

Town of Hawley, Massachusetts
Minutes of a
Selectboard / Board of Health / Zoning Board of Appeals Meeting
with the Personnel Committee
July 28, 2026

Present: Will Cosby, Hussain Hamdan, and Robert MacLean – Selectboard
John Sears plus Will Cosby – Personnel Committee
Tinky Weisblat, Gal Friday; Virginia Gabert, Treasurer and Financial Administrator
Gary Mitchell and Chris Tirone – Highway Department
and (via Zoom) Michael Miller

The meeting was called to order at 7:02 p.m. The board approved minutes from a previous meeting and signed some of the warrant sheets. The members discussed one article that dealt with reimbursing a member of the road crew for his hoisting license. Hussain said that he was inclined to follow past practice and pay it. Will noted that if the board were to adopt the personnel policy being discussed that evening, the question would be resolved. Virginia argued that the payment was not in the current policy and that she could find no record of similar payments in the past. The Town had previously paid for education but not the actual license; Hussain acknowledged this was a different scenario. The group noted that in the past classes and physical exams had been covered. Hussain moved to table the matter until the personnel policy was resolved. Bob seconded, and all voted in favor. Then:

1. **The two boards discussed the latest draft of the personnel policy sent recently to all by John.** Will asked whether John had any information to add. John expressed his belief that the policy was ready for adoption, although it should probably be looked at by the town counsel, Donna MacNicol. Hussain suggested that it might be a good idea to separate out the parts Donna needed to peruse in order to save the town a bit of money, opining that hiring her to comb through the whole thing might use up a significant portion of the year's budget for her services. No one was quite sure how to effect that separation, however. Hussain posited that it might make sense to wait to approve the policy until any review was complete. If Donna found issues with it, it might need to be changed again. Virginia looked up the budget for counsel and said that it came to \$1000., more than the \$450 to \$600 Hussain calculated Donna's review might take. Will asserted that it would be best to go ahead and approve of the policy and then consult Donna. Hussain offered his advice as a lawyer, stating that it would probably be fine to approve of the policy, although there might be some small changes needed later. Will responded that at some point the policy would have to be revisited anyway. Virginia concurred, recalling that in the past policies had worked for a while and then new issues had come up necessitating a change.

John said that one small section of the policy, which dealt with vacation times for part-time workers, needed addressing; at the moment both old and new language were in the policy. Hussain said he was inclined to go with the new language, which had been suggested by Virginia. The group approved the change.

Hussain returned to the issue of paying for licenses. He read from the new policy, which stated that employees would be reimbursed for renewing licenses necessary for work. If only a portion of the renewal payment was work related – if, say, a person were applying for a commercial driver's license and would need a regular driver's license for non-professional activities – the reimbursement would cover the difference between the two licenses. He reminded the group that the old policy had said nothing about this issue, leading different departments to deal with it in their own ways.

Tinky asked whether the small sums involved were worth the time it took to discuss them. Bob argued that they were indeed worth deliberating.

Will asked whether there were licenses or classes needed for departments other than the road crew. Hussain noted that the assessors needed training. According to Virginia, some towns required that their treasurers be certified by the treasurers' association, although Hawley did not. Will asked about reimbursement for firefighters' expenses. Hussain noted that because the firefighters were compensated minimally, it would be difficult for the town to ask them to pay for training. He acknowledged that the situation was different for full-time compensated employees. Will asked how much the road crew licenses cost. The commercial driver's license cost \$75 for five years; the hoisting license, more: \$125 for two years. Gary noted that that cost could vary based on required endorsements. The group clarified that they were only talking about paying for license endorsements the job required, not all endorsements.

John asked why the idea of paying these fees, or part of them, was not automatically acceptable. The group noted it represented a policy change and Hussain added that the matter had come up repeatedly so he found clear language important. There was brief discussion of a former town official who had (with the board's consent) attended a class that required the town to pay for a hotel room. Hussain noted that occasionally the town was a bit more accommodating than it needed to be but that the draft seemed like a reasonable compromise.

Hussain moved to retain the language in the draft. Will seconded the motion. Hussain and Will voted in favor of the motion, and Bob voted against it. The motion carried. After additional discussion, the group ultimately agreed to have the entire policy reviewed by Donna MacNicol prior to final adoption.

Before the Personnel Committee withdrew, John asked whether the group wanted to discuss the materials he had sent to the board detailing information about the Town Clerk: her resume, a report on the committee's interview with her, and a report about her references. Hussain said he thought that discussion should wait until after the forthcoming Special Town Meeting.

