

BROOKLINE COMMUNITY AGING NETWORK
Livable Community Advocacy Committee (LCAC)
June 13, 2022

Attending: Susan Granoff (Chair), Carol Seibert (Notetaker), Brian Kane (Presenter), Len Wholey (Presenter), Carol Caro, Janet Gelbart, Susan Cohen, Lou Crimmins, John Seay, Yolanda Rodriguez, David Trevvett, Melissa Trevvett, John Harris, Roger Blood, Marion Freedman-Gurspan

1. Report on 2022 Annual Town Meeting

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

The Spring 2022 Town Meeting ran for 7 nights from May 24 to June 8. Since Kate Poverman, Town Moderator, was unable to attend due to health-related issues, Sandy Gadsby, Assistant Moderator, moderated.

The town budget of \$348,597,000 was passed.

A total of 27 Warrant Articles (WA's) were vigorously debated and voted upon.

Only two articles were voted down, getting only about 43-44% favorable action votes:

Article 27 sought to ban the use of gas-powered leaf blowers on all properties of less than one acre by March 2024, and added to existing restrictions on the operation of gas-powered leaf blowers that were passed in 2016. Pushback came from landscapers and some residents. Landscapers said the town should continue to allow gas-powered blowers until electric leaf blower technology improves. Some residents were opposed because they had recently purchased gas-powered machines that comply with the amended regulations passed by the Town Meeting in 2016.

Article 28 would have authorized the town to seek State House approval via a home rule petition to allow 16 and 17 year olds to vote in town elections. An alternative motion, a resolution asking that our State House legislators introduce a state-wide opt-in law, also failed.

Five other WA's were not enacted, but instead referred to various committees and commissions for further study:

Article 22 sought to ban the sale or distribution of products containing fluorinated hydrocarbons or PFA's. This was referred to a moderator's

committee. Fining local stores for selling products that aren't identified as containing PFA's could present a problem.

Article 24 would have created a 3-year moratorium on the installation of synthetic turf on any town property, including at Driscoll School, but allowed for replacement of existing turf fields at Skyline Park and Soule Recreation. After June 1, 2025, new synthetic turf could contain no organic fluorine while replacement synthetic turf would have to conform by June 1, 2030. Referred to the new Athletic Field Surface Task Force created by Article 23.

Article 26 sought to require the town to pay up to 100% financial aid for low-income Brookline families and children, as well as low-income Brookline adult residents to participate fully in the town's recreation programs including summer camp at an estimated annual cost of \$1.1 million. Referred to the Parks and Recreation Commission to report back at the Fall Town Meeting.

Articles 12-13 sought to fight discrimination in Brookline by creating a new, complex, quasi-judicial process for investigating and making determinations about complaints of alleged discriminatory acts committed in Brookline, by a new committee of 7 part-time volunteers. There were many serious concerns raised: Why replicate the work of the Massachusetts Commission Against Discrimination, staffed with full-time professionals and with a budget of over \$8 million? Complaints, even if found valid, would not result in any financial damages paid to the complainant. Any fines assessed would be paid to the town. It would cost the town hundreds of thousands of dollars each year to administer and, according to Town Counsel, would lead to multiple lawsuits from losing respondents questioning whether they had received adequate due process. Referred back to the Commission for Diversity Inclusion & Community Relations for further consideration of these concerns.

Most of the other articles were passed by very large majorities of 82% or higher (the exceptions are noted):

Article 10 Transferring funds of nearly \$200,000 to fund the Planning Process Study Committee to establish a process for developing a new comprehensive plan.

Article 11 Increases the base amount for calculating the annual cost of living adjustment for retired Brookline town employees from \$13,000 to \$15,000.

Article 14 Amends a zoning by-law to permit ZBA (Zoning Board of Appeals) to require large construction projects to coordinate with the local neighborhood during construction to mitigate adverse effects during construction.

Article 17 A zoning by-law amendment to increase electric vehicle (EV)-ready charging stations in new construction and major rehabilitation projects.

Article 18 A zoning by-law amendment to increase accessible bicycle parking in multi-family buildings.

