

BROOKLINE COMMUNITY AGING NETWORK  
Livable Community Advocacy Committee (LCAC)  
May 9, 2022

Attending: Susan Granoff (Chair); Carol Seibert (Notetaker); Carol Caro, David Gladstone, Susan Healy, Liz Linder, Paula Friedman, and Henry Winkelman (Presenters).

Janet Gelbart, Susan Cohen, Lou Crimmins, David Trevvett, John Seay, Marion Freedman-Gurspan, Yolanda Rodriguez, Ruth Seidman, Maureen Mayotte, Linda Pehlke, Anne Meyers, John Harris, Clifford Brown, Roger Blood

**Presentation (and Possible Vote) on Warrant Article 30: Resolution regarding eliminating the parking requirement at the Kent/Station St Senior Affordable Housing Development** (Petitioners: Jeff Wachter, Carol Caro, Jennifer Raitt, Mariah Nobrega, Deborah Brown)

**PRO:**

**Carol Caro** (Petitioner and former Town Meeting and Advisory Committee Member)

To start, a brief history of the concept for an affordable senior housing development at the Kent/Station St. Parking lot. Around 2013, there was a movement to explore creating housing over town-owned land in Brookline. In 2016, Town Meeting approved the formation of a committee whose mission was to “develop a proposal for suitable air rights development of Affordable Senior Housing over the Kent/Station Street Parking Lot, with retention of the public parking on the site.”. There are currently 39 parking spaces of which 37 are utilized primarily by area merchants during the daytime and by residents/guests overnight. Permits for businesses cost \$25 per year and 75 cents per hour of use.

A Request for Proposals (RFP) was released in July, 2019. After review, the committee recommended that the Select Board move forward with a bid by 2Life Communities, (the developer of the KI Senior Housing project). A Kent Street Negotiation Committee met in 2021-2022 to discuss strategies with 2Life Communities. The committee quickly decided that utilizing air rights over the parking lot would not be feasible since support columns, elevators, and a pass-

through between Kent and Station Streets would result in a decrease in the existing parking. In March, 2022 the Negotiation Committee recommended no action by the Town on the disposition of the project to 2Life Communities due to significantly increased labor and materials cost estimates over the months since the initial RFP response. The developer was now suggesting that it would cost \$5 million to \$7 million more to complete the project, an amount that was not feasible for the Town or for the developer. Retention of parking for residents and merchants was found to be a major cost driver for the project.

Warrant Article 30 is a resolution that urges that the Town no longer require that proposals for building a senior affordable housing construction project on the Kent/Station St. town-owned parking lot keep all of the existing 39 parking spaces, while trying to keep as many parking spaces on site as is feasible at a reasonable cost.

At the public hearing for WA 30 held by the Ad Hoc Subcommittee of the Advisory Committee, there were many statements from local merchants opposing WA 30. In response, the subcommittee proposed an amended version of WA 30, which notes that (1) merchants in Brookline Village are heavily reliant on the parking spaces at this site for the cars of their employees (2) no alternative public parking currently exists in the Brookline Village area, and (3) Brookline Village residents already have difficulty finding legal metered parking spaces, a problem likely to be worsened by future planned development projects.

Therefore, the subcommittee's amended version of WA 30 resolves that the Town pursue affordable senior rental housing on the site in a manner that is cost-efficient for the Town, but only after the Department of Planning and Community Development and the Transportation Board have secured adequate sites for the 39 permitted merchant full-day public parking spaces currently located on the Kent/Station Street lot, whether or not located on the site, and without decreasing the total number of metered public parking spaces currently available in Brookline Village.

Carol Caro and her co-petitioners respond that these stipulations are too restrictive and will have the result that the envisioned housing project will not happen. They ask those who agree with WA 30 to contact their Town Meeting Members to voice support for affordable senior housing at Kent/Station Street.

The Town Clerk will soon post the official listing of Town Meeting Members for each precinct.

