

Town of Hawley, Massachusetts
Minutes of a
Selectboard / Board of Health / Zoning Board of Appeals Meeting
May 19, 2026

Present: Will Cosby, Hussain Hamdan, and Robert MacLean – Selectboard
ky Weisblat, Gal Friday; Virginia Gabert, Treasurer and Financial Administrator
Gary Mitchell and Chris Tirone – Highway Department
and (via Zoom) Town Clerk Elizabeth Van Iderstine and an anonymous viewer

The meeting was called to order at 7:02 p.m. The board signed warrants and approved minutes from a previous meeting. Then:

1. **The first order of business was appointing Ellie Van Iderstine Town Clerk.** Hussain moved to appoint her for three years, Bob seconded, the motion, and all voted in favor. Ellie joked that she didn't want the job but accepted it. Hussain swore her in, and Will thanked her on behalf of the board and the town.
2. **Will jumped ahead to some grant and road news.** He noted that funding had come through for the King Corner culvert project and asked Ellie whether she would be able to help manage that grant. She agreed. Meanwhile, Hussain moved to authorize Will as chair to sign a reimbursement request for the Dugway. Bob seconded the motion, and all voted in favor. Hussain noted that it would not be necessary to authorize Will to sign future requests for the project as they came in. This did not create additional contractual obligations for the town so signing was within his purview as chair.
3. **The group discussed designating Selectboard and Board of Health chairs and representatives** from the board to various groups. At Hussain's suggestion, the board decided to stick with the same structure it had been using. Will thanked Hussain in particular for his work with the Board of Health.
4. **The next issue was proposed website changes;** webmaster Bill Tuman wanted to send in his bill for the next year, Tinky explained, and would like it to include any proposed changes. Will explained that he would like to see the top menu more prominent and to make general useful information more prominent as well. Tinky said she would talk to Bill.
5. **The group discussed a new program the state DOT was offering to provide speed signs** for statutory speed limits. Hussain noted that Route 8A (Hawley's most prominent roadway) had varying speed limits. He referred to a memo that had come out sometime earlier establishing speed limits. Tinky said she would look at the DOT's webinar on the issue and report back.
6. **The group discussed getting an iCORI account** to do background checks on employees. Tinky said she believed the town needed an organizational account. She added that she understood that there was no fee per check, only a fee to join.

Ellie confirmed that information. Hussain suggested that Tinky verify the type of account needed and offered to administer the town's CORI program once it was set up since he had some experience with the system.

7. **The group decided not to change the town's recycling purchasing policy.** The reasons behind the proposed draft changes shared by the solid waste district did not appear to be relevant to Hawley.
8. **The cost of dump stickers and cards for FY27 was discussed.** Virginia confirmed that the town's cost for using the Ashfield Transfer Station remained at \$19,152. The group decided not to change the fees Hawley charged and reminded Tinky to suggest that people with more than two vehicles not affix their stickers but transfer them from car to car.

In other business, Virginia noted that insurance rates seemed to be going up. She said that the insurance agent had sent a proposal of \$34,226, more than the budgeted amount of \$33,000. The agent had pared that down to \$33,256 by increasing deductibles. The reason for the rate hike was automotive claims. The new quotation basically increased the deductible from \$300 to \$1000. As in past years, she said, she had declined coverage for terrorism and cybercrimes. Hussain noted that the main cyber threat had been ransomware attacks that encrypted a user's data. If the town's data were attacked in this manner, having insurance wouldn't necessarily get the data back. The best defense was to back data up regularly in multiple places. Will moved to accept the reduced quotation, Bob seconded the motion, and all voted in favor.

Tinky reported that National Grid wanted to schedule a pole hearing to move/install poles on West Hawley Road. The group decided on the date of Tuesday, June 16, at 6:30 p.m. and asked Tinky to verify that National Grid would handle placing the newspaper ad. The company had to pay for the ad at the very least.

Tinky and Will brought up a memo the FRCOG had sent encouraging towns to participate in Rural Policy Plan Public Engagement Sessions. Will said he believed several of the topics would be of use to Hawley. He planned to watch several of the videos involved but hoped others would as well. Hussain suggested that Tinky send the information to school-committee members, the COA, and the conservation commission at the least. Virginia said she had seen some information from the state that seemed relevant only to larger communities. Hussain said he would look at some of the videos and see how they applied to Hawley.

Will returned to the King Corner grant of over \$2 million. He said he hoped the state could provide additional funds to get the grant up to the estimated cost; he said he had asked for an updated estimate for the project.

Hussain reported on a recent ambulance-service planning session in Shelburne Falls, which had included services from Shelburne falls, Charlemont, and Colrain plus representatives from various towns. He noted that FRCOG had helped gather useful data. Nothing was certain, but the consensus was that the council's figure of \$2 million per year sounded realistic.

The group would not include Ashfield or Conway; those towns were happy with their current service. It might include Hawley, Charlemont, Health, Colrain, Rowe, Leyden, Shelburne, and Buckland. Colrain might lead.

The group had discussed what model might be wanted, he told the board: a lead town (not necessarily a good idea), a registered nonprofit, or perhaps a glorified fire district.

The wish list included two paramedic ambulances that would be staffed full time. The nonprofit model appeared best at present. Hussain observed that the group hadn't correctly calculated the revenue; the numbers would need to be figured out. The ultimate issue, he explained, was how much the service would cost per year and how much it could bill. After those numbers became clear, the towns would be assessed. Hawley's cost might be around \$50,000. The number could ultimately be less, but the service would not be cheap. Senator Jo Comeford's office had offered to organize a study of existing problems and strengths, but the group felt those had been largely identified; its members wanted any money available to go into implementation of the service.

He added that the group might start under the auspices of Colrain, which had an ambulance, a license, and nonprofit status.

Will asked where the ambulance might be located. Hussain replied that various scenarios were being explored. He observed that a call from Colrain took about 30 minutes to get to Hawley. It might not be the ideal location. The Shelburne Falls Fire Station was central but had some drawbacks. He expressed his personal concern that locations in Charlemont and Shelburne Falls were in floodplains.

Hussain said that more meetings were probably going to occur and expressed his overall optimism. Will said that the Rural Policy Plan Public Engagement Sessions might have useful information on this topic. He suggested that Hussain share that information with the larger group.

Tinky explained that she had recently learned that short-term rental businesses were subject by state law to building and health inspections from FRCOG. She noted that Charlemont had recently capped the number of Airbnb establishments in town. Hussain said he was reluctant to cap or ban these businesses but suggested that a town tax be considered in a month or two.

Virginia observed that the mini-splits had been acting up. Will reset them but said he would also reach out to the repair man, Matt, to see what could be done. The last time Matt had visited there had been an unidentified leak.

Virginia asked whether the town was soliciting fuel bids. Tinky said she planned to do so in June. Gary said he would talk to her about putting out a bid request for sand as well.

Virginia noted that Starlink was going up in price. Hussain said he would talk to Brandon Root about that service.

Tinky presented a possible letter of support for FRCOG for federal traffic-safety funds. Hussain observed that the letter mentioned "activities" without specifying what those were.

Tinky said she would ask for more details and rework the letter. Hussain asked her to remind FRCOG that it needed to observe the town's calendar of meetings and deadlines.

There being no other business, the meeting was adjourned at 8:16 p.m.

Respectfully submitted, Tinky **Weisblat**, Gal Friday

Williams Cosby

Hussain Hamdan

Robert MacLean