

Town of Hawley, Massachusetts
Minutes of a
Selectboard / Board of Health / Zoning Board of Appeals Meeting
September 22, 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
Trina Sternstein, Leslie Cooper, Peter Purdy, Susan Purdy, Ruth Gillan,
and Madison Schofield from the *Greenfield Recorder*

The meeting was called to order at 7 p.m. The board approved minutes from a previous meeting and signed treasury warrant. It deliberated briefly over an overtime question on one of the treasury warrants. Virginia explained that in general there was no overtime in the general highway budget. However, in this case the highway crew had been asked at the last minute to help a vendor preparing to pave roads in East Hawley. Gary explained that they had had extremely limited notice but had ended up putting in a lot of extra hours. Will asked Hussain what had happened in similar situations in the past. Hussain took the position that the road crew needed to be paid overtime if its members worked more than 40 hours in a week but also felt strongly that this kind of expenditure – though necessary – should have advance notice in the future. Bob agreed with Gary that it was hard to predict what outside companies would need in the way of help. Virginia said she could think of ways to fund the extra hours. Meanwhile, the board agreed to pay for the extra hours. (Virginia first estimated the tax and later figured it out exactly.) Then:

1. **Discussion ensued about the signs on Pudding Hollow Road and Middle Road** intended to deter large trucks (and others) from following their GPS into impassable roads. Will began the conversation by reminding those assembled that the signs were there for public safety and that when trucks became stuck on the roads they could keep people (and first responders) from getting by. On behalf of the group interested in replacing the signs, Peter Purdy offered a couple of alternative ways to word signs. The first said, “No Thru Traffic: No Trucks Except Deliveries.” The other said, “Not a Thru Road: No Trucks Except Deliveries.” He suggested that these would still be effective but would be more user friendly than the current signs. He expressed the hope that the board would consider and perhaps use the wording.

Will suggested that it would be hard to put all those words on a yield sign and noted that he believed that signs’ appearance and language had to be fairly standard. Hussain suggested a yellow diamond. Leslie Cooper said she had sent a link to sign shapes to Will. Hussain suggested possibly having two signs together, one a yield or caution sign and another lower sign with more words. Ruth Gillan shared a story about meeting a woman at the gate to the State Forest who had been in a tizzy about getting lost. Apparently, the woman had seen the warning signs but had had faith in her GPS. Trina Sternstein argued that the current sign on Pudding Hollow Road was illegal; it should be at an intersection, not in the middle of the road. There was brief discussion about whether it could go at the end of the bridge from Route 8A. Will said that the board would consider the situation and possible alternatives – maybe a yellow diamond, maybe two signs. Bob expressed concern that yellow might not be eye catching enough as a color. He spoke about signs he saw while working in Vermont. Will said the board couldn’t yet commit to specific language; it had to see what would work.

Peter asked whether the sign group could do anything more to help. Leslie noted that people didn’t like calling the road a dead end; there was some discussion about the exact definition of a dead end. Hussain ended by reiterating possibilities, such as big yellow sign with a graphic indicating no trucks were allowed, followed by another sign that said “not a through way” or “local deliveries only.”

Thanks were shared all around.

2. **In road and grant news,** Will talked about the bids that had come in the previous Friday for the King Corner Project. He noted that the bidding had been competitive with nine companies (out of 15 that had expressed interest) submitting bids. The lowest bidder, Maverick, had good numbers, but its references and experience didn't meet the minimum requirements that had been posted. The second-lowest bidder had provided both good references and relevant previous experience. He proposed setting a special Selectboard meeting for Friday, September 25, at 7 p.m. to make a decision to award the contract. He noted that there were still a few details to work out but that those should be resolved by Friday. Bob and Hussain agreed to the meeting.

Will moved on to the Dugway. The engineering firm, VHB, hoped to host a listening session on Wednesday, October 21, at 7 p.m. to look at conceptual-design ideas. He said he would like an invitation to be drafted the following week, the week of September 28. He asked Tinky to meet with him to draft the invitation with input from the other Selectmen.

Gary reported on the paving on East Hawley Road, which Will said looked good. Gary noted that the road crew had cut down some trees for ice prevention. People were moving quickly to retrieve the wood from those trees. He added that it would soon be time to solicit bids for winter sand.

