

# Brookline Community Aging Network

## *Livable Community Advocacy Committee*

### **Notes**

July 27, 2015

Attending: Matt Weiss, Roberta Winitzer, Susan Granoff, Jerry Small, Elaine Mountleigh, Roberta Winitzer, John Harris, Joan McCabe, Janet Selcer, Ann Stitt, Saralynn Allaire (Age-Friendly City committee), Alan Allaire (guest), Arlene Mattison (Brookline Green Space Alliance) and Erin Gallentine (Director of Brookline Parks and Open Space Division)

1. Senior-friendly features in Brookline Parks. Our guest was Erin Gallentine, director of Brookline Parks and Open Space. Frank provided background information on the Committee's previous meeting with Erin in 2011 and on the parks agenda for the Age-Friendly City initiative. He reported on the plan to prepare a brochure identifying age-friendly features in parks. He reported that Jean Stringham has taken photographs in the Minot rose garden, Hall's Pond, Olmstead Park, Brookline Reservoir Park, and the Dwight triangle on Babcock Street. A photograph of the new Fisher Hill Park will be added. Susan recommends that the brochure include directions for reaching each of the parks by public transportation.

Erin reported on age-friendly features in recently-completed playground renovations.

- a. Billy Ward playground. The path through the park is now fully accessible. The bench requested by Ruthann Sneider to be placed near the Aspenwall entrance has been ordered. The new bench will offer an overview of the playground. The bench will be some distance from the nearest play element.
- b. Clark playground. The active playground features are now clustered at the rear of the playground. An open area with benches is located in front. A glider appealing to people of all ages has been added.
- c. Waldstein playground. The reopening of the Waldstein playground will be celebrated next week (August 3). A walking path around the entire park has been added. The renovated park has three fully accessible entrances, including a new entrance on Dean Road. The park will include a quiet seating space. The rest room is now accessible. The controversial skate board feature was not included.
- d. Elliot Street playground. The path within the park has been extended so that it circles the park and runs through the middle. The path is fully accessible. The restroom is accessible. The reopening will be celebrated on August 4.

The Fisher Hill Park is under construction. The park will include multiple paths around the park. All of the paths will be accessible. The park will include a parking lot and a restroom. Erin is hoping for an opening in the late spring of 2016.

The garden behind the Putterham Library is being made fully accessible. Saralynn has been leading the advocacy for accessibility of the garden.

The following are among the many topics that came up in the discussion that followed Erin's presentation:

- Saralynn recommended consideration of new activities in the parks including bocce, pickleball, and shuffle board. Erin commented that lawn bocce is currently possible. Frank reported that Newton has four clay bocce courts in Cabot Park.
- John raised the need for water fountains in the parks. Erin reported that efforts are underway to refurbish existing water fountains. Among the desired new features is the capacity for users to fill their water bottles easily. The addition of new water fountains is being considered, but the expenses associated with the installation of water lines are a significant barrier.
- We suggested improved signage to inform park users of the availability of rest rooms.
- Jerry recommends that extended on-street parking be permitted near Brookline parks that do not offer parking lots. The two-hour limit for on-street parking exposes park users to the risk of receiving parking tickets when park activities extend beyond two hours.
- Jerry made the case for restrooms at the Brookline Reservoir Park. The Park and Recreation Commission has supported a request for the addition of rest rooms there. The Community Improvement Plan has funds earmarked for the restrooms at the park in the 2018 fiscal year. Jerry recommends that portable toilets be placed in the park immediately. Erin made it clear that the Town does not provide portable toilets in parks. Many of the Brookline parks lack toilets.
- Susan asked for information on the parks that currently offer Wi-Fi connections. Erin offered to provide us with the information.
- Frank made a case for including paths and benches in Mason Square Park. The park currently lacks both paths and benches. Those who are interested in walking around the park must make use of the street for part of their tour. (Some properties that are opposite the park lack sidewalks.)

2. Assessor's senior-friendly agenda for Town Meeting. Brookline's Assessor, Gary McCabe is planning to bring a proposal to the November Town Meeting to make some adjustments to the property tax work-off program. The changes are triggered by increases in the State minimum wage established by the Legislature. The minimum wage has been increased from \$8 per hour to \$9 per hour. It is scheduled to be increased to \$10 per hour. Town Meeting will be asked to support an increase in the amount of the maximum tax exemption for participants to \$1,125 in FY 2016 and \$1,250 in FY 2017. A proposal will also be made to increase the income ceiling for eligibility from \$47,450 to \$48,800. Presumably, LCAC will want to support these proposed increases since they increase the value of participation for seniors and make the program available to those with slightly higher incomes.

In the spring of 2016, the Assessor wants to bring a proposal to reduce the interest rate for participants in the property tax deferral program. The rate is currently 5%. The amount of the proposed reduction has not yet been determined. We will want to support a reduction since it will make participation in the program more attractive to eligible senior homeowners.

3. Comcast License Renewal. The fact that the Comcast cable license is up for renewal creates an opportunity to advocate for discounts for low income seniors or perhaps low income people generally. The Town may not be able to require Comcast to provide discounts but can use this occasion to lobby for discounts. We lack information on the discounts that are offered currently. The Comcast website does not provide information on discounts. Frank is looking into the discounts and will inform committee members. The committee that is reviewing the Comcast license renewal application will be holding a public hearing in September. Frank is encouraging members to support a meaningful discount for low-income people. Susan agreed to work with Frank to obtain information about senior discounts offered by RCN.
4. Senior Center Parking proposals. Frank reported briefly on the July 7 community meeting concerning expanded parking options near the Senior Center. The meeting was intended for Town Meeting members but attended primarily by neighbors who would be affected. The presence of seniors who want extended parking led to a constructive discussion between the seniors and neighborhood residents about how an extended parking program could be developed that would accommodate interests of both groups. The next step is a meeting convened by the Transportation Board primarily for

neighborhood residents.

5. New business. There was no new business.
6. Next meeting: Monday, September 28 at 3 PM at a location to be determined.