

BROOKLINE COMMUNITY ACTION NETWORK  
Livable Community Advocacy Committee (LCAC)  
April 4, 2022

Attending: Susan Granoff (Chair, Presenter), Alexandra Vecchio (Guest Speaker), Ruthann Dobek (Presenter), David Trevvett (Presenter), Carol Seibert (Notetaker), Janet Gelbart, Maureen Mayotte, Susan Cohen, Yolanda Rodriguez, John Harris, Matt Weiss, Elaine Bakal, Lou Crimmins, Melissa Trevvett, Henry Winkelman, Marion Freedman-Gurspan

1. **Brookline Parklets, Parks, and Open Space**

Guest Presenter: Alexandra Vecchio (Director of Parks and Open Space)

With a Yale Master's degree in Environmental Management and experience at Mass Audubon where she served as Climate Change Program Director, Alexandra Vecchio took up her first position in municipal government in February, 2021. She is Director of one of the four Divisions of the Department of Public Works under Commissioner Erin Gallentine whose Department motto is "The Power of Public Works is in advancing the quality of life for everyone in our community." The Department's Guiding Principles are:

- Provide a clean, green, safe, accessible, inclusive, sustainable, welcoming network of public spaces, assets, utilities, and infrastructure.
- Be the service provider of choice for design, construction, maintenance, and management.
- Create a culture of opportunity, continuous improvement, and excellence to deliver exceptional public projects and services.
- Demonstrate inclusion, equity, and engagement values in our management of public assets, services and employment practices.
- Incorporate climate mitigation and adaptation goals into the development of Capital Improvement Projects and daily public works operations.

In Vecchio's Division of Parks and Open Spaces, there is an emphasis on sustainability and community engagement. One example of all the above values is realized in the Division's work with the DPW Division of Transportation to create Brookline's new "Parklets," a Spring 2021 pilot project funded through the MassDOT Shared Streets and Spaces Program. Two Harvard Street locations, in Brookline Village near Starbucks, and in Coolidge Corner near Otto's Pizza, address community needs for public spaces as well as support for commercial districts. A third tentative location in Washington Square (Beacon at Washington St) for 2022 has grants already in place. Further expansion is planned as an ongoing effort, ideally resulting in one parklet in each commercial district.

Ms. Vecchio provided a glimpse into their innovative processes when she described engaging the local teen population of 12 to 17 year olds. In consultation with Brookline Community Foundation, a design workshop was held in early April, 2022. Fifteen enthusiastic students in 6th-10th grades were asked to conceive and design a Parklet and given a budget. They produced a creative design with wall mural, water feature,

seating and planters. It was a bit daunting for the students to take possible rough weather into account since the parklets are open May through October, to realize that plans must be modified to stay on budget and to remember that someone will need to water and weed the plants. Construction of the student-designed parklet is scheduled for late May at the Coolidge Corner location and will involve the students in building, planting, and painting.

The Parks and Open Spaces Division is responsible for developing and maintaining all of Brookline's public green spaces, parks, playgrounds, sanctuaries, and urban forests. Unfortunately, Brookline has lost its horticultural supervisor position and has numerous open positions for forestry, gardeners, and others. In addition, several workers are out with long-term health issues. As a result, DPW will be looking to community volunteers for ongoing watering and maintenance of rotaries and parklets, as well as Spring planting and Fall clean-up efforts. Watering our public trees occupies the Town's watering truck. In 2021 alone, the Town planted more than 500 public trees.

Questions and comments touched on:

- Senior Tax Work-Off Program as a possible worker resource.
- Trade-off involved in taking parking spaces for parklets.
- Difficulties accessing some open spaces and parks for those who do not drive.
- Pamphlets available on our Town green space assets and their facilities.

Appreciation was expressed for the efforts the Town makes to provide the community with our beautiful public green spaces which were especially important during the confinement of the pandemic.

## **2. Update on Council on Aging ARPA Requests**

Presenter: Ruthann Dobek (Director, Brookline Council on Aging/ Brookline Senior Center)

First, a **special note**: Interviews are being scheduled through the B.U. School of Public Health which is conducting an assessment of social service needs of older adults in Brookline. Interviews will be held on Monday, April 11 at 3 pm in person at the Senior Center or by phone or Zoom. To volunteer to be interviewed, call the Senior Center, 617-730-2770.

**ARPA Funding Requests**: The Council on Aging has submitted several funding requests for monies to address food insecurity, subsidized transportation, mental health, and Senior Center IT needs. A five member ARPA Submission Review Committee will score proposals, discuss the highest scoring requests, and prepare the first slate of recommended proposals for the Select Board to review on April 19. Select Board Member John VanScoyoc has been assigned as the presenter for the COA funding requests. An excellent opportunity for advocacy will be on Monday, April 11 at 7 pm on Zoom when the Review Committee will hold a public hearing. Ruthann will provide LCAC with the registration details and urges either providing testimony at that meeting or emailing your views to the committee before that meeting. Reportedly, 80-90

proposals have been submitted requesting \$160 million. Only \$42 million will be available in total, and the first tranche is just \$21 million. There will be intense competition for those dollars, so our advocacy is urgent.

