

Town of Hawley, Massachusetts
Minutes of a
Selectboard / Board of Health / Zoning Board of Appeals Meeting
June 30, 2026

Present: Will Cosby, Hussain Hamdan, and Robert MacLean – Selectboard
Tinky Weisblat, Gal Friday; Virginia Gabert, Treasurer and Financial Administrator
Ellie Van Iderstine – Town Clerk
Gary Mitchell and Chris Tirone – Highway Department
Wilder Sparks, John Sears, Robert Sears, Jacob Desrosiers, Bernie and Gina Barnhart,
and (via Zoom) Johnny Depin, Nicole Parker, and Michael Miller

The meeting was called to order at 7 p.m. The board approved minutes from a previous meeting. There was a brief discussion of paying for continuing education associated with the hoister's license for a member of the road crew. Bob objected to this. Hussain argued that this practice had been in place for a while. Bob said that it was only applied to this one person. Hussain noted that in the draft personnel policy (not yet approved) the town was to pay the difference between, say, a regular license and the specialized one needed for work. Bob said he would not agree to such a policy. Hussain recalled that in the past the town had paid for continuing education for some employees. Will said he wanted to avoid a double standard; if the town paid for training, etc., for some employees, it should pay for it for all. Hussain said that if the town refused to pay this fee, it set up conflicts with policies used for other people, including assessors and EMTs. Bob argued that this was a different matter. The hoister's license was a requirement for the person's job. He did not sign that warrant article. The others approved it. Then:

1. **The group opened fuel bids for FY27.** Tinky noted that there were fewer bids than usual, perhaps because fuel costs were currently uncertain. For wood pellets there was only one bidder, Lyme Green Heat at \$3.99 per ton.

For diesel, there was again only one bid, from Mirabito. The firm price was \$3.6890 per gallon for the summer blend and \$3.7790 for the winter blend. The variable rate was a \$.35 markup for both summer and winter. Virginia reported that the most recent diesel delivery had cost \$4.3186 per gallon.

For propane, there were two bids. George Propane offered a fixed rate of \$3.10 per gallon. Mirabito offered \$1.85 for the fixed rate or \$.9536 above Selkirk for the variable rate.

Hussain moved to award the pellet bid to Lyme Green Heat and the diesel and propane bids to Mirabito for their fixed rates. Bob seconded the motion, and all voted in favor.

Virginia noted that the diesel price the town had just paid had been fluctuating; the bidding had been solicited by the FRCOG, which the Town had chosen not to use for the next year's fuel bids. Hussain noted that the Town, when it did its own bidding, preferred fixed prices.

2. **Wilder Sparks of Charlemont stopped in to discuss the potential overpayment by Hawley and Charlemont for previous school budgets and how to handle that issue.** He apologized for not including Hawley in the conversation sooner. He explained that Charlemont was working with State Senator Paul Mark to look for an earmark for its overpayment, to use state funds instead of asking other towns to pay. He said he would be happy to support such an earmark for Hawley and believed that other neighboring towns would support the town as well. Hussain said he was happy to request an earmark but did not want to ask other towns to cover the overpayment. He referred to the error as “alleged” and noted that the Mohawk and Hawlemont Districts had gone through several business administrators who had each blamed the previous one for a different mistake with these numbers. Wilder said that Amy Wales of Charlemont’s finance committee was learning about Chapter 70 school funding. It was confusing, but he felt that she was very competent. Hussain asked whether Wilder had a draft support letter he could share with Tinky. Wilder said he would be happy to send materials along. He added that there didn’t seem to be a close deadline for this work. Will asked what the towns could do if the earmark process failed. Wilder said that perhaps the previous financial **business** administration firm could be sued; the overcharging had stemmed from enrollment errors in the past. He reiterated that it was not his intention to ask the other towns in the district for money. Hussain suggested waiting to see what happened with the earmark request. He added that the board was grateful to Wilder for coming; the visit had helped clarify things. Thanks were shared all around.
3. **Discussion continued about the town’s adoption of General Law - Part I, Title VII, Chapter 44, Section 53G,** about hiring consultants. Hussain said the question at the moment was not the town’s adoption of this law but the Selectboard’s adoption; he continued to question what matters the Board would use this for that were within its purview. Will argued that the adoption would give the town a better chance to evaluate possible energy-storage proposals. Tinky suggested the board could adopt the law in case it were needed. Hussain moved for the Board adopt it solely for use in matters that fell within the Selectboard’s jurisdiction. Bob seconded the motion, and all voted in favor. Will requested that Tinky ask the Planning Board how it was coming along on drafting energy-siting bylaws. Referring to draft language being circulated around the State, Hussain reminded the group that the Attorney General would have to sign off on any bylaws; he would like for any language Hawley used to be approved.
4. **In grant and road news,** Will reported that the signed King Corner contract had been submitted to the state. Response would probably take four to eight weeks. He said that VHB had completed its physical work on the Dugway and was starting to analyze the collected data; he thanked Gary for mowing the area. He added that he and Lloyd had done some maintenance work in the area behind the garage; the saplings planted in the fall looked good.

