

Town of Brookline
Advisory Committee Minutes

Sean Lynn-Jones, Chair

Date: February 16, 2016

Present: Carla Benka, Clifford M. Brown, Carol Caro, Lea Cohen, John Doggett, Dennis Doughty, Harry K. Friedman, Janet Gelbart, Amy F. Hummel, Systke Humphrey, Angela Hyatt, David-Marc Goldstein, Neil Gordon, Alisa G. Jonas, Janice S. Kahn, Steven Kanes, Bobbie Knable, Pamela Lodish, Sean M. Lynn-Jones, Shaari S. Mittel, Lee L. Selwyn, Charles Swartz, Christine Westphal

Absent: * Kelly Hardebeck, Jennifer Goldsmith, Fred Levitan, Robert Liao, Mariah Nobrega, Michael Sandman, Stanley L. Spiegel

The meeting was called to order at 6:30 PM.

Also in attendance Mel Kleckner, Town Administrator; Melissa Goff, Deputy Town Administrator; Austin Faison, Assistant Town Administrator; Commissioner of Public Works, Andrew Pappastergion; School Committee Chairman Susan Wolf Ditkoff, and members Helen Charlupski and David Pollak.

1. PRESENTATION OF FY2017 FINANCIAL PLAN

Mel Kleckner provided summary and offered highlights of the FY2017 Financial Plan (see attached) and answered questions. He noted that this is also a long-term planning document, useful throughout the budget process.

Q: What is happening to 1200 Beacon Street (Holiday Inn)?

A: If it ceases being a hotel we would lose the lodging tax for that but we don't expect that to happen this year.

School budget up by 5% - establish base with School/Town Partnership formula.

Q: Impression that the Public Schools of Brookline wanted to place a very clear budget stake in the ground, then consider plusses and minuses throughout the year to make adjustments. Is that the process in place? Concern it would be more appropriate to fix a number and go with that earlier in the process? Or is it an ongoing discussion?

A: There was a misunderstanding about the annual process.

Q: If School Committee does not opt for MSBA state funding, what happens to your assumptions.

A: A debt exclusion would be necessary to fund the project.

Q: Are we doing anything about getting out of Norfolk County to avoid paying the annual assessment?

A: One option would be to secede from the county but that would require legislation. We could recalculate the formula used for the assessment but it is a zero sum game. The formula is based on the value of the real estate in the member cities and towns, which is why Brookline's assessment is so high.

Q: What would be the consequences of withholding that payment?

A: It would be deducted it from our State aid.

Mel gave an overview of policy issues that inform the budget.

Diversity and Inclusion – We are putting in place programming with this new Department for various programs and services. We believe we are going to need independent consulting, guidance on approach, training, and litigation.

Solid Waste Management – Uniform trash bins allow for pick up for trash with automated equipment and reduce labor costs. Task Force looking into default bin size, over flow options and trash fees.

Q: We as a town don't have a system for exchanging goods – is it possible to expand the types of items that can be brought to transfer station that might otherwise end up in the waste stream?

A: The Task Force is very focused right now on the automated system but will be looking at composting and all of these sorts of things at some point but not ready just yet.

Performance Management – Once called “work load indicators” – converting these outputs (how many pot potholes are repaired, how many books are circulated in the library, etc.) to improve results and improve performance. Change the culture so we put together budgets based on more data – data makes decisions. We can use this approach in a much more effective fashion. Training in this area and using the national citizens' survey to compare results with those from 3 years ago are planned steps in this regard. We'll be getting Department Heads focused on this and trained in this.

Building Operations and Maintenance – Reviewing a consulting group study now with possible recommendations on the School side where preventative maintenance is essential and looking at suggestions for increased staffing and other resources to meet these demands.

Request to have a copy of this study / report prior to the March subcommittee review of this department's budget.

Parking Meters – Converted to digital – accept a variety of payment methods – also communicates to the parking enforcement personnel. Also, exploring possible use of mobile technology (Parking App).

Q: Will it delay replacement of meter heads?

A: No. Will not stop converting some digital meters but will pursue exploring.

Q: Are the newer meters bringing in more revenue?

A: Haven't seen a jump in meter revenue largely due perhaps to better compliance, fewer violations.

Credit Card Fee Consolidation – Need to look at all credit card fees for all different types of transactions. Make a determination if we should pass “convenience charge” onto users.

Succession Planning – A group of department heads who will begin leaving in the next two-three years – we need to develop institutional knowledge and leadership to accommodate these transitions.

Energy Efficiency and Sustainability – LED Streetlight showing energy savings. Look for other alternatives for payback like that.