## **CON**

- 1. David Gladstone** (President, Brookline Chamber of Commerce; member, Small Business Advisory Committee; and Brookline Bank, Business Banking Development Officer)

Affordable senior housing in Brookline is a priority. Opponents of WA 30 are not against creating such housing. It is not necessary to make this an either/or answer. Why not have both parking and housing? Taking parking will result in a negative impact on local small business. Todd Kirrane (Transportation Division of DPW) cannot create non-existent parking spaces. Forty to 60 businesses in Brookline Village have spoken: they need the 39 spaces somewhere in the Village. The revision of WA 30 proposed by the Ad Hoc Subcommittee is reasonable. We should build the housing, and provide 39 parking spaces, even if these are not all on-site.

- 2. Susan Healy** (Owner, HC Studio)

We need to try to see the problem from both sides. Affordable housing for seniors is important. We need even more than the current number of parking spaces in Brookline Village. Together we can find a solution that works for both. The original RFP is outdated financially. COVID has resulted in a 30% increase in the cost of everything. The housing concept is great and can be done. The definition of a community is “people working together to build success for everyone.” Ms. Healy has owned a Brookline hair salon for 22 years. Even pre-COVID, and with the existing 39 parking spaces, it was a struggle for employees and clients to park. Many of her employees commute from distant towns and cannot rely on public transportation. This required creative solutions such as paying for her employees and clients to use Lyft to reach the salon. Reducing Village parking will have a trickle-down impact on teachers, residents and guests in the Village. We need to revisit the outdated RFP and work to avoid creating a divide over the goals of creating housing and retaining parking.

- 3. Liz Linder** (Owner, Liz Linder Photography and newly elected Town Meeting Member)

As a close Brookline Village neighbor of the proposed project and owner of a business that overlooks the Kent/Station St parking lot, Ms. Linder is paying close attention to the outcome of this proposed development. At the same time, she considers affordable housing to be a priority for the town. She is among the 40-60 Brookline Village business owners who feel that the essential character of the Village is at stake if we choose to build the housing without the mandated parking. There may be more appropriate sites in the area for such a project where parking and housing interests can all be served. The current site will result in choked services and roadways and fails even to allow adequate parking for the intended residents of the building. If there is so much friction around this proposal, it may not be the way to go. This requires a thoughtful approach on where Brookline puts its housing.

4. **Paula Friedman** (Town Meeting Member)

Ms. Friedman is long-time Town Meeting Member (around 20 years) and a 40-year resident of Brookline, member of the Zoning Bylaw Committee, past Co-Chair of the Brookline Neighborhood Alliance, member of LCAC and of the Senior Center Advisory Committee. Her career has been dedicated to geriatrics and gerontology and she is a strong advocate for older adults.

WA 30 reflects a lack of awareness of how important it is for seniors who want to drive to have access to their cars and to parking spaces for their cars. The original proposed development was to have 44 spaces to accommodate residents, visitors, service personnel and staff. The current proposal would potentially eliminate the requirement for even 39 parking spaces. Thirty-nine spaces would provide only  $\frac{2}{3}$  of a parking space per unit.

Driving is one of the most important sources of personal independence and life satisfaction for older adults. An NIH meta study finds that driving cessation is associated with a decline in general health and physical, social and cognitive function. It is associated with an increased risk of admission to long-term care, depressive symptoms, and mortality in older adults.

If the current proposed Warrant Article is flawed, we need to look again to find a way to preserve parking for older drivers, business owners and their patrons and employees while creating affordable senior housing in Brookline.

### **5. Henry Winkelman** (Former Town Meeting Member)

After his mother suffered a stroke and required care at home for a year, Henry Winkelman realized that the Baby Boomers are aging and in need of affordable housing accessible for the disabled. He went on to obtain a Masters degree at Georgetown University in real estate development with an emphasis on creating affordable housing. He has spent years advocating for the use of air rights over town-owned parking lots. In this solution, the town never loses ownership of the property.

Four California projects (slide show) exemplify how air rights development makes it possible to create affordable housing for seniors while maintaining public parking spaces. Two local developments offer further examples: The Massachusetts Turnpike Authority sold air rights over the Pike to build a grocery store, and the Courtyard Marriott Hotel sits on what was formerly the Webster Street Parking Lot. However, the latter project put its required parking underground. It is not Brookline town parking and is not as accessible or inexpensive as the town's meters.

