he identified three) David said that the changeover was optional; Hussain asked that the company communicate that more effectively.

When WiValley was initially hired, it had indicated that, in addition to offering Internet connectivity, it could also create an internal wireless network using the same hardware and specifically linking municipal buildings for emergency management purposes (e.g., Fire Station, Highway Garage, Town Office). This system was supposed to be able to carry voice and data between these facilities without being dependent on an external internet connection or any infrastructure outside of town. In other words, it would still function independently if all backhauls were shut off. Hussain said he believed some initial work had been done toward this, but the project was never completed. Gonetspeed did not have information on this for the meeting.

Additionally, Melanie Glynn of Savoy wanted to know whether people in towns other than Hawley had been transitioned to the new systems yet.

Will Cosby asked about the estimated timeline for changing over all of Hawley's systems.

In general, David said he would have to do research and get back to the board with answers to these questions, although he did tell Melanie that the goal was to move all four towns to new systems. Hussain suggested he answer the questions in an email. David said he was hoping for a collaborative relationship with the town. He reiterated that GNS wasn't making money on this project. He pointed out that in many cases townspeople would be better off going directly to Starlink or Spectrum rather than seeking an upgrade from his company. The board thanked him and Heidi for attending.

3. **Will brought the discussion back to Labelle Road.** He explained that the plan might be to pay for an engineering plan with Chapter 90 funds and then apply for a grant for the actual work.
4. **The Personnel Committee and the Selectmen returned to the previous meeting's discussion of the most recent draft of the Personnel Policy Manual.** John Sears, chair of the committee, explained that the group had been comparing the new draft with the 2022 version. They discussed several minor points; then Hussain asked Virginia about her questions. She was concerned about vacation-pay allocation and asked whether a special fund should be set aside for vacations as it was for sick pay. Hussain expressed his own questions about whether people were taking time off during the summer. Ordinarily, vacation time wasn't an issue because the Town budgeted for 52 weeks and didn't pay someone else while an employee was on vacation. However, he also noted that someone planning to retire might bank up time, in which case there would be another employee and this could result in going over budget. Virginia said that if people took time off at a time of year when a full crew was needed, more help might need to be hired. The group discussed the question of accrual of time off. Will said that vacation carry over was limited, and Virginia noted that sick time was limited to 400 hours. Virginia said that the town currently had \$4300 in funding for sick time and thought the same amount would be available the following year. If everyone got sick at once, that might not be enough. Hussain pointed out that that scenario was extreme and suggested that a special town meeting could be held if needed. Returning to the question of carrying over vacation time, Virginia stated that it could be done but only if the Selectmen agreed. Robert shared his experience from past employment that some people tended to hold off on their vacation time and get paid instead for it at the end of the year. Virginia noted that the Finance Committee was due to meet again in a couple of weeks and might have some input. Hussain suggested that that committee might have good feedback about the question of carrying hours over.

Hussain said that he thought John was doing a great job. Robert observed that everyone was busy and asked whether perhaps the Finance Committee could meet with the Personnel Committee. Hussain suggested that if the Personnel Policy came up on the agenda for the next Selectmen's meeting, Lloyd Crawford and Ken Bertsch from finance could be invited to come as well.

Lloyd suggested that it would be helpful for the Personnel Committee to make note of the financial implications of changes. He also asked whether the town could make employees, the road crew in particular, more efficient by, say, scheduling time off when the workload was relatively light. (For instance, if a snowstorm were expected at nighttime, the employees could come in then). He reminded the group that anything that could be done to save money would help.

Virginia asked what pre-employment costs (such as the required physical) were covered in the budget. Hussain said that, generally, if a person had a CDL, s/he already had a DOT physical; however, in some limited situations the Town might want to give an employee a physical. Virginia asked whether a new budget line needed to be added for expenses. Lloyd argued that it might be better to pad the existing budget a bit instead of adding more line items. There was a bit more discussion about hiring costs and the idea of splitting some costs with workers. Hussain said that the Fire Department paid for EMT training but that different Departments were not handling things the same way. When the draft before the Board had been developed, it was decided to pay for special licenses like the CDL by paying the employee the difference between a normal driver's license and a CDL (about \$15).

The group discussed but didn't come to any consensus on the issue of personal and bereavement leave. Those present also talked about how to pro-rate leave and vacation for new employees based on the fiscal year.

Virginia asked about the definition of overtime, traditionally work over 40 hours in a week. The new version of the policy appeared to make some changes in this area, not allowing comp time in exchange for overtime, for example. Hussain indicated that this seemed to be a legal requirement already. The group also talked about what constituted overtime for the road-crew employee who only worked 32 hours a week. At the moment, according to Virginia, this person got overtime when he worked more than 32 hours in a week.

Hussain asked how the discussion of overtime applied to office staff. Tinky noted that the situation with office staff was different; those employees scheduled their own time while the road crew was scheduled by the road boss. Virginia stated that no one in the office ever worked 40 hours in a week; she worked 24 hours a week, more or less, and everyone else worked less. Hussain cautioned that it didn't make sense to have multiple standards.