Long Range / Strategic Planning – School Classroom Space Issue – Expanded High School and 9th Elementary School; Affordable Housing activity; Assessment of Strategic Assets and Large Land Parcels; State Community Compact – using all of our staff resources on these issues.

Employee Wages and Benefits – 82% allocated toward this.

Joint Labor MC (JLMC) is currently reviewing the Fire Departments' collective bargaining issues.

Q: Is there a timetable for a decision?

A: Late spring probably.

Health Insurance costs –

Q: Is there anything going on at the State level that could help with any of these costs, mitigate the expense?

A: Not aware of anything at this time.

OPEB (health insurance for retirees) – you can work 10 years and get the same health insurance when you retire as someone who worked 40 years. This is an issue that we hope the State will be looking at.

Long Range Financial Budget Plan – It is a very conservative and assumes we don't balance out budget yearly. Instructive to see the kinds of projections we are making – structural gap between amount of money we can take in and the amount of services we can provide. Our goal is to extend the periods of time between overrides.

General Questions/Comments

Q: If we decide we are not going to apply for MSBA financing, we will need to conduct a feasibility study, is there a provision to provide funding for this?

A: Not close enough to what this project is, needs more definition. We'd have to look at the capital plan and make some choices if people want to move faster.

Q: Two capital projects going on at the same time, puts a lot of pressure on departments to handle all of this – the Building Commission, Building Commission staff, School Department, Selectmen – do we have sufficient number of staff to be able to move these projects apace?

A: We have reached our limit in terms of personnel for project management. We would need to go outside for additional project management.

Q: Can the funding for staff time come from the respective project budget?

A: Yes. Understand these departments are being stretched and taxed.

Q: We talked about school building projects – what about renovation of Coolidge Corner Library?

A: Hasn't bubbled up to be a real project yet so no funding targeted.

Q: Lincoln School use?

A: We are planning on using that as swing space for Devotion and the high school. We are also leasing a building in Coolidge Corner for the other Devotion grades. Hope to build enough capacity to eliminate those leases and get people back into the public schools.

Mel acknowledged the Town's Director of Finance, Stephen Cirillo, and his service to the Town.

Melissa Goff wrapped up the presentation of the budget.

1. INVOCATION OF MGL CHAPTER 44, SECTION 31D ALLOWING THE DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC WORKS TO EXPEND FUNDS IN EXCESS OF THE FY2016 APPROPRIATION FOR SNOW AND ICE CONTROL

Commissioner of Public Works, Andrew Pappastergion provided background on Snow and Ice Control Budgeting, history of deficits and funding.

Snow and Ice Control Budget is a separate entity from full DPW Budget. As soon as it goes into deficit the Commissioner comes before the Selectmen to invoke Chapter 44 which is not very practical when you are in the midst \$268,000 deficit. There have been three snow events since that meeting. An event is anytime we have to mobilize resources – rain that turns to ice and we need to put sanders on the roads, we get snow and have to send out plows, etc.

The Board of Selectmen voted in January for favorable action to invoke Chapter 44.

Q: Can't we come in with a more realistic budget? What happens if we overfund?

A: According to the law, if you have a surplus in Snow and Ice Budget in one year you cannot invoke Chapter 44 in the following year.

Q: Where does the money eventually come from?

A: The deficit includes encumbered amounts – they come off of the balance sheet even if we haven't spent it. Funding comes out of the reserves from the Town and it is reconciled at the end of the year.

If no savings offset, then it comes out of reserve fund. Last year it was made up from funds from a variety of different pots - the overlay fund, a few reserve funds, and some federal funding (FEMA).

A MOTION was made and seconded to certify the Board of Selectmen's vote in January for favorable action to invoke Chapter 44.

Vote: With a vote of 19 in favor, 0 opposed with no abstentions, the Board of Selectmen's vote for favorable action to invoke Chapter 44 was certified.

2. CONSIDERATION OF WHETHER TO RECOMMEND THAT THE TOWN OF BROOKLINE RESUBMIT A STATEMENT OF INTEREST TO THE MASSACHUSETTS SCHOOL BUILDING AUTHORITY REGARDING BROOKLINE HIGH SCHOOL

The idea of potentially not resubmitting a statement of interest (SOI) to the Massachusetts School Building Authority (MSBA) came up when the Long Range Planning and Policy subcommittee had an executive session with a whole host of departments. Susan Wolf Ditkoff, School Committee Chair, asked that the full Advisory Committee make a recommendation on the advisability of resubmitting an SOI to the MSBA. Lots of moving parts to consider.

