

Brookline Community Aging Network

Livable Community Advocacy Committee

Notes

September 9, 2019

Attendance: Pat Ahlen, Roger Blood, Susan Cohen, Marian Freeman-Gurspan, Susan Granoff, Carol Seibert, Matt Weiss, Frank Caro. Guests: Martha Bullock, Matt Baronas. Susan Gittelman, Debbie Jones-Steele, Yolanda Rodríguez, and Linda Okun

1. Affordable housing: new affordable units and rent trends in existing units. Virginia Bullock of the Planning Department reported that Brookline housing rental prices are going up rapidly. She gave information about market rental prices of housing units of various size. She also reported estimates of what households with median-income and - those at the poverty threshold can afford to pay for housing. There is a big gap between rental costs and what many people can afford. The continuing rise in housing rental costs is driven by job growth in the metropolitan area.

Virginia described the work of her unit in administering the Town's housing trust fund. The money comes from fees paid by developers in lieu of their providing a sufficient number of affordable units. Some of the Housing Trust Fund money is used for new affordable housing such as the BHA's Dummer Street project. Some of the funds are used for preservation of existing housing such as Beal Street and some of the Brookline Housing Authority buildings. Her unit is also working on affordable 40B projects. If all of the proposed projects are built, they will add 236 affordable units. Nearly half of the proposed units will be for older people. The 2Life project on the Temple KI site will add 62 senior units. Two 55 plus projects have been proposed, one on Boylston Street in Chestnut Hill and the other on Beacon Street in Coolidge Corner. Each will have 11 affordable units. Hebrew Senior Life is giving serious thought to building more units on a site that it owns on Centre Street.

Matt Baronas reported that those with Section 8 vouchers often find difficulty in finding rental units in Brookline because the value of the vouchers falls short of the cost of rental units in Brookline.

Roger Blood explained the role of the Housing Advisory Board in developing policy to guide use of the Town's affordable housing trust funds.

Roger reported that 3 nonprofit organizations bid on the Kent-Station street senior housing project. The next step is for the Select Board to appoint a committee to review the proposals. If the project is successfully developed, it will add 40 to 60 units for seniors. Most of the units, if not all, will be affordable. The idea of building affordable senior housing on Town-owned parking lots originated with Henry Winkleman, a LCAC member. BrooklineCAN has supported this initiative for several years. The Kent-Station Street project can be considered a pilot. If successful, similar projects will be proposed for some other Town-owned parking lots.

2. Accessory Dwelling Unit (ADU) proposal. Roger Blood also made a presentation on Warrant Article 19 that seeks to establish an accessory dwelling unit bylaw for the Town. Roger explained the accessory dwelling unit concept. The major aim of the proposed bylaw is to provide an option for additional affordable housing. A second aim is to assure that existing units meet the Town's safety standards. Roger provided reasons why an ADU may be helpful to families at every stage of the life cycle. He reviewed the history of accessory dwelling units in Brookline. Currently the Town has an estimated 200 illegal accessory dwelling units. About 10 years ago, Town Meeting narrowly rejected an ADU bylaw proposal. The proposal had majority support but lacked the two thirds required for zoning bylaw changes. In recent years a number of municipalities in MA have added accessory dwelling unit bylaws to relieve the shortage of affordable housing. Newton is one of the municipalities that have recently enacted an accessory dwelling unit bylaw. The Newton experience is that only a modest number of new units have been added.

Roger briefly explained some of the specific provisions of the proposed bylaw. In most cases, the accessory unit would be limited to 750 square feet. Another requirement is that either the main unit or the accessory unit has to be owner-occupied.

Roger answered many questions about the proposal.

3. Update on electric scooter trial. In November, Town Meeting will consider a proposal to suspend electric scooter activity until the Legislature has passed legislation regulating electric scooters. The Warrant Article places responsibility for regulating electric scooters with the Transportation Board after the Legislature acts. Scooters would be permitted only after Town-approved regulations were in place. Select Board Member Heather Hamilton is one of the sponsors of the proposal. We will consider endorsing the proposal.

4. This summer the Town installed new benches at 10 locations along Beacon Street. At some locations, more than one bench has been installed. The installation of the new benches is largely the result of BrooklineCAN advocacy.
5. Frank identified four warrant articles of special interest to seniors
 - a. Article 8 an act authorizing the Town of Brookline to offer a senior discount program for water and sewer rates.
 - b. Article 9 a real estate transfer tax with Town's appropriation of funds into the Municipal Affordable Housing Trust Fund
 - c. Article 16 shared E-Scooter or other micro-mobility pilot programs or implement any permanent shared E-Scooter or other micro-mobility services
 - d. Article 19. Accessory dwelling unit bylaw

We will discuss these warrant articles at our next meeting and consider endorsing one or more of them.

6. Frank is seeking a volunteer from the committee to help at the Committee's table at the BrooklineCAN annual meeting September 19. Help is needed for one hour (5 to 6 PM).
7. Frank is also seeking volunteers to help at Brookline Day, September 22 between 11 and 3. He is looking for people to help at the table for 30 to 60 minutes.
8. Next meeting: October 7
9. Susan Granoff expressed concern about a limited service hotel that is being proposed on Webster Street in the building that used to house a nursing home. The hotel proposal is supported by the Brookline Economic Development Advisory Board. Some Town Meeting members are concerned about the implications of the owner's poor reputation. The owner has received extensive negative publicity because of the poor condition of properties in Boston rented to students. Concerned residents of the neighborhood close to the Webster Street property are worried that the owner may neglect the property and allow undesirable activities. Susan believes that the matter is of concern to BrooklineCAN because of the proximity to Housing Authority senior buildings. Susan is asking that members attend an upcoming meeting of the Zoning Board of Appeals to register their opposition.

Notes by Frank Caro