

BROOKLINE COMMUNITY ACTION NETWORK  
Livable Community Advocacy Committee (LCAC)  
February 7, 2022

Attending: Susan Granoff (Chair, Presenter), Select Board Member Bernard Greene (Guest Speaker), Carol Seibert (Notetaker), Janet Gelbart, John Seay, Maureen Mayotte, Rosamond Rabinowitz, Jill Schiff, Ruth Seidman, Susan Cohen, Yolanda Rodriguez, David Lescohier, Diana Lees Spiegel, Lou Crimmins, David Trevvett, John Harris, Matt Weiss, Melissa Trevvett, Carol Caro, Roberta Leviton, Ruthann Sneider, Emily Rindermann

1. Update on the Community Preservation Act (CPA) Tax Surcharge Exemption

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

The Community Preservation Act has resulted in a new 1% property tax surcharge which went into effect in February. Seniors who meet certain income requirements are exempt from this surcharge. At this time, eligible income limits are a 2020 total household income of \$70,750 for a one-person household or \$80,850 for a two-person household. Of note, all 2020 out-of-pocket medical costs can be subtracted from income. Susan Granoff has spoken with the new Town Chief Assessor, Rachid Belhocine, and clarified that there is no requirement to provide medical information on the application form if income alone qualifies the taxpayer for the exemption. There is an exemption application form on the town Assessor's Office website section on the Community Preservation Act at the following link: <https://www.brooklinema.gov/2046/community-preservation-act>

Help for filling out the form is available at the Senior Center and at the Town Assessor's Office. Deadline for returning the exemption application is April 1, 2022.

2. A Conversation with Select Board Member Bernard Greene

Guest: Select Board (SB) Member Bernard Greene, former chair and current SB member since 2015; Town Meeting Member since 2006; former general counsel for the Massachusetts Clean Water Trust state agency, now retired from the practice of law.

**Question 1:** Bernard Greene was first asked what had led him to become involved in Brookline government, and why he was motivated to run for a seat on the five-member Select Board, the elected executive leaders of

Brookline's government. He explained that he has always had a strong interest in public service and that his legal practice career has been focused in that sector. He served for many years as Bond Counsel in Cleveland, Ohio; worked for the Attorney General in Nashville and in Massachusetts; and served on the Cleveland School Board before working in the State Treasurer's Office in Massachusetts. But he emphasized that the real reason he decided to join Brookline's town government was because he was asked. A friend suggested he run for Town Meeting Member. He wondered if he might be able to make a contribution to his town, ran, and was elected. From there, he was appointed to the Advisory Committee. Again in 2015, he was asked to run for a Select Board seat. Mr. Greene wants to be clear that we must ask those we would like to see take on roles in the town's government.

**Question 2:** What benefits does Brookline offer to its seniors, about 20% of the population, and what more should the town be doing for seniors, especially today with the toll the Covid pandemic is taking on older people?

**BG:** All politicians realize that they should be responsive to voters who care what you can do for them. In Brookline, seniors are the most responsible group of voters. Because they vote, seniors get attention and town leaders are listening. Seniors need to be vocal about their needs and their reactions to proposals that may affect them. For example, proposals for overrides or for new parking restrictions may not have taken account of the impact on seniors. Let your voices be heard, reach out and speak to town leaders, email your ideas or make public comments at Select Board meetings. Covid revealed threats to the town's seniors and made it obvious that Brookline needs a more robust human services infrastructure. We should be using available funding to address needs for social workers both at the Senior Center and in the town's Department of Health and Human Services. We have a new Director of Public Health and Human Services in Brookline, Sigalle Reiss. The Council on Aging should reach out to her and make sure that seniors' needs are being articulated.

**Question 3:** Should the Select Board make more efforts to bring seniors onto town boards and committees?

**BG:** The SB does make efforts to increase the diversity of commissions and boards, but notices of openings go out to a limited number of people who are active in civic affairs and town politics. If seniors know good potential candidates, they ought to spread the word about available openings and urge them to apply.

**Question 4:** The Council on Aging is the fulcrum of efforts to help seniors, offering services such as transportation to medical appointments and social work. Access to the current Senior Center is difficult for those who do not live nearby. An additional Senior Center more accessible to South Brookline would have a huge impact on the lives of seniors. Is this a priority for the town's budget?

**BG:** The Select Board is very much thinking about how to increase facilities and resources for seniors. A good next step would be to appoint a committee to consider the use of the Newbury site near South Brookline for a satellite center. The senior van service is currently helping older people access the Senior Center. Other efforts could include using federal infrastructure funding to invest in electric vehicles and the necessary infrastructure.

**Question 4:** The Brookline Select Board Committee on Policing Reforms that you chaired made a number of recommendations. Which of those have been implemented or may be in the future? Why has police department morale been declining in recent years?

**BG:** These are complex problems with roots in anti-police rhetoric, salary limits, and difficult access to educational opportunity. The town is looking forward to the arrival of a new police commissioner soon with the expectation that recommendations of the Reform Committee will be taken up. What happens then will depend greatly on what the new chief and the police department and the SB hear from the community. Make your voices heard. Three Reform Committee recommendations have moved forward: a new Police Commissioners Advisory Committee that will strengthen civilian oversight of the police department, a new app for complaints and commendations, and a homelessness task force. For the future, the Reform Committee agreed with the SB Task Force to Reimagine Policing in Brookline that Brookline needs more social service resources both in the police department and in the department of health and human services.

