

Town of Brookline  
Advisory Committee Minutes

Sean Lynn-Jones, Chair

Date: March 3, 2016

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Present: Carla Benka, Clifford M. Brown, Carol Caro, Lea Cohen, Dennis Doughty, Harry K. Friedman, Janet Gelbart, Kelly Hardebeck, Jennifer Goldsmith, Amy F. Hummel, Systke Humphrey, Angela Hyatt, David-Marc Goldstein, Neil Gordon, Alisa G. Jonas, Janice S. Kahn, Bobbie Knable, Sean M. Lynn-Jones, Shaari S. Mittel, Robert Liao, Mariah Nobrega, Michael Sandman, Charles Swartz.

Absent: \*Fred Levitan, Lee L. Selwyn, Stanley L. Spiegel, Christine Westphal, Pamela Lodish, John Doggett, Steve Kanes.

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The meeting was called to order at 7:00 PM.

ANNOUNCEMENTS:

Stanley Spiegel is taking a leave of absence.

Also in attendance Ruthann Dobek, Director of Council on Aging (CoA), Bill McGroarty, Director of Veterans' Affairs, Sandra Debow-Wong, Director of Human Resources, Leslea Ann Noble, F. Scott O'Shay.

**REVIEW OF FY2017 BUDGET: COUNCIL ON AGING**

Systke thanked the CoA and the many people who came out to the hearing. They shared a wealth of information with the Subcommittee which was very helpful. The Council serves about 12,000 people. They have a budget of \$894,573 and are very active in securing federal, state and private grant money.

Ruthann Dobek, Director of CoA, offered comments. They have a four-pronged plan comprised of municipal, federal, state and private funding. This was a rare year that each leg is very stable. They have a pending state grant to supplement the municipal funding. Their private fundraising has been quite successful, able to purchase a brand new van at no cost to the Town (through Brookline Rotary Dancing with the Stars event). Very successful Memory Café also being funded through private donations. In addition, she acknowledged the wonderful work of their 300+ volunteers who do over 350 jobs in the community, an example of successfully leveraging human capital.

Q: How is the tax work off program going?

A: Very successful - means for up to 30 seniors to earn up to \$1,000. CoA lost 2 people who got part time work with the Town after being part of the program. Others are working in a variety of town departments.

Q: For someone who can afford to pay for the lunch program, is there a mechanism for them to do that?

A: We state how much the lunch actually costs and request a suggested donation.

A MOTION was made and seconded to recommend approval of the FY2017 Council on Aging budget of \$894,573.

**Vote:** With a vote of 22 in favor, 0 opposed with no abstentions, the Advisory Committee recommends approval of the FY2017 Council on Aging budget of \$894,573.

### **REVIEW OF FY2017 BUDGET: VETERANS' SERVICES**

Lea noted a small increase of \$472 mainly due to Steps. There may a RFT request. There were 4 burials for vets who did not have friends or family to assist them. Bill [McGroarty, Director of Veteran's Services] continues his work with the work program. One person who was working in the Health Department now works for the EPA. About 60% of vets are from the Persian War. He is the keeper of town memorials and has been connected with some folks who are interested in doing some public art.

Bill gave an overview of recent and ongoing activities and initiatives of Veterans' Services. He shared recently recovered photos of the 1915 dedication of the Civil War monument in front of the library and survivors of WW1 in 1923. These will hang in the VFW Hall. He has just recovered them.

Bill discussed the opportunity to create some public art, perhaps a mural. There was a suggestion to use letters from citizens written to their loved ones during the war. Also suggestion to place rocks with Vets' names on them where they usually place flags.

Restoring the VFW memorial plaques and one will eventually hang in the lobby of Town Hall.

A MOTION was made and seconded to recommend approval of the FY2017 budget for Veterans' Services of \$331,908.

**Vote:** With a vote of 22 in favor, 0 opposed with no abstentions, the Advisory Committee recommends approval of a budget of \$331,908 for Veteran's Services.