Article 23 Amends the town's by-laws to ban the sale of single use plastics (single use floss picks with plastic handles, plastic ear swabs, non-medical use of plastic wet wipes, etc.) starting in January, 2023. A motion to refer failed.

Article 29 A home rule petition to permit permanent legal residents to vote in town elections. (passed with 63% of votes)

Article 30 A compromise version of WA 30 passed. It allows building a senior affordable living structure on the Kent/Station Street town-owned lot while retaining the 37 existing parking slots in some form whether onsite or not.

Article 31 A resolution opposing a November state ballot initiative seeking to declare app-based drivers for Uber, Lyft, Doordash to be independent contractors, not employees.

Article 32 A resolution calling for an end to the Cuba embargo.

Article 34 A resolution asking that all large-scale deliberations among multiple Town Meeting Members during Town Meeting deliberations be made transparent to the public and to other Town Meeting Members in real time and that Town Meeting Members refrain from more than de minimis communications with each other during Town Meeting that do not create a concurrent public record. (passed with 52% of the vote)

Article 35 A resolution urging Town Meeting Members Association to make the email listserve communications for Town Meeting Members open to the public on a "read-only" basis. (passed with 54% of the vote)

A number of the above articles were of great interest to those attending the LCAC meeting. The resulting questions and comments were too extensive to report here, but made for a very lively forum.

2. Presentation: Vision Zero (A Program to Eliminate Traffic Fatalities through Changes in Roadway Design and Related Policies)

Presenters: Len Wholey (Brookline Transportation Board and Town Meeting Member) and Brian Kane (Chair, Brookline Transportation Board and Executive Director, MBTA Advisory Board)

a. The problem of car crashes in Brookline

There are about 1000 car crashes in Brookline per year. Len Wholey has taken 2021 data from a Brookline Police spreadsheet to create a map of the crashes with car crashes resulting in injury shown in red. (*See the attachment with the slides provided with this presentation.*) Of note: crashes often occur in close proximity to our Brookline schools.

A second visual presented data on motor vehicle (MV) crashes in Brookline from 2016-2021 and showed the yearly average number of MV crashes with injury (100), MV crashes with pedestrians (50), MV crashes with pedestrian injury, and MV crashes with bike with injury. Approximately one third of car/bike crashes result in injury to the cyclist. The COVID-19 pandemic resulted in fewer than usual crashes.

Who is at fault? Of the 253 MV crashes with pedestrians over the last 6 years, 119 assigned fault neither to the pedestrian nor to the driver (47%). In 45% of the crashes (115), drivers were found at fault. In 19 crashes, (7.5%) pedestrians were found to be at fault.

b. Brookline wants to improve pedestrian, cyclist, and motorist safety

In 2017, Brookline decreased the default speed limit to 25 mph. A procedure has been created to allow residents to request the town to evaluate and implement traffic calming for specific streets. Todd Kirrane, Brookline's Transportation Administrator, is tasked with overseeing these efforts as well as those required by the Complete Streets Designs, Bike & Pedestrian Planning, and Public Transit improvement plans. Kirrane states that there is a backlog of safety-related requests that are awaiting study. 37 requests include calls for stop signs, new crosswalks, traffic signal operation changes, etc. Twenty-five petitions, some dating back to 2015, call for traffic calming actions and are pending investigation. These efforts require time and money.

Warrant Article 31 passed in November 2019 for Brookline to prioritize sustainable transportation and to establish a sustainable transportation engineer or planner position, so the Transportation Department should be getting some help with their work.

An example of effective street design changes that have already resulted in fewer pedestrian and bike crashes is the bike lane installation on Beacon St from Marion St to Westbourne Terrace. There had been a history of about one cyclist injury per year on that roadway. Since the 2016 installation of the bike lane, that number is zero.

c. What is Vision Zero?

Vision Zero is a strategy to eliminate all traffic fatalities and severe injuries, while increasing safe, healthy, equitable mobility for all. First implemented in Sweden in the 1990's, it has proved successful across Europe and is now gaining momentum in American cities.

