

Brookline Community Aging Network

Livable Community Advocacy Committee

Notes

December 4, 2017

Attendance: Alex Beck, Frank Caro, Harvey Cohen, Jerry Feuer, John Harris, Susan Granoff, Carol Seibert, Ann Stitt, Melissa Trevvett, Matt Weiss, and Jackie Wright. Guests: Andy Martineau (Planning Department), Trevor Johnson (Planning Department, and Jay Woodward (former Planning Department director)

1. Zoning as it affects supply of multi-family residential buildings that may attract seniors. Guest, Jay Woodward. Jay Woodward was Brookline's Planning Department director for over 30 years. He retired in 1999. During his service with the Town, a number of taller and more massive residential buildings were constructed in the Beacon Street corridor. Some of buildings approach 20 stories in height. Because of a negative reaction to some of the taller buildings, Town meeting down-zoned the Beacon Street corridor. The – down-zoning remains in effect. Consequently, comparable taller buildings are not currently permitted by zoning.

We discussed our visions of what we would like to see accomplished. Frank and Matt see a need for expansion of housing supply in the Beacon Street corridor. The area is attractive to seniors because it offers wide-ranging attractive community features in a walkable setting. The MBTA green line provides mass transit access to downtown Boston. Tall residential buildings make it possible to provide housing for many people in the Beacon Street corridor. They also provide potential customers for Brookline businesses in the corridor.

We discussed the special need for affordable senior housing. Because of fixed incomes many seniors cannot afford market-rate housing in expensive real estate markets.

We were sidetracked by a discussion of 40B housing developments. We also discussed age-restricted housing. We also discussed Brookline's current aversion to expansion of supply of family housing because of over-crowding in the schools.

State law permits housing that is age-restricted. Housing developments may be limited to those who are 55 plus. (The age cut off may also be higher).

We discussed the limited availability of subsidies for affordable housing. In mixed income housing, higher charges to those living in market-rate units help to subsidize affordable units.

Andy Martineau suggested lower parking requirements in senior building as a strategy to stimulate construction of taller multi-story buildings for seniors. The lower parking requirement is a zoning change that might pass Town Meeting.

We discussed Town Meeting as a barrier to up zoning. Zoning changes require a two-thirds vote in Town Meeting. Residential density is highly controversial within Town Meeting. To be successful, a zoning proposal needs to be very carefully crafted so that it can overcome the objections of Town Meeting members who believe that Brookline is too crowded and congested.

2. Initial meeting of bike-pedestrian subcommittee. John Harris and Susan Granoff gave reports on the initial meeting of the bike-pedestrian subcommittee. Six people attended. Cyclists spoke about their concerns that they are sometimes not seen by motorists; automobiles drive too fast; and sharrows provide inadequate protection for cyclists. Pedestrian concerns discussed include need for improved cross walks, bicycles that are not adequately lit at night, and cyclists on sidewalks. John and Susan are working on finding a date for the next meeting. John and Susan would like the Bicycle Advisory Committee and the Pedestrian Advisory Committee to be represented at future meetings. More subcommittee members are needed.
3. Winchester street lighting for pedestrians. Frank reported that Peter Ditto (Town Engineer) and Tom Brady (arborist) have discussed tree pruning as a strategy to improve lighting for pedestrians. The next step will be more pruning. We will not see the results until the trees leaf out in April. We are skeptical of pruning as a strategy. We believe that additional lighting focused on the sidewalk is needed.
4. Frank neglected to discuss opportunities for winter sidewalk monitoring after storms. The winter sidewalk monitoring team could use some new members. We have a particular need in the St. Mary's shopping district. Those interested in the project should contact Frank.
5. January topic: We will continue our discussion of "up-zoning" as a strategy to increase supply of housing in the Beacon Street corridor.
6. We will postpone our discussion of financial insecurity among Brookline seniors. If Congress passes tax reform legislation, we will devote a future meeting to the effects of the new tax law on seniors. Susan Granoff is following the issue closely.
7. Next meeting: January 8