Will asked Gary about paving plans. Gary said he needed to get in touch with Northeast Paving and hoped to address issues on Plainfield Road, East Hawley Road, and Forget Road. Will said he had received the contract from FRCOG for purchase of heavy materials.

Gina Barnhart asked what was planned for the construction at King Corner; she wanted to know whether the road would be closed. She also asked the board to tell Mark Bigelow to stay out of the area around the pond and culvert. Will explained that the construction project would require complete closure of the road for a couple of weeks; there was no way to do it by halves. Gina asked about the beavers. Will noted that the town was trying to minimize beaver damage. Gina repeated that Mark was always “messing with” the beaver dam. Hussain recalled that Mark had been asked to stay out of the dam in 2018 by the Town and the Environmental Police. Gina asked why a temporary bridge like the one constructed near Tedd White’s house for the Sears Road culvert couldn’t be erected. Will remarked that unfortunately the terrain was different at King Corner so such a bridge was not possible.

Gina asked when Savoy Road would be fixed. Will replied that the state had put that project out to bid. He wasn’t sure of the schedule. Gina said that she believed the work in Tedd’s area had been overkill and wondered aloud whether this project would be the same. Hussain suggested she ask the Department of Transportation. Gina asked about fixing holes in the road near her house. Gary explained that he was waiting for the new budget to come through so he could purchase stone. Gina asked about a hole in the Dugway, which Gary said he knew of and hoped to fix in time. Will suggested that in the meantime Gina drive around the hole. Gina asked about putting lines on the road. Will said this was a complicated process; the town would have to repave the road, put grooves in, and then paint the lines. He found this impractical. Gina returned to the issue of road closure and asked whether abutters would be notified. She was told that they would. Hussain noted that local ambulances would also have to be alerted.

5. **The next issue was reorganization of the Town Office staff.** Tinky said that she had proposed ceding 12 of her 18 hours to Ellie so that Ellie would be eligible for benefits. Tinky would then be in a communications position, taking care of the e-news, the website, and other projects as needed. Hussain said he supported the parties’ dividing work amongst themselves in a collaborative manner and thought everyone was doing an outstanding job. He believed that there was a lot to consider, however. In particular, if one person who had not been getting benefits was to be eligible for them, he wondered how much additional money that would entail. Virginia said that the only major additional expense was health insurance, which would amount to about \$12,000 per year. Hussain asked whether the town had that money; Virginia noted that the money was not in the budget and that a special town meeting would need to be called, preferably before the new tax rate was set. Will asked about the impact on the levy and said that more research might be needed. John asked whether a special town meeting was needed. Tinky argued that offering benefits was important to keeping employees, but Hussain remarked the town could not spend money it didn’t yet have. In the end the group agreed to continue the discussion at the next meeting.
6. **Appointments were made for FY27.** Tinky noted that there was an opening on the Communications Committee. Hussain remarked that Jason Velazquez had been on the committee before; he could be asked to serve again. Hussain explained the reasons for the new classification of Fire Department officers as Deputy Forest Fire Wardens; they needed to have enforcement authority with regards to illegal burns.

Another change was the resignation of Bob Root as deputy fire chief. Hussain presented a draft letter thanking Bob for his 27 years of service, and the others agreed to sign. Hussain added that Police Chief Jason Pelletier was resigning. Kyle Sweeney, who was taking over Jason's work in Charlemont, had agreed to step in. Will moved to approve the Fire Department list, and Bob seconded the motion.

Bernie Barnhart argued that Kyle Sweeney was abusive and offered to show the group video footage of Kyle's abuse of an older person. He added that Kyle held grudges. Tinky explained that Kyle would not be doing law enforcement per se in Hawley; the police chief in town was responsible only for processing firearms IDs. Nicole Parker protested that Kyle had hurt her father; she wanted protections, she said. Hussain observed that Hawley didn't have an actual police department. Law enforcement was mostly handled by the State Police, although a former chief had occasionally been asked to attend Town Meetings to keep the peace. Nicole asked what the town could do if Kyle refused to issue firearms permits to people he didn't like. Hussain clarified that Massachusetts was now a "shall issue" state and the denial of a license by a police chief had to be for valid reasons and was subject to review by the courts. Will called the vote, and all voted in favor. Nicole said she would like to bring up a concern from a past meeting. Will asked her to do this under new business.