Robert observed that the Town Clerk often worked extremely variable hours. Hussain said that if that position was formally moved from elected to appointed, the town might have to change how it was paid. Virginia pointed out that the Town Clerk was currently paid an hourly rate at election time.

John wondered aloud how other employers handled overtime pay for part-time workers. Robert said that Hawley's personnel policy dealt with the highway department more than other employees. Hussain observed that this was the first time the Board had been confronted with the question of paying overtime under 40 hours. He thought that uniform standards were important but also thought changing the compensation of an employee who had traditionally been given OT at 33 hours might not be fair. He thought this issue needed to be carefully examined and revisited.

Lloyd noted that the 3/4-time person on the highway department received health benefits equivalent to those of full-time employees. Given that, he thought that person should be paid for overtime only after 40 hours.

Will asked whether Mike Schofield received overtime for his plowing work but was told that as a contractor Mike didn't get overtime.

Virginia noted that years earlier after a big storm the road crew had often received time off. Hussain suggested the existing policy allowed the highway department to set its schedule as needed. He also suggested that Hawley ask surrounding towns how they handled part-time personnel, particularly whether they paid overtime to part-time folks when they went over their regular hours.

Lloyd asked whether health insurance was prorated according to the number of hours people worked. Hussain mused that there was no universal definition of full time vs. part time. Virginia wondered about people who didn't work all year long.

John and Hussain agreed that perhaps it was worth looking into the definition of a full day. The policy use of words like days, weeks, and hours left some ambiguity. Virginia pointed to some definitions within the draft.

Lloyd suggested that the budget be considered when scheduling the highway department. Perhaps the crew could work fewer hours in spring.

Will observed that in the past townspeople had been comfortable being snowed in. In the present day, they expected to have their roads cleared, and the road crew plowed and sanded in response to pressure.

Speaking of plowing and sanding, Virginia informed the group that the town budget for snow roads was more than \$31,000 over budget, not including recent sand deliveries. These could bring it to \$40,000. She said she knew nothing could be done about the problem but wanted to bring it to the board's attention. Hussain asked Virginia to keep the board up to date by email.

Virginia returned to the question of new-employment costs for the highway department. Hussain suggested perhaps including \$500 for these costs in the budget. Lloyd noted that the amount would depend upon what the budget was expected to cover. Funds could be rolled over. Gary said the amount sounded reasonable as long as there were not a lot of new costs in any one year. Chris Tirone explained that he got reimbursed for some but not all of his expenses.

The Personnel Committee departed at 8:49, leaving just the Selectboard for the rest of the meeting.

5. **The next item under discussion was creating new "town of Hawley" emails**, particularly for the Selectmen. Hussain reported that in Charlemont Selectboard emails went to all three Selectmen. He suggested that Hawley have two three-member emails, one for the Selectmen and one for the Board of Health. Virginia noted that in Bernardston emails were assigned by names. Tinky was asked to implement Hussain's idea.
6. **The group skipped over Congressional earmarks** since not a lot of information was available about those yet.
7. **Tinky asked about website changes Will had observed.** He said that the bylaws were incomplete and that he found the organization of important documents confusing. Tinky said she would work on that organization. The bylaws were more complicated; the town didn't have a list of all of them. Virginia recalled that this had been an ongoing issue and that a committee had tried in the past to look into it. Will and Hussain noted that bylaws should be findable in old town reports.

Meanwhile, Hussain opined that the most important bylaws were available on the website. He asked whether there was anything desperately needed that could not be found. Lloyd recalled one bylaw about talking too long at Town Meetings.

8. In reaction to a letter saying what FRCOG was able to help the town accomplish in the next year, **Lloyd suggested that perhaps the organization could help the town obtain some grant funding.**
9. **Hussain said he would draft the Selectmen's contribution to the 2025 town report.**

In other business, Will said that the session the previous evening with State Senator Paul Mark had been positive. He recalled that improvements to the Fire Station had been discussed and that the senator had asked for more information, particularly regarding what the town would like from the Department of Conservation and Recreation and what additions were needed. Hussain said he had spoken with a septic engineering company; its representative had said it might be possible to install a septic system on the existing lot. A quotation for the new system would be needed; Hussain estimated its cost between \$25,000 and \$50,000. Hussain moved that the Board approve writing a letter to Paul Mark outlining the Town's requests. Bob seconded the motion, and all voted in favor.

The board read and signed letters of support for a culvert-review process and for the town of Buckland's MVP application. All agreed that both made sense.

Speaking of MVP, Lloyd said that the deadline for the next MVP grant applications was fast approaching. He asked the board to authorize Will to sign the application for King Corner. Hussain moved the authorization, Bob seconded the motion, and all voted in favor.

Tinky announced that the Franklin Land Trust was planning its annual bike ride for August 22.

Gary said that he was getting ready to finish his list of surplus equipment to sell. Hussain reminded him to set reserves on the items and that the Board had to approve the list.

There being no other business, the meeting was adjourned at 9:19 p.m.

Respectfully submitted, Tinky Weisblat, Gal Friday

Williams Cosby

Hussain Hamdan