The traditional approach considers traffic deaths to be inevitable and relies on perfect human behavior and individual responsibility to prevent collisions. The belief is that saving lives is expensive. In contrast, **the Vision Zero approach believes that traffic deaths are preventable if we accept that human failings are inevitable and we work to prevent fatal/severe crashes by a systems approach that need not be expensive.**

d. Steps toward Vision Zero in Brookline

The strategy includes lowering speed limits, redesigning streets, implementing meaningful behavior change campaigns, and making data-driven decisions. Getting to our goals will require political commitment, a systems approach based on data, multidisciplinary leadership, additional resources, and an action plan with accountability.

The Select Board has agreed to appoint a Vision Zero Study Committee to research/develop/propose a Vision Zero Policy. The Select Board has pledged to support the appropriation of sufficient funds necessary to retain professional and technical consulting services to work with the Vision Zero Study Committee and relevant staff to develop the Vision Zero Policy and an Action Plan to implement the policy.

Comments and questions followed.

- A Vision Zero warrant article was not moved at the Spring Town Meeting because the Select Board had already agreed to the proposal to form a study committee.
- Double bike lanes would improve bicycle movement on Babcock Street. This apparently was rejected due to resulting loss of parking spaces.

- We should not make drivers the villain. Seniors need to be able to drive in Brookline.
- Cyclists don't always follow the rules of the road. Problems with cyclists injuring pedestrians are likely to get worse with more electric bikes on the road.
- Why is there a backlog of requests to improve safety for drivers, pedestrians, and cyclists? Ans: Because we have not prioritized it. Budgets are statements of values and priorities.
- How do speed bumps help? Ans: By raising awareness and forcing cars to slow down.
- Moving away from cars is good for the climate. We need more public transportation options to reduce the need to drive.
- If drivers do not slow down in response to signage and enforcement, they can be slowed by roadway design.
- We have to be sure that safety changes we institute do not impair the ability of first responders to move quickly.
- Signage telling cyclists to walk their bikes in the commercial districts is not working.
- Restaurant tables on sidewalks or in street spaces formerly used for parking are not helping.
- Should we be looking beyond municipal solutions? Should Brookline be lobbying for vehicle changes such as reducing the size of SUV's? Ans: These regulations come from the federal government, so the approach would have to be to lobby our Congressional representatives and senators.
- Who has jurisdiction over roadways? Ans: If a road is built or rebuilt with state or federal money, there are limits on what the municipality can do. It would be helpful to move more Brookline roads to local jurisdiction. Lobby Mass DOT.
- Pedestrian-friendly street lighting is needed. Reportedly DPW has requested ARPA funding to study and create a master plan. This is apparently still in the queue.
- The state will not pay for pedestrian-friendly lighting in the redesign of Washington Street. Reportedly MA DOT considers it "decorative."
- The members to the Select Board Committee on Vision Zero have apparently not yet been named. We do not know the reporting timeline. It is going to require continued lobbying to get this done. We can and should have public comment at Select Board meetings.
- How long did it take surrounding communities to study and implement their Vision Zero programs? Ans: Len Wholey will try to investigate what was done by our neighbors.
- We will need careful public education. In some communities, there was backlash when the public saw that they would have to make some

sacrifices to get to Vision Zero. We should make efforts to listen to input from a wide cross-section of residents. Not everyone will love this plan. Outreach will have to be done. This will mean that the make-up of the Vision Zero Select Board Committee is important.

- Does the Transportation Board coordinate with WalkBoston? Ans: Len Wholey is a member of WalkBoston and has reached out to them.
- Does the town publicize car crashes? Ans: It is rare to see crashes reported. The data are available, but you have to ask. When a police report has been filed, you can request that, but it will be in redacted form. Neighboring Newton posts all of their car crashes in unredacted form.
- We could think about publicizing an incident report on the town website without names, if privacy is an issue. It may be helpful to bring these events to regular consciousness.

3. **Discussion: LCAC Self-Evaluation**: postponed to the next meeting.

4. **Other Business**

Roger Blood reported that there will be a third community-wide forum on the Housing Production Plan on Monday, June 27, 7-9 pm on Zoom. This will include some location-based “visioning” exercises for six specific locations to give an idea of potential resulting density. Look on the town website under the Housing Production Plan for details.

NEXT MEETING: MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 12 AT 3 PM ON ZOOM

We plan a summer hiatus: no July or August meeting.