

BROOKLINE COMMUNITY AGING NETWORK
Livable Community Advocacy Committee
April 29, 2024

Attending: Susan Granoff (Chair), Janet Gelbart (Notetaker), Roger Blood (Guest Presenter), Linda Olson Pehlke (Guest Presenter), Ruthann Dobek (Guest Presenter), Lincoln Heineman (Guest Presenter), Sana Hafeez (Guest Presenter), Susan Cohen, Regina Frawley, Marion Freedman-Gurspan, Perry Grossman, Katie Hope, Maureen Mayotte, Fran Perler, Yolanda Rodriguez, John Seay

I. Presentation and Discussion of Warrant Article 13 (amendment to Zoning By-law to reduce restrictions for Accessory Dwelling Units)

Guest Participant: Petitioner Roger Blood (Chair, Housing Advisory Board)

II. Presentation and Discussion of Proposed Amendment to Warrant Article 13

Guest Participant: Linda Olson Pehlke, TMM Precinct 17, Advisory Committee Member

In November, 2019, Town Meeting approved a zoning bylaw to encourage the creation of Accessory Dwelling Units (ADUs) to provide flexibility for families as their needs change over time, increase the diversity of housing choices, and provide a non-subsidized form of affordable housing, with minimal adverse effects on Brookline's neighborhoods. Since its passage, only one new ADU has been constructed and approximately 150 pre-existing ADU's remain under the radar and may not comply with either the zoning bylaw or the Town's building code.

Mr. Blood has proposed an amendment on behalf of the Housing Advisory Board (HAB) to incentivize creation of the additional housing envisioned in the bylaw by:

- increasing the maximum square footage by right from 750 to 900 square feet
- increasing the maximum square footage by special permit from 950 to 1200 square feet
- retaining only the Town Assessor's Residential Exemption data base for the annual documentation of owner occupancy now required to monitor compliance
- eliminating some of the restrictions on the exterior appearance such as the placement of front doors, mailboxes, and utility meters
- eliminating the requirement for owner occupancy provided that the investor-owner sells the property to an owner-occupant within 24 months or deed-restricts the unit at affordable rent levels for at least 15 years.

Additional details about the proposal are contained in Mr. Blood's slide presentation which is included with these notes. He pointed out that the Governor has proposed a law requiring as of-right construction of ADUs which would eliminate without conditions all owner-occupancy requirements and pre-empt local zoning laws. If passed this would necessitate further amendment to our ADU zoning bylaw.

Ms. Pehlke, who serves on the Land Use Subcommittee of the Advisory Committee, agrees that ADUs fill an important niche in Brookline's housing mix. However, she is concerned that eliminating the ADU Bylaw's current requirement for owner-occupancy will result in de facto

two-family zoning in single family districts. She indicated that passage of the Governor's proposal is highly unlikely given the level of pushback it has received from municipalities across the State, and suggests that current changes to the existing law be minimal pending action from the State and the Town's Comprehensive Planning process which is just getting underway. The Massachusetts Area Planning Council reports that highly capitalized investors and all cash purchasers outcompete individual homeowners, driving up housing costs.

Her amendment to Mr. Blood's proposal supports increasing the of-right maximum size of ADUs to 900 square feet, relying on the Residential Exemption data base for annual certification by owner-occupants, and the recommendations for exterior changes. However, it recommends reducing the maximum size of ADUs under special permit to 950 square feet and, most significantly, would maintain the requirement for owner occupancy. Additional details of her proposal are contained in Ms. Pehlke's slide presentation which is included with these notes.

Mr. Blood and Ms. Pehlke are in negotiation about changes to the square footage requirements and are likely to reach agreement before Town Meeting, but the elimination of the owner occupancy requirement remains unresolved. Mr. Blood believes that the restrictions on developers contained in his proposal should be sufficient for the owner occupancy requirement to be dropped without negative consequences but Ms. Pehlke strongly disagrees. Comments from participants supported her position. Given that the final language of the bylaw amendment is in flux, the sense of the LCAC was to make no recommendation to the BrooklineCAN Steering Committee for action at this time.

III. Presentation and Discussion of Warrant Article 12 (expansion of Senior Tax Work-off Program)

Guest Participants: Petitioners Lincoln Heineman, Finance Director, and Ruthann Dobek, Council on Aging Director

Ms. Dobek spoke on behalf of the Council on Aging and explained that the purpose of Warrant Article 12 is to bring the Town's Senior Tax Work-off Program into alignment with recent changes in State law increasing the maximum tax write-off allowed to \$2,000 per year from \$1,875. Under this State program, qualifying Seniors lower their tax bills in exchange for working in Town departments. The program is the most successful of the Town's efforts to provide tax relief to low income seniors [residents age 60 and older with total gross income not exceeding \$82,950] and currently has 35 participants. Most seniors work at the Senior Center, but Ms. Dobek hopes other departments will expand their participation which dropped off during Covid. She described the program as a win-win for Town staff and seniors. Warrant Article 12 has the unanimous support of the Select Board, the Advisory Committee and the Board of Assessors. The sense of the LCAC was to recommend that BrooklineCAN's Steering Committee add its support to the measure.

