

Town of Hawley, Massachusetts
Minutes of a
Selectboard / Board of Health / Zoning Board of Appeals Meeting
with the Personnel Committee
May 5, 2026

Present: Will Cosby, Hussain Hamdan, and Robert MacLean – Selectboard
John Sears and Robert Sears – Personnel Committee (along with Will Cosby)
Tinky Weisblat, Gal Friday; Virginia Gabert, Treasurer and Financial Administrator
Gary Mitchell and Chris Tirone – Highway Department
Sabra Billings and (via Zoom) an anonymous viewer

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

1. **Sabra Billings was recognized.** She explained that she was a resident of Bernardston running for the vacant state-representative seat. She described some of her 30-year work history, much of which had revolved around food; among other positions, she had served as director of operations at the Food Bank and owned Adams Donuts. She currently ran her own consulting firm but thought her experience with people and in the promotion of local food would come in handy at the Statehouse. She mentioned education, Chapter 70 funding in particular, as a concern. Hussain and Will agreed with her that this was a huge challenge. Hussain also cited, as he had with past candidates who had visited, local EMS challenges and the problems with the state’s medical bureaucracy. John added that Vocational Education was an issue, and the group briefly discussed its problems for Hawley, particularly vis a vis transportation.

Sabra mentioned the recent funding going to the Quabbin area for its contributions to water throughout the state. She opined that a case could be made for compensating towns like Hawley for their contributions to ecology and tourism.

Robert asked whether Sabra had any information about the so-called millionaires’ tax. She said its disbursement was not transparent.

Hussain remarked that much of the gas tax paid by Franklin County residents went to finance transit in Boston. Sabra mentioned a pilot bus program but said it didn’t seem to have much publicity behind it. Hussain noted that he would love to see east-west rail service in the state but that such a project would have to ensure that the Hoosac Tunnel underwent repairs. Will mentioned that the Franklin Regional Transit Authority provided pick-up service to seniors; Tinky promised to make sure that this was mentioned on the town website. The group thanked Sabra, and she departed.

2. **The next topic was suggested changes to the Personnel Policy.** John explained that he had sent out a fresh draft of the policy at the end of March. Virginia had spotted some **issues** and provided some questions. The group went on to discuss her concerns.

One was how to pay for on-the-job training for prospective employees; the group decided that this would be determined by the hourly rate being offered for the job, which Hussain noted was already included in the budget, assuming multiple candidates were not being tested at once. Hussain asked whether there ever would be three days of paid testing. Gary didn't think this was likely.

The next issue was whose responsibility it was to maintain job descriptions; this was listed in the current draft as the purview of the Selectboard. Virginia had asked how and when the descriptions should be reviewed. John suggested that the ideal time would be before hiring someone new. Hussain suggested that the Selectboard should work with department heads on these descriptions. Virginia asked whether the descriptions should be reviewed on a regular basis. Hussain said he thought "as needed" would suffice. He also suggested that the descriptions be shared with the people in the jobs, who could help edit them. Robert suggested sharing the descriptions in exit interviews, noting the help Pam Shrimpton as Town Clerk had provided in the past.

The group discussed background checks. The group concluded that CORI checks were not being performed for any positions, although in many cases this was because the candidates were well known locally. The cost of the checks was discussed; the Town might be able to do these through the Police Chief, to whom Tinky was asked to reach out.

The group went on to the formula for vacations and holidays and how it could be calculated. The issue at hand was how to define the base for vacations: by the day, the week, or the hour.

The group moved on to personal days and when to start providing them. The group agreed that in the first six months employees could accrue but not take these days. Instead of adjusting days based on when in the year the employee was hired, the group decided that an employee should get a full fiscal year's worth of personal days for the fiscal year within which that person's probationary period ended.

The group took a little time to nail down its definition of a day before moving on to carrying over vacation days. There was some discussion about whether this should vary depending on the hours a person worked. In the end, the group agreed that no more than two weeks' worth of vacation days could be carried forward from year to year, with a week being the typical number of hours the employee worked in seven days.

The group briefly discussed sick leave and how much of it could be carried over, and whether sick leave should be withheld in cases of self-imposed injury or substance abuse. The latter language was deleted over concerns that it would be hard to enforce.

The procedure for reporting sexual harassment by a Selectboard member was next. The group decided that the aggrieved person could talk to the administrative assistant and discuss the matter with the other members of the board. Hussain pointed out that the accused should be recused from any discussion. There were also alternatives outside Town government, and the policy could include language about those.

The section stating that firefighters were paid minimum wage for calls was changed to a rate set by the town, as firefighter stipends had been getting cost-of-living adjustments in recent years.

Hussain suggested that the Personnel Committee put together another draft based on the evening's discussion. **The Personnel Committee left at 8:46.**

3. **In road and grant news,** Will explained that he, Lloyd Crawford, and Gary had met with people from GZA and FRCOG earlier in the day to discuss "rejuvenating" dirt roads. They were hoping to get grant money to apply for funding to make Labelle Road easier to use. Nothing was certain as yet. Will also noted that VHB was continuing with its survey work at the Dugway and that FRCOG was analyzing traffic there.

Tinky shared an email from Sandra Mizula, asking the Board of Health to do something about the dust on Ashfield Road, which contained silica, something Sandee cited as a health hazard. The email suggested coating the road with calcium. Hussain and Will noted that rain, forecast for the following day, might mitigate the problem. Will stated that the group took the issue seriously but added that affordable options were limited. The town did not own a sprayer, and even if calcium were affordable, it might pose its own health risks. He added that people were driving too fast on the road, spreading the dust. Gary noted that he could not grade the road in the rain but might be able to when the road was damp. Hussain said that the only long-term solution he could see was paving the road, which could be very expensive. He then suggested perhaps applying oil and stone and asked whether that would trap the dust. Gary agreed this might help. There was some discussion about the cost of doing this, at least for the inhabited section of the road. Gary said he would look into the matter.

4. **The question of possibly amending the town's recycling policy** was tabled.
5. **The group discussed a request from school officials and Charlemont to plan a meeting** about the funds supposedly overpaid to the school system in past years. Hussain said he was not particularly interested in participating and pointed out that it seemed that every business administrator Mohawk hired had a different notion of what the past errors were. Will said that if there were a lot of money involved, someone might be willing to go, but that seemed unlikely. Bob observed that the issue was between the Mohawk Trail Regional School District and the towns.

In other business, Virginia asked about a public-records request that had come in asking for a report of Fire Department expenditures. Hussain explained that the town was obliged to share any records that existed if they were requested but was not obliged to create a new record, which this report appeared to be.

Tinky asked whether the board wished to talk to Ellie Van Iderstine, the current interim Town Clerk, about her responsibilities and appoint her permanent Town Clerk. The group told Tinky to invite Ellie to the next meeting and to find the Town Clerk job description and send it to the Selectboard and the Personnel Committee.

Meanwhile, **Hussain moved to continue Ellie's interim appointment** until the next meeting. Bob seconded the motion, and all voted in favor.

There being no other business, the meeting was adjourned at 9:12 p.m.

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

Williams Cosby

Hussain Hamdan

Robert MacLean