Virginia noted that there was a potential budget twist. Her husband was getting ready to retire, and it was possible that she would then be put on his State retirement health insurance. In that case, the town would not necessarily have to appropriate more funds for giving health coverage to the Town Clerk.

She would not know about the changeover for a little while, however. Hussain asked her whether being on her husband's policy would be a better deal for Virginia; he said he didn't want people making sacrifices. Virginia said it might not be a sacrifice; the amount might be coming out of her husband's paycheck instead of hers. More information was needed. Bob argued that the voters should be given the chance to vote on the benefits for the Town Clerk in any case.

John said he would clean up the revised policy and send it to Donna. Hussain asked that he share any feedback the counsel might provide.

The Personnel Committee adjourned at 7:58 p.m.

2. **In grant and road news,** Will said he had a suggestion for procurement for the King Corner project. He would like to hire Andrea Woods, formerly of FRCOG, who had set up her own business doing the sort of procurement work she had formerly done for Hawley at the council. He posited that Andrea knew the ins and outs of such work; she had already explained that the town might not have to pay for advertising in the newspaper as COMMBUYS and the bulletin board would suffice. He also noted that the King Corner project was technically complex so someone knowledgeable would be needed to vet potential contractors. Andrea's fees seemed reasonable. She would step back once a contract was signed with a vendor, and GZA would serve as clerk of the works. Virginia asked whether Andrea's fees would be covered by the grant for the project; Will asserted that they would. He added that Andrea's knowledge would be even more helpful because the current grant came from a new (to Hawley) bureaucracy in the state. Tinky printed out the contract, which had been slightly amended from Andrea's original based on suggestions from Hussain, to which Andrea had agreed. Hussain moved to sign the contract as presented, Bob seconded the motion, and all voted in favor.

Will said that FRCOG had sent the town a review of possible work on Labelle Road. The council had suggested remedies the town's own highway department could implement on that dirt road, which could be difficult year round. At Hussain's request, Will forwarded the review to Bob and Hussain by email. Gary, who had looked at the review, said it wasn't practical for his three-man crew. It would cost them a huge amount of money and keep them busy on one small road instead of letting them work on projects all around town. The group agreed that the project of fixing this road was difficult; it was too big to be done by just the road crew but wasn't big enough to allow the town to apply for a grant for it.

Will asked Gary about his paving plans. Gary said that he hoped to do some paving in August on East Hawley Road and adjacent roads. He would use \$700,000 from the town's Chapter 90 allotment. Will asked whether it was too soon to plan for gravel and oil on Pudding Hollow Road. Gary said he wanted to work on reshaping that road and perhaps parts of Middle Road first.

Virginia posed a question about the Winter Recovery Assistance Program. She said that the town could apply for two different amounts of funding from the program. It could ask for \$57,000, which would represent the amount the town's snow-roads account had gone over budget in the previous year. Or it could ask for \$27,755, which was the amount the highway department as a whole had gone over budget. After some discussion of the pros and cons of both figures, Hussain moved that the town ask for the larger figure. Bob seconded the motion, and all voted in favor.

3. **Tinky presented the warrant for the Special Town Meeting** on August 17, which covered some financial cleanup from the previous year and the question of budgeting for health insurance for the Town Clerk's proposed expanded role. The board signed the warrant.
4. **Tinky presented the annual Memorandum of Understanding with the Solid Waste District**, noting that the fee was the same as it had been, \$171 per year. Hussain moved to authorize signing the MOU, Bob seconded the motion, and all voted in favor.

In other business, Tinky noted that she had received an email from Paul Mark's office confirming that Hawley was to be included in an upcoming earmark request to reimburse it and Charlemont for past overpayment of the school budget. She said that she would draft a letter of support for Charlemont's efforts on this project for the next Selectboard meeting.

Will reported that he had recently attended a well populated meeting about the Payment in Lieu of Taxes program. He had met a representative from the DCR there and had asked her to help with the town's request for land behind the fire station. He added that he had recently learned that a nonprofit group called the Native Land Conservancy had purchased property at the old Donovan Farm so the town would receive no taxes from that land. He expressed concern that a substantial part of the town's acreage would generate little or no tax income. Hussain observed that he had attended another PILOT meeting. Amherst was looking for more funds in lieu of taxes for the University of Massachusetts campus. He added that Hawley's PILOT payments were tiny compared to most other places in the state, suggesting that a minimum rate would be a huge help.

There being no other business, the meeting was adjourned at 8:22 p.m.

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

Williams Cosby

Hussain Hamdan

Robert MacLean