

Town of Hawley, Massachusetts
Minutes of a
Selectboard / Board of Health / Zoning Board of Appeals Meeting
August 11, 2026

Present: Will Cosby, Hussain Hamdan, and Robert MacLean – Selectboard
Tinky Weisblat, Gal Friday; Virginia Gabert, Treasurer and Financial Administrator
Gary Mitchell and Chris Tirone – Highway Department
Susan Purdy, Peter Purdy, Ava McDermott, Jill Behringer, John Sears, Jane Myers,
Trina Sternstein, Lloyd Crawford, and Leslie Cooper

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

1. **The board invited input from residents concerned about the new signs on Pudding Hollow Road and Middle Road.** Peter Purdy noted that the nature of the signs was the issue: he felt they were hostile, unwelcoming, and not totally clear. Moreover, they didn't mention trucks, which seemed to be the problem.

Ava McDermott explained that she was building a house on Pudding Hollow Road and that the signs confused delivery trucks. She argued that the current signs were not appropriate, that stop signs had four or five specific criteria, which were unmet by the signs in place. She added that since the signs said "Stop," residents were constantly breaking the law by not stopping; that the signs did not meet the required distance from an intersection; and that such signs could only be put up if five incidents had occurred in a 12-month period. She said she believed the signs were a problem for residents and suggested perhaps a tonnage sign would work.

Leslie Cooper chimed in, saying that she shared Ava's feelings and recalled that people coming to her home had been confused by the signs. She noted that the road crew did an excellent job. She suggested wording like "No Trucks Over 5000 Pounds" or "No Trucks Except Local Delivery." She and Will talked for a moment about whether Pudding Hollow Road really was a dead end. Leslie stated that she felt vulnerable when her road was called a dead end.

Hussain opined that tonnage as a requirement would not work; logging trucks that routinely went up the roads could be very heavy. He said he had seen some wording that might work, such as "Not a Through Road" or "Local Traffic Only."

Trina Sternstein observed that the signs offended her from an aesthetic point of view. She noted that she understood from Hussain that warning signs should be yellow. (The stop signs in question were red and white.)

Hussain suggested wording such as "Local Traffic Only. Not a Through Way." Leslie added that a sign at the end of the Sears/Harriss house could warn people that the road was not maintained.

John Sears said he agreed that the signs were not only inappropriate but ugly, inhospitable, and confusing. He said the group wanted to feel good about its neighborhood. Will countered that a sign was necessary; John said, "Yes, but not these signs."

Susan Purdy added that the signs could be toned down, arguing that their main words were hostile: "stop," "no," and "dead."

Will said he would look at state regulations and asked Ava to send him the information she had. Hussain suggested that cost was important for the signs. He provided examples of stuck trucks that had needed help from townspeople and emergency workers. It was not ideal to have the Highway Department pulling vehicles out, but when they blocked the road, they became a safety issue. Leslie asked whether the town could bill the trucking companies for those services. Will argued that it could be difficult to figure out whom to bill. Hussain agreed, citing an incident in the past involving a damaged guardrail.

Trina and Leslie both offered to help pay for new signs. Will thanked them for the offer.

Lloyd suggested that perhaps the concerned neighbors could propose a sign. Will reminded the group that any proposal would have to meet federal guidelines for standardized signs.

Ava asked why the current signs had been chosen. Will countered that they clearly worked; no large trucks had becoming stuck since the signs had been erected. He did accept that some of the issues raised, particularly Ava's, presented a problem. He asked the group to return in a month with a proposal. Hussain reminded those present of a fairly common sign: "Not a Through Way. Local Traffic Only." Leslie said that would work for her. Hussain said that coming up with something would be useful, reminding those present that sometimes drivers showed no common sense and cited examples.

Will suggested that the group return with a proposal on September 22. Trina reiterated that no one was criticizing Gary and the road crew, who did a great job. Will reminded the group that the signs were effective. "Too effective," countered Ava. Leslie opined that the signs could do the job and also be welcoming. Thanks were shared all around, and most of those present left.

2. **The next topic was the possibility of applying for a community-compact grant.** Will explained that this state grant had a new cycle coming up. He suggested that a grant could be used for purchasing accounting software for the financial administrator. He noted that it would be important to know what the town needed. The topic of software increasingly becoming cloud based in contrast to Virginia's preference for a local stand-alone option was again discussed. Hussain said that the town could ask for stand-alone software; the town might not get what it wanted, but wouldn't know if it didn't ask. Virginia clarified that most towns, unlike Hawley, had both an accountant and a treasurer, although she combined those functions.

Hussain said the town might get stuck paying for two different software packages. Virginia said she didn't know what was available; QuickBooks worked for both functions, but it might change soon. She was asked whether FRCOG's technical-assistance team could help, or whether perhaps the town needed to ask software companies to make presentations. She said she was worried about cloud-based software, which didn't work with Hawley's iffy internet. Lloyd asked her whether it would take a lot of time to move data from current computer-based QuickBooks program to the online version or to some different provider. She said she believed it would; what she had seen of online QuickBooks looked quite different. She added that much of the work would fall to Ellie, the Town Clerk, if Ellie could take on additional hours. She, Virginia, was highly overextended. There was general consensus that any migration should coincide with a new fiscal year. She noted that that could be a good option so that the next person who worked at her job knew the system. Hussain asked about reaching out to QuickBooks; Virginia noted that the company did seem to be customizable.