3. **The group moved on to a brief analysis of the previous week's listening** session about short-term rental taxation. Hussain observed that most of the participants had seemed to support exploring the idea to some extent. He suggested borrowing language from other towns and drafting a bylaw to be voted on at the Annual Town Meeting in May. The group briefly debated whether to have another listening session in the spring. The consensus was that this issue could be combined with other bylaw questions in a sole listening session.
4. **The board discussed the quotation from Spectrum for internet service,** which came to \$142 more per month than the town was currently paying. Will asked whether Virginia could find the money somewhere in the overall budget. She said she probably could. Hussain suggested that the three town buildings be split up. The Town Garage currently had Starlink from Gonetspeed, for example, which worked. The group agreed that the main priority should be the Town Office, which needed strong upload as well as download speeds. Tinky said that she would ask Keith Havilland for a quotation for just that building and place the matter on the agenda for the next meeting. Will noted that his Spectrum hookup at home was even faster than expected.
5. **The group looked at the letter Hussain had drafted about trying to acquire land behind the Fire Station from the DCR.** Hussain moved to sign the letter, Bob seconded the motion, and all voted in favor.
6. **The board discussed the letter Hussain had drafted to the FCC about Verizon's intention to discontinue copper landlines in Hawley.** The letter raised several concerns, including the lack of workable alternatives in this area and the susceptibility of other systems to prolonged power outages. In response to a statement that Verizon had started discontinuing the service in nearby towns, he pointed out that their transition away from copper had yet to be approved by the FCC and was in a public comment period. He noted that counties in other states had written to the FCC and stated that he thought Hawley had an obligation to register its concerns, even if they ended up being ignored. Will agreed the Board should sign the letter. No one was particularly optimistic, however.

7. **Hussain reported on the most recent multi-town meeting about the possibility of establishing a shared ambulance service.** Representatives from Hawley, Charlemont, Colrain, Rowe, Buckland, Shelburne, Heath, and Leyden had looked at budgeting options. The most popular of these seemed to be town assessments based on a combination of call volume and local population. The total would probably come to about \$1 million per year, plus some initial start-up costs; the latter would include funds for ambulance upgrades and the addition of bathrooms and sleeping quarters. These might be provided in a trailer at first and then transition to something more permanent. He suggested that Hawley's annual fee might come to \$35,000, with start-up expenses of around \$6000.

Will noted that the annual fee would be more than Hawley was currently paying. Hussain reminded the group that the current model wasn't sustainable, that paramedics needed to get paid and that much of the local emergency staff was aging out. He explained that it wasn't yet clear where the headquarters of the new service would be. Colrain had space, but so did other towns. Ideally, some kind of plan and funding could be proposed at the next May's Annual Town Meeting.

Will suggested that the taxpayers might need preparation if they were to pay more for the service. Hussain said that the town was already budgeting \$10,000 per year; this would be \$25,000 more. He reiterated that there seemed to be no real alternative. He noted that Massachusetts didn't consider an ambulance to be an essential service. Will asked whether there were towns in which the proposed service might not pass. Hussain said time would tell, but also acknowledged that with the large numbers involved the prospects of this venture could be heavily impacted if a larger town voted no.

8. **Tinky relayed a question from Anne Gobi,** who wanted to know what Hawley's primary reason for needing more PILOT money might be. Will and Hussain were uncomfortable giving a single reason. They discussed several. It did not cost less to respond to an emergency in the State Forest than it did in eastern Mass (where PILOT payments were higher). The town had almost no development capacity left. The state-owned land provided outdoor recreation and carbon sequestration. Will and Hussain felt that \$100 per acre might be a good sum with which to start. Will expressed the belief that the state was telling Hawley it was not valued. He observed that it would take just under \$6 million to get all the towns in PILOT up to \$50 per acre. (Even that figure would be a significant increase for Hawley.) The group agreed that the PILOT situation was, as Hussain put it, "a truly multifaceted debacle." Will noted that 48 percent of the town was owned by the DCR and that Fish and Wildlife land ownership was growing. (That department paid no taxes at all on its land.)

In other business, Tinky said the Town Office had been offered a file cabinet, which the Town Clerk thought could replace an older one. The board empowered her to accept the gift.

Tinky said she had been contacted by a meat vendor who wanted a short-term license to sell in Hawley. She was told to put this person in touch with the Health Inspector and to note that a Hawley business license would be needed.

Tinky mentioned that the Franklin Land Trust wanted to come talk to the board about applying for a conservation restriction for part of the Hughes property in East Hawley. She was told that the board's approval was unnecessary; so was a conversation.

Tinky noted that her counterpart in Buckland, Pam Guyette, had called to say that the Selectmen there were working hard to help Spectrum clear legal hurdles so that some people in East Hawley could get broadband. The board asked her to thank Pam and the town for their continued good will, which would be a big help to residents.

Tinky said that the Halloween Party would not take place as the town's small children seemed overcommitted. Hussain suggested a cider party for residents at the charcoal kiln.

Virginia observed that the Selectboard meeting ordinarily scheduled for Tuesday, November 3, would have to be rescheduled as that Tuesday was Election Day. The group decided to move the meeting to Monday, November 2.

Hussain moved to sign the letter to the FCC. Bob seconded the motion, and all voted in favor.

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