7. **Tinky brought up complaints people in town had made about new signs** intended to keep truckers and others from venturing into the State Forest. She explained that the main complainant, Trina Sternstein, had been unable to come that evening but had wanted the issue raised. Will argued that the signs were meant to draw attention and prevent truck drivers from wandering where they didn't belong. Hussain recalled examples from the past, including a lumber truck from New Jersey blindly following its GPS onto Middle Road in the State Forest. He said that the road boss was doing what he could and that the new signs followed accepted conventions for signage. Because Trina was not available, the Board agreed to discuss this at a later meeting.
8. **The group turned to cemetery mowing.** The Finance Committee had proposed transferring this task from a private contractor, Mike Schofield, to the road crew; the road crew was being given more hours in the new fiscal year so this might make financial sense. Will remarked that Mike had recently mowed, and the cemeteries looked good. The road crew would need additional equipment to do the work. John Sears, the chair of the Historical Commission (which oversaw cemetery mowing), noted that there were funds left over from FY26 for mowing and made a proposal: Mike would be asked to continue with the work through the fall, and the highway department would take over in the spring. This gave Mike some notice and allowed the road crew time to secure the necessary equipment. Hussain said he took issue with the process. The Finance Committee and the Selectboard had both approved a budget that had assumed the road crew would be doing this work, increased road crew hours, and simultaneously reduced the funding that otherwise would have gone to cemetery mowing. These discussions had begun early in the year. He was disappointed that matters had not been resolved and communicated to Mike much earlier and stated he had emphasized the importance of giving Mike advance warning several times.

John said he hoped his proposal would address some of these concerns. Hussain asked about the Historical Commission's cemetery budget. John the group had \$8000 for the next fiscal year plus whatever was leftover. Hussain suggested calling Mike. Virginia said that Mike had recently billed her for mowing. John said he would be happy to talk to Mike but reminded the group that some of the cemetery budget would need to be used for tree work. Will apologized that the board hadn't addressed this issue earlier and said he thought John's suggestion had merit. John expressed a belief that the important upcoming mowings were before July 4 and before Hawley Day; he said he would talk to Mike. The group discussed the idea of sending Mike a letter, inviting him to a meeting, or having John speak with him. Hussain wanted some documented form of communication (a letter or an invitation to a public meeting) and expressed discomfort that everyone had assumed someone else would communicate with Mike.

Hussain asked whether the needed mower for the road crew was in its budget. Gary said that would depend on the winter to come; he had an estimate of \$3239. Hussain asked whether the cemetery trust fund could help with this purchase. John observed that that fund also had to cover some tree removal. Hussain suggested that perhaps a mixture of budgets could be tapped. John said he would talk to the Historical Commission.

In other business, Tinky asked when the group could discuss the proposed changes to the Personnel Policy. The group decided on July 28. Virginia asked for a fresh copy; when that was ready, Tinky would be asked to print a copy out for Robert Sears.

There was a brief discussion about the possible usefulness of chargeable electric mowers. The consensus was that the battery life was too short to be effective for cemetery mowing.

Nicole Parker was recognized. She reminded the group that in August of 2024 she had complained about alleged illegal burning of trash by her neighbors, the Hoyts. The smell was back, although she could not see the items being burned because, she said, the Hoyts were blocking the area with a camper. She argued that the Board of Health hadn't taken the concern seriously before and said she thought the minutes of the 2024 meeting questioned the truth of her allegations. Hussain reminded the group that Health Agent Randy Crochier had previously been involved in this and had documented the matter. Hussain reminded Nicole that the town did not have a patrol for health-code violations; it relied on people to bring issues to the attention of the Board of Health. Nicole said that she believed that illegal burning should incur fines. Bernie observed that the smoke in question was definitely not from wood, and Gina said that one fire in particular had given her serious migraines. Hussain asked about the time of day for the burning. Gina said the Hoyts seemed to wait until she had finished her outdoor chores. Hussain indicated that the appropriate procedure if someone noticed an illegal burn was to call the Fire Department, which might involve law enforcement if warranted. The Barnharts expressed frustration with Fire Chief Greg Cox. Hussain noted that Randy also had health-related powers. He added that anyone responding would probably have to catch people in the act of illegal burning; otherwise, it was difficult to verify the allegations. Tinky was asked to put Nicole in touch with the health agent.

The group discussed upcoming vacation schedules. Bob and Hussain said they were planning to be around for much of the summer. Will said he might miss meetings on July 14 and September 8.

Tinky read a memo from web designer Bill Tuman suggested three different options for web hosting since the current plan was becoming more expensive. She was asked to get more specific information about pricing.

Tinky shared information from Jessica Atwood at FRCOG explaining that because of personnel issues the council would not be able to provide a signs/lines assessment during the current year. The Selectmen said they understood.

Tinky asked whether the group wanted to continue using Zoom for meetings. The board decided to keep it for the moment.

Tinky asked whether the town was all set for the July 4 picnic. Hussain said that someone had donated cases of soda.

Hussain noted that an ambulance meeting was coming up on July 15. Nothing was settled about a combined service, but he was hopeful, he said.

The group briefly discussed flags that had been displayed at the Town Garage in response to a question from Hussain. Will said he had requested the taking down of a flag that purportedly celebrated the country's 250th anniversary because it was black, and he didn't think it was appropriate. Hussain joked that we didn't want the celebration to look like a funeral but also noted that the POW/MIA flag was black. There was a brief discussion of the Town's flag policy.

There being no other business, the meeting was adjourned at 9:04 p.m.

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

Williams Cosby

Hussain Hamdan

Robert MacLean