Will asked whether the town used Tyler software. Virginia said that this large company was used for assessing. Hussain observed that he had some experience with Tyler from court filings; it didn't always work. This was fine for assessors' work, which wasn't day to day, but the treasurer/accountant software had to work all the time.

Will said that the internet issues in town should soon be resolved with the introduction of fiberoptic cable. He asked whether a QuickBooks presentation would help Virginia. She said she wasn't sure. She noted that QuickBooks wasn't designed for municipal use, although it could be fine tuned, and had been by Hawley. She expressed a desire to document her work process for the next person who took her job.

The group suggested whether waiting to change software was feasible. Virginia said that the current software would last for at least a year. Hussain suggested that the town's biggest vulnerability moving forward would come from IRS rule changes, but Virginia explained that the town paid a little extra to QuickBooks for a payroll package.

Will instructed Tinky to ask Ellie to put investigating software on her calendar after the upcoming primary election, perhaps in October.

Virginia said that her health insurance would no longer cost the town money after September 1 (she was moving to a different provider) so that budget line could be used for providing insurance to Ellie. The question of giving Ellie additional work hours right away came up. Hussain reminded the group that town had previously sparked controversy for purchasing highway equipment with Chapter 90 funds without consulting the townspeople, even though such purchases were legal. People wanted to be included in major decisions, and he generally agreed with this unless there were extenuating circumstances. He argued that proposed changes to employee responsibilities and benefits should be discussed at Town Meeting to keep people informed, even if the financial vote turned out to be a moot point. Will asked whether the warrant article about Ellie's health insurance could be withdrawn; Hussain said this could be done on the evening of the meeting by a floor vote.

Virginia noted that since after September 1 she would no longer need to work 20 hours each work to receive health insurance she could give more of her work to Ellie. Will agreed that the townspeople should be informed of these work-hour changes, arguing that giving Ellie more work was a good move for the town.

The group discussed some of Tinky's work as assistant to the Selectmen. Hussain stated that he would prefer to have Tinky continue to write the minutes for the Selectboard meetings; he liked her style. Tinky suggested that perhaps she and Ellie could share this responsibility.

3. **In grant and road news,** Will said things were busy. The invitation to bid for King Corner was nearing completion; he hoped it would be listed on COMMBUYS around August 19. He noted that, contrary to an assumption at the previous meeting, the invitation would have to be listed in the local newspaper. He asked Tinky to get in touch with Andrea Woods the following week for details. He said that he had been talking to people at the DCR about using their yard for construction laydown for the King Corner project. Lloyd asked about listing a notice of intent and order of conditions for the project. Will offered to talk to Lloyd about this issue later that evening.

Gary reported that he was hoping to get about three and a half miles of road paved in East Hawley, and Hussain confirmed that people in that portion of town were enthusiastic about this work. Lloyd asked whether Hawley was in line for the DOT paving program. Gary affirmed this; Lloyd suggested checking to make sure. Lloyd asked about VHB's status; that company was supposed to submit a report so a community meeting could be organized. Will conveyed the company's apologies from Matt Chase and said that the report and meeting scheduling should be coming soon.

Will noted that Spectrum was busy wiring (and selling) internet in West Hawley. Chris said he had seen the company at work in East Hawley as well. Will suggested that if people were interested in being in the first round of installation, they should get in touch with the salesperson. He shared some pricing information.

Hussain shared another piece of road news. There were questions about the bridge on Route 8A next to Savoy Road, he said; a neighbor was concerned that an abandoned house nearby might collapse into the water. Will asked whether the house was privately owned; Virginia confirmed that someone paid taxes for it. Lloyd argued that the point about the house was separate from questions about the bridge. He asked whether there was any news from the DOT about the bridge work; Will said he would reach out and try to get some.

In other business, Tinky presented a letter of support for the town of Charlemont for the board to sign. Will moved to sign it, Hussain seconded the motion, and all voted in favor. It was signed.

Tinky said that she had received a letter from the United Way asking for a nominee to serve on a group about digital equity for seniors. Will asked Jill Behringer, who had remained throughout the meeting, whether she was interested. She declined.

He then said that the digital equity movement was not very useful to Hawley as Hawley didn't have an appropriate building in which activities for it could take place.

Tinky said that Superintendent Sheryl Stanton and the school-sustainability group had requested to come to a meeting in September. Tinky was told to ask Sheryl about either September 22 at 6:30 p.m. or a date in October.

Virginia said that her main question was where the town was with regard to increasing employment for Ellie.

She also reported that the assessors were close to figuring out current values for property. She suggested that values would probably go up while the tax rate would probably go up less.

There being no other business, the meeting was adjourned at 8:24 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,
Tinky Weisblat,
Gal Friday

Williams Cosby

Hussain Hamdan

Robert MacLean