Carla Benka, Capital subcommittee chair provided an overview of the Subcommittee +2's (Mike Sandman and Janet Gelbart) report and then it was opened up for discussion.

The overall sense of the Subcommittee was not to pursue MSBA funding for either the 9th Elementary School and/or the High School under certain circumstances. It is a long and exacting process.

The MSBA's funds cannot be used for site acquisition.

The Subcommittee +2 determined early on in its discussion that if MSBA support would be sought, it should be for the more expensive project (the High School), as opposed to the new K-8.

Participation with the MSBA may mean that you don't get to do what you want. When you get State money you have to bring your facility up to MSBA standards. What they see as a priority may not be what your priorities are. They don't pay for improvements to auditoriums in elementary schools, they won't do a black box theatre and we could be penalized for preserving gym space in excess of MSBA's standards.

What would the breakeven point be? Somewhere around \$150-\$175m.

We had an SOI declined already so what are the chances things would change especially given we have received assistance for other projects.

The Pollack Option. Look at the High School as a whole. Don't have to do a complete overhaul all at once. What needs to be fixed and how many students do we want to plan for?

For example, science Labs do not meet standards - can't have more than 24 kids in a science class because rooms are too small. Repurpose the science rooms and put science program in a different location.

This led to discussion of 111 Cyprus Street – Currently used as back offices for Brigham and Women's Hospital. Owner would like to convert to a 40B. What would have to happen to take it by eminent domain? Build extended campus - is that an educationally sound approach? What do we do about neighbors, what do we do about traffic, etc.?

Alternative - resubmit one more time and then during the 9 months decision process, look at other options.

Plug number for HS go it alone \$100 million

Plug number for HS with MSBA partnering \$150 million

Plug number of 9th school \$75 million

What is the Commercial Development potential to cover the costs?

Extract yourself from the MSBA process?

Nothing is precluded. We can submit as many SOIs as we like, but they have reminded us that Devotion is our priority project. Our odds are reduced under the present circumstances given that 100 core projects are submitted and only 20 are funded in a year, we are fighting the tide.

School capita Subcommittee chair, David Pollak, offered the following comments:

Go with MSBA - is there any chance of success?

Is it going to force us to spend time that we don't have to address this problem?

Is it going to lead us into things that we don't want to do or that we can't afford to do?

I didn't hear anyone think it likely that we would get the money. Different projects – solve for the capacity issue vs the entire renovation, representing different amounts of money.

Also depends on where the MSBA process leads. I value planning and even though the MSBA takes time, I am dedicated to the discipline of planning. In the planning process, the feasibility process makes you look at a tear down replacement, fixing and enlarging, building a smaller second high school, a purpose build for the overflow capacity and you could build a science high school; can't put non MSBA funds into another project.

Q: From the descriptions of the MSBA it sounds like a popularity contest, is there any legal guidance where their discretion restrained?

A: There is a template for the Statement of Interest and there are criteria for funding. Highest criteria are structural issues, then overcrowding and only one priority project at a time. But they make their decisions in a closed room.

Q: For those of us on the override committee, trying to understand the impact of the roughly 500 non-resident students on the system? Have you looked at limiting or removing the non-resident students? Think it is important to let voters know if they want to spend their money that way?

Q: Are there points in the process where costs go up or not? Establish value of property based on highest and best use. Is there a need to do something because the cost will change?

A: (Susan Wolf Ditkoff) We are waiting for more information on this from the Selectmen.

Q: Where do the funds come from for an eminent domain taking and what is required?

A: (Susan Wolf Ditkoff) What information would we want to know to determine if this is a good idea? Adding students, staff, parking, impact on neighborhood, number of kids coming to that campus on a tight timeline every day without reliable transportation. It looks great, some interesting pedagogical opportunities, but some restraints on the site.

Q: Would there be a case for resubmitting even if all of the questions to 111 Cypress were positive?

A: (Susan Wolf Ditkoff) The two questions should be uncoupled. We submitted the SOI for the high school over a year ago. We have been able to do very little to advance the planning process for the high school until we heard back in the negative in December. Do feasibility studies now and look at all options simultaneously. Zoning could be changed in the process of doing an acquisition.

Q: Parking lot where the T stop is rather than 111 Cypress?

A: Large pipe in the way.

Q: Deferred? Rejected? What is the difference?

A: MSBA didn't discourage you but again noted 100 applications but could only fund 20.

Comment: Consider the cost of alternatives – any site you buy is going to be substantial; also what are avoided costs?

Q: Structural safety, overcrowding – is their idea of overcrowding the same as Brookline's idea? Do they have a different threshold?