The original WA 34 approved in 2016 (which was proposed to Town Meeting by Henry Winkelman) was based on the air rights concept and stipulated that the existing parking spaces would be retained. Town Meeting overwhelmingly approved the article based on assurance that the existing public parking would not be lost. Mr. Winkelman believes there was not sufficient effort to examine, study, or consider the air rights concept. Today, there is an even greater need for Brookline affordable senior housing, but WA 30 makes no mention of air rights and proposes to eliminate the requirement for retaining the existing spaces. Brookline needs to further explore air rights development as a viable solution that meets the need for both housing and parking.

Carol Caro responded that she has spoken to several of the committee members who were assigned to look at ways to accomplish the mission of WA 34. They apparently did consider air rights but found that the concept would not apply at Kent/Station St. because elevators, supporting columns and other structural elements would require the loss of some of the existing public parking.

There followed a lengthy and lively discussion with many questions and comments offered by LCAC attendees. Some of the points made include the following. In some cases, ideas from several speakers are included in one bullet.

- 2Life Communities created their housing project at Williams and Harvard with no designated parking for residents. Residents of the new housing were not accepted if they intended to have cars.
- Todd Kirrane is willing to study what replacement parking might be available in the area if fewer than 39 spaces are retained at Kent/Station St. However, he advises that this is a difficult undertaking.
- Brookline Village parking spaces are being taken for parklets and for restaurant outdoor dining. Once parking spaces are taken, they don't come back.
- Medical offices, Town Hall, the Senior Center, all the commercial areas in town need to find more parking. Our local businesses need support.
- This Warrant Article is simply hoping for a magic solution. The town needs to do the housing development in a location that can support the housing and the parking required. There was recently a plan for a school in Brookline on a site that most residents did not want. That plan failed.
- The town has many competing needs. Brookline by Design wants a comprehensive plan for town development. We need to take the time to hear all points of view and get to a reasoned solution.
- Manhattan seniors live well without cars because they have excellent access to public transportation.
- Newton has offered subsidized transportation for \$2 per ride to any part of Newton.
- Covid makes taking public transportation risky for high-risk seniors. Not everyone is able to walk or bike. Cars are necessary to bring home groceries and other shopping.

- If engineers in California found it possible to build housing over parking lots, why is Brookline rejecting the concept? Locally, Somerville and Central Square as well as Chicago, New York City, and Washington, D.C. all have encouraged air rights development. The strategy works and is a viable way to get both housing and parking.
- Decreasing parking may decrease the number of cars on the road, a goal for Brookline's sustainability efforts.
- If we eliminate parking, we discourage patronage of Brookline businesses by residents of nearby towns.
- Underground parking is prohibitively costly: \$50-100,000 per space.
- Using air space over the parking lot creates a height issue and may run into conflict with the neighbors' expectations.
- Town Meeting in 2016 voted on a project in which all the existing parking would be retained. We can't change those terms. Unfortunately there was no interim report from the negotiating committee who were given a charge and proved unable to fulfill it. This was to be a pilot project. One advantage of WA 30 is that it clarifies that the original charge was not completed. There has not been enough energy applied to finding a way to get this project done. The longer it takes, the more costly it will be.
- WA 30 is asking to go forward with the housing development while keeping as many parking spaces as feasible with reasonable cost to the town. The final proposal will go back to Town Meeting and require a  $\frac{2}{3}$  vote.
- The Town needs to look again at the whole project in light of newly flagged legal requirements in MGL Ch. 149 (public construction bidding laws.). The Attorney General's office has advised that this development including public parking would require publicly bidding the project, a step that would affect the project budget due to cost and time inefficiencies associated with the public bidding process.

At the conclusion of the meeting there was consensus that no vote would be taken on whether LCAC supports Warrant Article 30. All the presenters were thanked for providing us with this opportunity to learn about the many facets of the complex problem of balancing the need for affordable senior housing while maintaining currently available public parking spaces. There was general agreement that both needs are important and that we want to avoid pitting one interest against the other.

Other Business was deferred to the June meeting.

**NEXT MEETING: MONDAY, JUNE 13, 2022 AT 3:00 PM**