**Question 5:** Does the SB have a mechanism for giving guidance to help the town administrator set priorities for the annual budget?

**BG:** Each year a SB document sets out goals and priorities for the town administrator to address in the budget. In a new approach, each Select Board member is now assigned three departments. The Council on Aging, the library, and town counsel are the three areas SB member Greene is covering. The Select Board members will be meeting with these

departments, working to understand their needs, and to look for solutions. Public hearings with the SB, the Advisory Committee, and Department heads will be held to solicit community input on proposals before they are voted. This will be an opportunity for advocacy during public comment.

A number of additional specific concerns were raised and addressed:

- Attendee Comment: It can be difficult for members of the public to know when to show up to speak in public comment forums.
- It may be dangerous for social workers to be present with the police responding to domestic violence incidents. Do we have precautions in place? BG: Yes, social workers would not be sent into this situation before the police had secured order.
- In the search for a new police commissioner, is there representation from the Police Reform Committee? BG: No, but the search committee is a good group. It might be helpful to include a police-trained person in addition to civilians.
- Why is the town so short-staffed? BG: The Massachusetts Prop 2 ½ is designed to result in structural deficits. Overrides are hard on those at the lower end of the ownership spectrum, including seniors.
- Could the town's department of public works require that homeowners who cannot clear the sidewalks in front of their homes after storms be asked at a minimum to salt, sand, or de-ice the walkways? BG will mention this to Erin Gallentine.
- Welltower promised to provide the Senior Center yearly with \$2500. Are they doing this, and is there a mechanism to ensure compliance? BG feels that Welltower is a responsible developer, but he will check and agrees that verification is important.
- How do items get on the SB agenda? BG: The chair of the SB, the town administrator, and the assistant administrator assemble the agenda. A "futures list" enumerates items to come up later.
- Attendee Comment: Some people may not realize that there is an opportunity for public comment before the beginning of the SB meeting. This would be a way to make yourself heard and perhaps to be added to the "futures list." It is especially effective because everyone who watches the SB meetings on BIG will be made aware of the concern being raised during public comment. BG: Citizen comment does make an impact. The SB does respond both to public comment and to emails.

- Communication from and with the town can be difficult, frustrating, and confusing. It would be helpful to have someone assigned to coordinate and improve the town-public interface. BG: Feng Yang is the town's Chief Information Officer and is working hard on just this improvement. A new position within the Diversity, Inclusion, and Community Relations Department is tasked with community engagement. There could be some overlapping interest with other public communication efforts.
- A number of key department heads and administrators have resigned. What do we know about why this is happening? BG: While a number of these resignations have been the result of retirement, moving away from Brookline etc, it is true that there is a huge problem both in hiring and in retaining good people to work in town government. Having to fill many hugely important administrative positions in a short time is very challenging. This also provides opportunities for finding highly skilled new leaders who can reconceptualize their departments.
- Attendee Comment: Competition for good people is fierce and money tight. Brookline needs succession planning to be ready as current leaders age out.

Bernard Greene was heartily thanked for his service and for taking time to give us the benefit of his insight into the important issues and complex problems faced by the Select Board.

### 3. Update on the May Town Election and BrooklineCAN's April Election Forum

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

Election Day in Brookline will be Tuesday, May 3, 2022. Due to reprecincting, 246 of the 255 seats for Town Meeting Member (TMM) will be on the ballot in addition to a number of town-wide positions to be filled including 1 SB member, 5 Library Trustees, 4 School Committee Members, and 5 Constables. There is a need for more seniors to run for office, especially since many current office holders are choosing not to run. To run for Town Meeting, one must request nominating papers from the office of the Town Clerk, obtain 10 (even better 15) signatures in support, and return the papers by March 15.

There is also a need for seniors to vote. Voting can be done by absentee ballot. To do so, pick up an absentee ballot application at Town Hall or print out the application which can be found at the Town Clerk's page of the

Town's website ([brooklinema.gov](http://brooklinema.gov)) under Elections & Voting. [Note: If the reason you are requesting an absentee ballot is because of Covid-related concerns, don't check off any of the boxes that list other reasons for request, since Covid is not listed on the state form; your ballot will not be rejected by the Town Clerk if no reason is specified].

There will also be three days of early voting at Town Hall. Check the town website for details. <https://www.brooklinema.gov/137/Elections-Voting>

It is especially important to vote this year since the sheer numbers of new TMM's will act as a pivot point for town politics for years to come. If you have any interest in running for Town Meeting this spring but have questions about the duties of a Town Meeting Member or how much time it requires or what's involved with running for that office, please email Susan Granoff at [susangranoff@msn.com](mailto:susangranoff@msn.com), who will be happy to answer all of your questions.

Plans for the usual BrooklineCAN Candidates Forum are being made. BIG needs to have our date since the calendar is filling up. We will need to recruit a chair for the event soon.

#### 4. Discussion of LCAC's Endorsement Policy

Final decision deferred to the March meeting.

#### 5. Other Business

- Discussed a number of town leaders who might be invited to speak at future LCAC meetings.
- Public hearings are held on the budgets of each town department. This is a good opportunity to speak about budgetary concerns. The schedule appears on the first page of the Calendar on the town's website. It is possible to sign up for "Notify Me" to be informed about meetings you particularly want to attend.

**NEXT MEETING: MONDAY, MARCH 7, 2022 AT 3:00 pm**