

# Brookline Community Aging Network

## *Livable Community Advocacy Committee*

February 3, 2020

### **Notes**

Attendance: Roger Blood, Susan Cohen, Marion Freedman-Gurspan, Susan Granoff, John Harris, Ruthann Sneider, Diana Spiegel, Gordon Szerlip, Melissa Trevvett, Matt Weiss, & Frank Caro

1. The committee will co-sponsor an election forum in late April. Two Select Board members will be elected this year. The early indication is that the Select Board race will be contested. We will be seeking volunteers to help with the forum.
2. Property tax relief for moderate-income senior homeowners. Susan Granoff reported on the work of the Moderator's Committee on Elderly Tax Relief. Susan chairs the committee. Despite efforts to make the Property Tax Deferral program more attractive, only 9 Brookline households are participating. (All are headed by women.) Through analysis of American Community Survey data, the committee has determined that about 12% of Brookline households headed by seniors have incomes that qualify them for the Circuit Breaker tax credit. The estimate is that about 475 households are income eligible. The committee has also learned from the data that 4.6% of Brookline senior homeowner households spend more than half of their total income on housing. Half of these households (91) still have a mortgage on their home. The committee will be submitting a warrant article to Town Meeting for a limited version of the circuit breaker tax credit program that is offered in Sudbury, MA. Eligibility will be limited to those who are unable to qualify for the Tax Deferral program because they have a mortgage on their home. Participants would pay no more than 10% of their total income on property taxes. The committee estimates that about 100 households might qualify. In Sudbury, the program added an average of \$73 to residential tax bills.

Susan invited committee members to sign the warrant article. The committee will hear more about the proposal as the annual Town Meeting approaches.

3. Susan Granoff reported that the Brookline Circuit Breaker Program home rule petition that was passed by Town Meeting in May 2018 (WA25) has been assigned the number H. 3682. The proposal has been assigned to the Joint Revenue Committee. The proposal is stuck in Committee. It is one of many bills assigned to the Committee. The bill applies only to Brookline. It would be financed by Brookline. We discussed various strategies for encouraging the committee to move the bill forward. We discussed email messages, conventional mail, and phone calls.
4. Senior property tax deferral provisions in S1692. Frank reported on an effort by the Massachusetts Councils on Aging (MCOA) to encourage lobbying on behalf of Legislative bill S1692 sponsored by Senators Edward Kennedy, Pat Jehlen and others. The bill would make the Property Tax Deferral program more attractive. Among the bill's provisions is an option for municipalities to pay more reasonable interest rates for a year after participants die. Our representative Tommy Vitolo also has submitted a bill with somewhat overlapping provisions. MCOA is encouraging seniors to place phone calls to the committee chairs encouraging support for the bill.
5. Proposal to reduce use of cars. Matt Weiss reported on a proposal from Todd Kirrane (Transportation Administrator) to replace some curbside parking places with drop-off spots. One of the aims of the approach is to reduce double-parking by delivery trucks and vehicles dropping off passengers. Double parking creates a serious hazard for cyclists. The proposal sparked a lively discussion with various committee members speaking passionately at the same time. There may be reason for us to have a meeting concerned with transportation and parking options for those with mobility limitations. We may invite Todd Kirrane to come to a future meeting to talk about his idea.
6. Aspects of the Welltower Newbury College campus negotiations that affect senior interests. Roger Blood reported that two options are being considered through which Welltower may meet its obligations to provide 15% affordable units. Both options are off site. One option would focus on a residential property on Fisher hill that is now owned by Welltower. Eighteen units of affordable housing would be created on the site. The units would open to people of all ages. The units would be sold to qualifying buyers. The second option is for the Brookline Housing Authority to replace the Colonel Floyd townhouses (Marian Street) with two elevator buildings for seniors. The project would create 105 units of which 45 would be new. The town houses are outmoded since they provide housing on two levels. All the replace units in the towers would be on one-floor. The two options will be brought to Town Meeting. The Fisher hill option would require rezoning; hence a two-thirds vote in Town Meeting.

Ruthann Sneider spoke about her proposal that Welltower make annual payments of

upwards of \$25,000 on an annual basis to help the Senior Center. The payments would be made to the Brookline Multi-Purpose Senior Center Corporation. Ruthann is seeking others who will join her in advancing this advocacy agenda. It is now common for developers to make cash or in-kind contributions as community benefits for the right to develop. In Welltower's case, zoning relief will be needed. Welltower will need a 2/3 vote in Town Meeting.

Next meeting: Monday, March 2

Notes prepared by Frank Caro