IV. A Conversation with Select Board Candidate Sana Hafeez

Guest Participant: Sana Hafeez

Ms. Hafeez felt it was a blessing to grow up in a multi-generational community and benefit from the wisdom and experience of elders. If elected, her priorities are to solicit meaningful feedback and solutions from community members to get wider buy in for the Town's decisions. For example, the warrant articles discussed today reflect the concerns of the people who will be impacted by the outcomes; implementing their feedback will lead to a better result.

Q&A

1. Tell us a little more about your background and why you are running for the Select Board.

I grew up in the South where the political landscape is a lot tougher on things that we already have in Brookline. I have lived here for 2-1/2 years and work as a community organizer for a local non-profit. The issues facing the Town have been around for a long time but the solutions the community is looking for haven't taken hold. By working in the community I can see the common threads among the issues we are facing. Things stop at the Select Board. We can't keep having governance that looks like us but doesn't represent our needs.

2. In the materials you provided to us you mentioned things like affordable child care, affordable housing, and better nutrition for everyone. I agree that we need these things, but the Town can't afford what it currently provides. How will you pay for it all?

We need a comprehensive plan to foster development and grow the revenue base. But we also need to re-assess the budget process, examine the effectiveness of the programs we have, and re-channel resources into areas the community has identified.

3. How do we make up for the loss of ARPA funding? Tax increases are limited under proposition 2-1/2 and we don't have a lot of room to foster additional growth. How do we balance competing needs?

We have not used much of the ARPA funding we received and some programs not funded by ARPA, like the aviation training program, have had better outcomes than those that were. Through community engagement we get buy in for success where the needs intersect. We need to approach problems as parts of the same puzzle so we are creating self-reliant communities that don't need outside funding in the first place.

4. Brookline has a local transportation divide which makes it hard for people in North Brookline to interact with those in South Brookline. Newton has created a program that subsidizes local bus transportation within the Town and for medical appointments nearby. Would you use that as a model?

Uber and Lyft have rideshare programs which can substantially reduce fares for those who can use them. Biking Brookline is identifying safe bike routes – where to cross, what time of day is best, which roads are safest -- to improve accessibility. We should be focusing on the worst roads and sidewalks for immediate repair to improve access

for everyone and we can do that by using information that already exists in the community.

5. How would you improve communication so that people who are not already involved have access to information?

I would engage on a personal level to identify the people in each community who are the disseminators of information. The Town website needs to be made more accessible so things are easier to find. We need to speak in language that is accessible to all people and to rebuild trust that government is listening and working for the community. When people feel their voice matters, it fosters more participation.

6. Seniors are the fastest growing segment of the population and the oldest (those over 80) is growing even faster which will increase the demand for services. How do we prepare for this? Do we need to study the long-term needs, or prioritize the needs of the senior population in new ways?

We already know the issues. We need to re-evaluate our Town finances and understand how we are spending our money and that the process is fiscally sound so we are not increasing property taxes repeatedly. Our solutions will come from time consuming, nitty gritty number crunching and I am willing to do that. I think we are nervous about finding out how ineffective our spending might be.

7. How would you balance the needs of the school age population with the rest of the Town?

Prioritizing the needs of the kids makes sense, but is the money being used effectively? The process for funding Pierce was rushed. There should have been a more accessible process that implemented input from the community. We need to do more cost-benefit analysis on everything.

8. Why are you running for Select Board instead of another level of Town government?

We have to operate within the confines of government. If government repeatedly ignores the input and solutions from the community we need new governance. If ideas from the community are repeatedly stopped at the Select Board level, then we need to be at that level to foster a different philosophy. We need to put aside our individual ideas and represent the community, not ourselves. Our issues cannot be ignored when we are sitting at the same table. I want to provide accountability for Brookline's governance.

9. You've said that things get stuck at the Select Board. Do you support charter reform as a way to get things unstuck? Should we have a commission look at our form of government and see what other options there might be?

I think we definitely need to look at it if that's what people want. But a lot of it stems from how ineffective Town Meeting and the Select Board have been. Last year's Warrant Article 19 requesting the formation of a Black and Brown Commission is an example. It came out of frustration from community members who had gone to all

the existing avenues and not had their issues addressed so they asked for a new body to address them. The Select Board voted no action and Town Meeting referred it to a committee and nothing has happened. We can't keep ignoring our issues and stifling our communities.