### 3. Update on Town Election, Election Forum, & Town Government News

Presenter: Susan Granoff (Town Meeting and Advisory Committee Member)

**Town Election:** Tuesday, May 3, 7 am - 8 pm. Massachusetts did not approve early voting for this election, but Absentee Voting is available. Absentee ballot applications can be downloaded from the Town website (Town Clerk>Elections and Voting) or picked up in person at Town Hall. Signed applications can be returned by email to the Town Clerk, if desired. Covid-19 is listed as a valid reason for applying for the application which must be received by the Office of the Town Clerk before noon the day before the election. You will need to request an absentee ballot each calendar year. Susan reminds us to double check your precinct number and polling place since many have changed with re-precincting.

**BrooklineCAN Candidate Forum:** Tuesday, April 12, 3 pm on Zoom including candidates for Select Board, School Committee, and Library Trustee. To register in advance to watch and participate, click here <https://cts.vresp.com/c/?BrooklineCommunityAg/5ef70c6e5e/6619ae73a1/6c967b71ad>. The forum will be video recorded and available for viewing through the BrooklineCAN website or BIG. If you have a question for the candidates, email it to [<questions@brooklinecan.org>](mailto:questions@brooklinecan.org). This appears to be one of the least competitive elections in memory, but we can take advantage of the opportunity to inform potential Town officials about the concerns of older adults in Brookline. Since it is impossible to invite Town Meeting Member candidates, who number around 300 this year, voters can rely on the League of Women Voters of Brookline Voters Guide which is due to be printed in the TAB on April 21 and will be available on the LWVB website [www.LWVBrookline.org](http://www.LWVBrookline.org).

**Town Government News:** There have been many recent comings and goings of Town department directors. New Director of the Department of Public Health and Human Services, Sigalle Reiss, began work on February 28. New Town Counsel, Joseph Callanan, began work at the end of March. The Director of the Library, Sara Slymon, submitted her resignation and will be leaving in mid-May. The Select Board is currently considering whether to approve a new Brookline Police Chief candidate recommended by the Town Administrator; the candidate, Ashley Alexander Gonzalez, has been a police chief in Austin, Texas, for the past 4 years and previously was Deputy Chief of Police of Norwalk, CT's police department. In addition, many current Town department directors report that they are having difficulties filling vacancies within their departments because they are not able to offer salaries and benefits that are competitive with those offered by neighboring and peer communities.

The Town Administrator engaged a Boston University Public Health Professor, Harold Cox, last November to study the need for the town to provide increased social services,

its current organizational structure for delivering these services, and whether there is a need for a new umbrella social services department as recommended in the 2021 Final Report of the Task Force on Reimagining the Police. Professor Cox resigned in March for personal reasons, but this study is still ongoing. The Council on Aging, as the prime deliverer of social services to Brookline residents age 60 and above, is among the existing departments that might be subsumed under this new umbrella department, which would result in a loss of the COA's independent authority over decisions related to its spending, programming, and staff. We will need to speak up and argue vigorously for the continued independence of the COA, the organization that has decades of expertise in delivering social services to Brookline's senior population.

#### **4. LCAC's Warrant Article (WA) Endorsement Policy: Continuation of Discussion and Possible Vote**

After discussion and two votes, it was decided that for a warrant article to receive the endorsement of the Livable Community Advocacy Committee (LCAC), it will require a yes vote by 75% of the committee members present. It was recommended that we continue to focus on only a small subset of warrant articles that relate to issues of special concern to older adults and where our committee's endorsement would be meaningful.

#### **5. Which Warrant Articles on the May 2022 Warrant To Have Presented?**

It was decided that Susan Granoff will request that petitioners of WAs 19 (Vision Zero Action Plan, aimed at reducing deaths and injuries on the roads to zero); 20 (Pedestrian-Friendly Lighting); and 30 (Kent/Station Street Senior Housing Project) present their proposals at the May 9 meeting of LCAC. All three articles are of special interest to Brookline's older residents.

#### **6. Presentation of Warrant Article 20 (Resolution Regarding a Pedestrian-Friendly Lighting Policy)**

Presenter: David Trevvett (Petitioner and LCAC attendee)

After presenting the Pedestrian-Friendly Lighting Committee proposals to the Select Board last Fall, David Trevvett is now submitting a WA calling on the Select Board to move ahead on the Committee's key recommendations. If the Select Board agrees to what the article seeks prior to Town Meeting, the article will not be moved.

**NEXT MEETING: MONDAY MAY 9, 2022 AT 3:00 pm**