

Brookline Community Aging Network
Livable Community Advocacy Committee

Notes

October 24, 2016

Attendance: Ann Stitt, Shirley Selhub, Jackie Wright, Mary McShane, Alex Beck, Jerry Feuer, Melissa Trevvett, Matt Weiss, Henry Winkelman, Elaine Mountleigh, Susan Granoff, Asya Zimbov, John Harris, Frank Caro, Laura Vanderhill (guest), and Kathryn Kirshner (Guest)

1. Laura Vanderhill introduced herself as a representative of Springwell, the Area Agency on Aging that serves Brookline and several other municipalities west of Boston. Laura provided an overview of the Older Americans Act. She also provided a brief description of some of the services provided by Springwell. She mentioned that Springwell is an Aging Services Access Point (ASAP) through which it is involved in administration of the state-funded home care program. She explained that Springwell is currently conducting a needs assessment, a process required every four years. The needs assessment will lead to an area plan. Laura reported that the Executive Office of Elder Affairs anticipates supporting the development of some age-friendly initiatives. We identified various needs of seniors in Brookline including improved subsidized transportation and expanded affordable senior housing. Jackie Wright spoke about the work that she has done in the past as a community organizer.
2. Guest Kathryn Kirshner, a Brookline resident, provided us with an introduction to cohousing. Frank invited Kathryn to speak to

inform the committee about cohousing as a housing option for seniors. Cohousing is a housing model that combines private living units with extensive community space and community activity. The model was introduced in Denmark as intergenerational housing. Initially, the premise was that children needed many parents. Subsequently, senior cohousing initiatives were launched. Cohousing came to the United States in the 1990s. The U.S. currently has 131 cohousing communities. Massachusetts has 13. All of the cohousing communities in Massachusetts currently are intergenerational. Some are in municipalities close to Brookline, notably Cambridge, Somerville, and Jamaica Plains. Arlington and Belmont are both forming new cohousing communities.

Kathryn explained that each unit in cohousing has its own kitchen, living room and dining room. There is also a common kitchen, dining room, living room, recreational room, and often a common vegetable garden. The extent to which communities have common spaces is the result of decisions made by its community members. Mary McShane reported that she is a member of a group that meets in Watertown to study the possibility of forming a new cohousing community. Mary informed us that a meeting will be held on Sunday October 30 at 2:00 PM at the Watertown library to talk about cohousing generally and to recruit members for planning of another cohousing community. A Cambridge cohousing community, Cornerstone Village Cohousing is sponsoring the meetings. Study groups follow a workbook written by Charles Durrett, a national

advocate for cohousing. The workbook is published by New Society Publishers.

Kathryn reported that cohousing appeals most to those who are looking for an intentional community. Prospective members of a cohousing community have to commit to a multi-year planning process. They must be tolerant of many meetings with decisions made on a consensus basis. The process may require five to ten years, from start to move in. Most cohousing communities eventually construct their own housing. There are a few “repurposed” buildings, such as re-using a school or factory building.

The ownership model for cohousing is similar to a condominium association. Owners can sell their units. When an owner wants to sell, other owners have the first opportunity to find a buyer.

Cost is a major barrier to cohousing. Cost is a particularly important barrier in Brookline. Some cohousing communities include affordable units. In some cases, the affordable units are subsidized internally.

The national cohousing association holds annual conventions. There is also a national cohousing day when cohousing communities hold open houses. The website is <http://www.cohousing.org/> Information on the annual meeting can be obtained from editor@cohousing.org

3. Sidewalk lighting project. Extensive field work is underway on the sidewalk lighting project. This year we have a dozen volunteers making observations including many attending the meeting: Susan Granoff, Asya Zimbov, Melissa Trevvett, Matt Weiss, Henry Winkelman, Alex Beck, Jerry Feuer, and Frank Caro. We are covering much more ground than we did last year. Susan reports that in neighborhood the lighting is much improved largely because of the installation of LED lights. This year we are reporting nonfunctioning lights immediately through Brookonline. Some lights have already been repaired. Field observations will end very soon as the leaves fall.
4. Susan's warrant article 33 on options to strengthen property tax relief options for low-and-moderate income senior homeowners has received strong support from both the Board of Selectmen and the Advisory Committee. The proposal will establish a committee with a mission to develop property tax relief proposals to bring to Town Meeting next year.
5. Henry Winkelman's Article 34 would encourage planning for an affordable senior housing development above the Kent-Station Streets parking lot. There is some opposition. Planning Director Alison Steinfeld wants to hold off until alternate uses of the property can be considered. Some neighbors would also prefer that affordable senior housing be constructed elsewhere. Henry is hoping for strong support from the Board of Selectmen.
6. Susan reported that the Board of Selectmen and School Committee have selected the Baldwin site for the new elementary school. Susan is now considering other potential threats to the Stop and Shop supermarket. Susan will seek help from the Town's

Economic Development Advisory Board to assure that the Stop and Shop or an equivalent supermarket remains in the location of the current store.

7. The Transportation Board is now accepting applications from volunteers for the Pedestrian Advisory Committee. Interested people should send a “resume and letter of introduction and interest” to Todd Kirrane, Transportation Administrator, Transportation Department, Town Hall. A maximum of six people will be appointed to the committee. Since we advocated for creation of the committee, we have an interest in assuring that there are good applicants.
8. Susan encouraged members to take advantage of early voting opportunities.

Next meeting Monday, December 5