

BROOKLINE COMMUNITY AGING NETWORK
Livable Community Advocacy Committee
June 10, 2024

Attending: Susan Granoff (Chair), Janet Gelbart (Notetaker), Amy Ingles (Guest Presenter), Erin Chute (Commissioner of Public Works), John Bowman, Anita Breslaw, Marion Freedman-Gurspan, Susan Howards, Carol MacBain, Fran Perler, Yolanda Rodriguez, John Seay, David Trevvett, Melissa Trevvett

I. An Introduction to Brookline's Complete Streets Policy

Guest Presenter: Amy Ingles (Transportation Administrator, Brookline Department of Public Works)

DPW Commissioner Erin Chute introduced Transportation Administrator Amy Ingles and gave an overview of the Transportation Administrator's role in maintaining and improving the transportation network for our public right of way. Decisions are data driven utilizing regular street condition assessments to evaluate opportunities for maintenance and improvement.

Complete Streets is a policy and a process to promote safety, comfort, convenience and accessibility for all modes of transportation and pedestrians. It includes active sidewalks and roadways, dedicated bike lanes, and safe crosswalks and intersections, all of which compete for space within our existing infrastructure. There is a focus on managing traffic speeds to reduce injuries.

The Massachusetts Department of Transportation (Mass DOT) created a funding program in 2016 to help municipalities develop Complete Streets policies, establish priorities, and implement small projects. Brookline completed its prioritization plan in 2017 and with MassDOT and other grant funding substantially accomplished all of the projects initially proposed under this program. In 2023, Brookline updated its prioritization plan and identified 28 new projects focused on traffic calming and crosswalk enhancements.

The Town has created a Transportation and Mobility Plan which incorporates Complete Street policies into routine road and sidewalk maintenance. Repair priorities are set through regularly scheduled condition assessments, and the need for the addition of Complete Streets design elements like dedicated bike lanes, speedhumps, and ADA compliant curb ramps are evaluated. If needed and feasible, these elements are included in the construction. However, this process is more time consuming and expensive than simply replacing what's already there. The challenge is to focus resources where they are most needed and find appropriate funding for the additional design elements. (Ms. Ingles' slide presentation is attached).

Participants raised several concerns:

1. The elimination of parking spaces to create bike lanes, outdoor restaurant seating, and street calming adversely impacts seniors who need parking for their caregivers and visitors, and to be able to easily access local stores for shopping. On-site parking is not a luxury for anyone who is mobility impaired..
2. Bump outs often obscure the driver's view of cross traffic requiring them to pull out into the crosswalk to see opposing traffic.

3. Lack of enforcement encourages disregard for traffic laws endangering pedestrians and slower-moving cyclists.
4. Many street calming efforts, like eliminating or narrowing traffic lanes, diverts more cars onto adjoining streets, which simply shifts the problem without solving it.
5. Lack of adequate pedestrian lighting keeps seniors from venturing out at night, adding to the isolation of this vulnerable group.
6. There needs to be a snow removal plan that accommodates clearing bike lanes without negatively impacting sidewalks.

Participants also proposed several potential solutions:

1. creation of a place on the Town website for reporting near misses with the goal of establishing a data base to inform the Town's decision-making;
2. reaching out to seniors via the Council on Aging or the Senior Center to ensure that the concerns of the largest segment of the population are considered by all planning and design review committees and their consultants;
3. reviewing traffic calming on a neighborhood by neighborhood basis, rather than street by street to minimize diversion;
4. establishment of a daylighting program which prohibits parking within 20 feet of a crosswalk to promote better visibility for drivers and pedestrians; (Note: Ms. Ingles indicated that this is already a Town regulation but it has not yet been implemented with signage at all crosswalks or fully enforced.)
5. creation of buffers between sidewalk level bike lanes and the sidewalk to prevent micromobility users from veering onto the sidewalk to avoid traffic signals;
6. installation of bicycle traffic signals.

Ms. Ingles responded positively to the idea of a near miss data base which she said had been implemented in other areas. She will do some research to learn how Brookline might benefit from best practices in this regard.

DPW is currently reviewing its traffic calming policies including looking at establishing calming clusters. The current process is cumbersome requiring only 10 signatures to initiate a study and potential re-design with opportunities for public input throughout. There are currently 28 projects on the waiting list, which keeps growing, and the Town has the capacity to complete only about two each year.

The federal government regulates the placement of bicycle traffic signals limiting their use throughout the Town.

Ms. Chute thanked participants for their input. The goal of Complete Streets is to achieve balance among competing needs on a constrained right of way. Ms. Ingles encouraged the group to keep advocating to have their concerns addressed and keep the Town informed of areas which might otherwise be overlooked.

II. Report on Actions of 2024 Brookline Annual Town Meeting

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

Ms. Granoff reviewed the actions of the May Town Meeting. Only 17 Warrant Articles were voted on all of them passed overwhelmingly. The key actions included:

- approval of the FY2025 budget of \$390 million; the proposed amendment to increase school funding by \$1 million to restore the Early World Language program for grades K-5 failed
- approval of WA 13 to reduce restrictions on creating Accessory Dwelling Units (ADUs); investor owners will still require a special permit
- approval of WA 12 increasing the maximum Senior Property Tax Work-off exemption to the new state permitted level of \$2,000
- approval of installing geothermal pumps under the Pierce School playground; State legislature approval is still required
- approval of the police and public safety dispatchers labor union contracts; civil service requirements for police were eliminated; qualified retired officers will be eligible for police details
- approval of \$8 million for eleven Community Preservation Act projects
- approval of a reduced setback for heat pumps in multi-family districts
- approval to reduce the number of voting members on the Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Community Relations Board from 15 to 9 to address issues with recruitment
- approval to table without discussion WA 19 regarding a cease fire in Gaza

III. Update on Verizon's Landline Copper Wire Repair Policy

Several years ago, Verizon instituted a policy to no longer repair copper wire landlines when existing services break down. They will install equipment to re-route landline calls to internet connection, but this is problematic for Life Alert type systems. It's important to make seniors aware of this change so they can act accordingly.

IV. Date of Next Meeting: TBD

Susan Granoff is stepping down as Chair of the LCAC and encouraged members interested in assuming the role to contact Ruth Seidman and Ruthann Dobek, the co-Chairs of BrooklineCAN. The date of the next meeting, which would normally take place in September, will be determined by the new Chair. Members of the committee thanked her for her work over the years.

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.