A: They would agree that we are overcrowded. They do site visits. They know we are using modular sites, etc.

Comment: I think it is critical that we do as many options that the School Committee thinks they should do because we know we are not going to be funded by MSBA. If you are capacity for that site for 2700 and you haven't counted additional 40Bs and Puddingstone, need to consider more than one high school.

The School Committee is interested in looking at models that keep Brookline as having one high school – all freshmen together, expand school within a school – lots of options and models. Not a North South split necessarily.

Q: How are you going to pay for all of the planning and feasibility studies you have to do?

A (David Pollak) We need to decide with \$800,000 in FY17 what we can do with that funding. 9 different school /town funded categories in the CIP and wouldn't recommend taking money from those funds.

Need to look at what one high school means. Consider other ways to have two high schools and also blended version options. Once you make the MSBA decision, you then put different pieces together.

Six different options – HMFH designers of the Devotion School and did 15 different plans. Then a visioning study was done with SMMA started looking the high school.

Q: Why not a Junior High School?

A: MSBA didn't like the idea of changing the way we structure our school system. Most people are committed to a pre K-8 model.

But that is before the public understands the costs. Still the number of the children would be the same.

What actually is the incremental cost of opening a building? Overwhelmingly the operating cost comes with the student not with the building.

The old Lincoln wouldn't be able to accommodate the full 9th grade or the full 8th grade.

Q: Conceptually would one junior high solve the capacity problem?

A: Assume 2 grades, which is 1400 kids and so does that draw enough off the high school? No.

If you drew off from both, 700 from the high school and 700 from elementary that might work.

Comment: Surprised at the low percentage reimbursement rate for Devotion (21.6%).

Certain things they won't pay for like the parking, site work, and lots of other conditions and exclusions.

Comment: It was said that a 2700 person school is not a sound idea but I attended a 3 grade school of 3600 students and we have 3 Nobel Prize winners among alumni to date. I think you can have a lot of kids and have a solid educational model. Before the school was expanded we had over 2000 kids at the

school and had the house system; kept it intimate and nurturing. Just wonder if there aren't other opportunities for rethinking the space that we have.

Hugh Mattison, Town Meeting member from Precinct 5, has identified a piece of property that is owned by the town. It is listed in the Assessor's databas as 0 Brington Road and I is located directly in back of the Tappan St gym and pool, across the T tracks. The site raises the possibility of taking to the T about air rights.

A resident of Brington Road commented that the neighbors would like the high school at 111 Cypress. STEM Academy would be welcomed by neighbors.

Q: 2700 figure. Is that considered the stabilized population of the high school or just one step on the escalator?

A: (Susan Wolf Ditkoff) The number went from 650 to 670 with Hancock Village One; it doesn't include Puddingstone or any other 40B and/or any other condo conversions. Capacity for further condo conversions is huge. MIT concluded numbers going up.

Q: For the Feasibility Study you want to undertake are you having a consultant look at different models of different high schools?

A: (Susan Wolf Ditkoff) Building Commission will put out an RFP; SMMA stopped at conceptual sketches and pros and cons of options. Two community planning processes wrought a ton of community input. One last piece which is let's pull this together and what are the pedagogical implications (evaluated by staff, teachers) – maybe bring SMMA back because they are teachers, principals and architects – then the site question, then a public process on specific ideas that have to do with the high school.

Comment: It would be good for us to know and understand the pedagogy – why the preK-8 and 9-12 model has been chosen for Brookline. Is there any available background on this philosophy?

A MOTION was made and seconded to recommend against resubmittal of a Statement of Interest (SOI) to the Massachusetts School Building Authority (MSBA).

Vote: With a vote of 16 in favor, 0 opposed and 1 abstention the motion against resubmittal passed.

Announcement: Three finalists for School Superintendent position. Bobbie Knable has been appointed the Advisory Committee representative for this process however any Advisory Committee member interested is welcome to attend the meetings.

Next Meeting: The next meeting of the Advisory Committee will be on March 1st.

Upon a MOTION made and seconded and voted unanimously, the meeting adjourned at 9:55pm.

Documents Presented at Advisory Committee Meeting:

1. Massachusetts General Law Chapter 44 Memo (1 page)
2. Capital Subcommittee Report on Partnering with the MSBA for 9th School/BHS Expansion (4 pages)
3. Summary of Subcommittee Members' Questions re MSBA Participation in BHS Expansion/9th K-8 School (2 pages)
4. MSBA Partnership Comparison Matrix (1 page)
5. FY17 Budget PowerPoint Presentation