10. Do you see any advantages to Town Meeting as a way for people to get involved in government?

There are a lot of folks who don't know who their Town Meeting Members are. It takes 250-300 votes to get elected and many ballots are filled with blanks because voters don't know the players. Town Meeting engages those already involved but not the wider community.

11. Would you change the functions of the Town Administrator who, among other things, is responsible for preparing the Town's annual budget?

My focus will be on what I can change as a Select Board member. As one person out of five I can't change everything. Transparency would be my first goal. We should be having meetings with the community before the budget is constructed so we know what their needs and priorities are.

Concluding Remarks

I would like to thank you for your time. The only thing I can bring to the Select Board are the ideas from the lived experience of the community. I know how to reach out and accurately reflect their input. I appreciate the work you are doing to provide information to the community. I hope you will vote change. Thank you.

V. Date of Next Meeting: TBD

At our last meeting, the group had expressed interest in learning more about Complete Streets. Department of Public Works Commissioner Erin Chute and her staff won't be available to do a presentation on this topic until after the conclusion of Town Meeting. The June meeting will be scheduled based on their availability.

The Livable Community Advocacy Committee is one of several BrooklineCAN committees. Everyone is welcome to attend, but if you do so regularly, we invite you to support BrooklineCAN with your membership. You can join using PayPal, credit card or by check. Instructions are on the right hand sidebar on the front page of brooklinecan.org
Thank you.

An Introduction to Sana Hafeez

Hello Livable Community Advocacy Committee (LCAC),

Thank you for reaching out with this opportunity to connect and discuss our mutual goals. Since the advent of Ramadan and officially turning in my nomination papers to run for office,, I have been contemplating the values that ground me. As I spend this time with my family, I can't help but think about my Brookline family and how both have shaped me into who I am today. I grew up in a multigenerational home with my grandparents and will be forever thankful. In my culture, elders are respected and honored for their wisdom and experience. Elders often play a large role in child rearing and the passing down of cultural values. I believe that some in Brookline have forgotten the blessing and luxury it is to live and grow in a multigenerational community.

When I moved to precinct 4 and began organizing in Brookline, I couldn't imagine how much I would learn from this community. The resilience and persistence of our community, from the youth to our elders, to proactively work to better our condition despite both historic and new barriers was inspiring. Living in and being a part of this community is a privilege that has given me perspective on the barriers to change here.

Many marginalized communities in Brookline are seen as an afterthought, not a priority. I've seen firsthand how many elderly and disabled residents become trapped in their homes and suffer from isolation because of inefficient management of snow on sidewalks in the winter. I've seen the way folks in Kent Street and the Village have a hard time getting access to programs like the Brookline Food Pantry despite voicing these concerns at various meetings. I've seen the way Brookline's elders are overrepresented in at-risk populations for poverty and housing insecurity, especially those that are low income and from the black or brown community. While all issues of inequity are linked, many of the solutions are as well.

Brookline has no shortage of resources, folks willing to do the work, or qualified professionals that can make lasting change. What much of Brookline's governance does lack is perspective and a vested interest in making change happen sooner rather than later. Some have said that I may be intense in my approach to addressing these barriers. But, you simply cannot move at a snail's pace when the elders that guide you discuss their fears that after renting for decades, they will die in housing.

Working as a community organizer to promote equity for Brookline's marginalized communities, it was never lost on me that we all have at least one thing in common. God willing, we all grow old one day. And when that day comes, our community will largely determine our quality of life. So when myself and others began working on an affordable housing proposal, we sought advice from our elders that have lived in Brookline for decades. In creating the Housing Economic Equity Plan submitted to the CPA, we ensured that the properties we searched for were accessible and compatible with multigenerational housing. Low-income families with children and elders were two populations of interest when designing the proposal. Similarly, one facet of my role in creating a workforce development program that successfully trained residents to earn their federal licenses, is outreach to and retaining a diverse student base including teenagers to those 50+, with all

ranges of academic backgrounds, and all levels of technology/computer proficiency. Increasing equity, accessibly, has always been the goal.

If I am elected to the office of Select Board, I will work to promptly address issues of equity like affordable childcare, affordable housing, workforce development & economic opportunities, environmentally sustainable practices, and meaningful inclusion, as well as transparency & accountability in governance. I hope I can look to LCAC, Brookline CAN, and other groups for wisdom on how to ensure that Brookline's elders are not an afterthought, but a part of the discussion and solution.

Should Brookline choose differently, I will still work with so many others doing amazing work in the community to address these issues as a community organizer. I hope I can still look to LCAC, Brookline CAN, and other groups for wisdom on how to ensure that Brookline's elders are an active part of the discussion on how to make effective community-based solutions.

I look forward to our conversation on Monday.

Best, Sana Hafeez

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