### **REVIEW OF FY 2017 BUDGET: HEALTH & HUMAN SERVICES DEPARTMENT**

Systke noted that when you look at the number of people the department serves it is amazing it can be accomplished on this budget. Many people who are working whose stipends are financed through sources other than our town. She offered highlights of the programs and services provided by the department.

Dr. Alan Balsam, Director of Public Health gave an overview of the department's activities and initiatives. He noted that the department is responsible for three main things: Health Assessment, Development of Policies and Programs and Adherence. In 2015 they put out Vol 16 of the town's health report - a description of all communicable diseases found in Brookline. Recently published Vol 17 – a description of Youth Behavioral Risk Factors. They have seen a decline in substance abuse, but a dramatic increase in stress, depression and suicide ideation. Shifting toward more attention as to why this is happening. Macro issues, societal in nature. The fact that we have 50 peer leaders this year is important because

they are more persuasive than older professionals especially with students in lower grades. Buddies Program where we have 10 people connected with frail adults in our community. In the event of a crisis or a problem, they have an actual person to reach out to, not just a system. We have the Friends of Public Health and Advisory Council of Public Health. Marijuana Dispensary is set up and is going well. Public Health Week teaming up with Climate Action doing some joint events with them.

We are asking for level funding, nothing more. We hope to keep the ball rolling and glad to entertain questions.

Q: Do you have an estimate of the amount of revenue we may expect from the dispensary?

A: \$150,000 half of the 3% (the town will receive 3% of gross revenue, half goes to the Brookline Community Foundation; half of it goes to the Town). Don't know the potential.

Q: Do you help parents interpret the data from the Survey?

A: Yes, two newsletters and also public meetings and more to come on that.

Q: I read the data and there were two messages that were somewhat important but seemed to become lost – more help looking for messages in that data. Specifically the point about rates of alcohol and drug use among athletes is higher than general population - did they then meet with coaches? Also, when parents are vocal about alcohol and drug use, rates of use are lower than the general population.

A: These things were highlighted at public meetings. We have a Human Services Coordinator working in the Diversity and Inclusion department.

Q: Tobacco ban warrant article – do you see it affecting your workload should it pass?

A: No, I am ambivalent about it and feel it is largely symbolic. One concern is that it will provoke a lawsuit from the tobacco companies. The Advisory Council will look at it closely. It is a complicated issue. We will study it just as we did as the ban on plastic bottles. When we introduced the concept everyone agreed, but then it became more complicated. If we do pass it, it would be less work as we wouldn't have to monitor the 30 vendors.

Q: Any trends in Public Health that you see - especially the NARCAN figures?

A: Surprised in the decline of substance abuse among youth. Climate change is a huge issue in public health, of our generation. We will see the proliferation of vector borne diseases, communicable disease, more natural disasters, food shortages, etc. These are things that I think will affect public health.

Q: The 15 cases of NARCAN, 15 different people or repeats?

A: A couple of repeats.

Q: Is the opioid crisis we are hearing about, is that in Brookline?

A: Not as much of an issue here as it is in other communities, but an important issue we need to attend to.

Q: I know some communities are going to public letter ratings of restaurants, are we going to do that?

A: On our website we provide the full inspection report.

Q: What are you finding at the high school – depression and suicide ideation is concerning. Our neighbors in Needham and Newton have had a rash of suicides. It is a communicable disease also. Is there some sort of regional effort we can take?

A: The Community Health Network Area 18. Our group in the schools feels it has something to do with the focus on achievement and devices and the use of devices. Linked increase in stress and depression to those who use devices for other than school work.

Q: Medical Marijuana Dispensary – you mentioned the problem of volume. Is there or is there not a rule that doctors can only prescribe for one week?

A: That is opioids.

Q: The incidents of Norovirus - were they individual or linked to institutions?

A: An outbreak is simply defined as two or more incidents with one link.

Q: What is being done to fend off Lyme disease?

A: Door hanger campaign, public education, proposal to monitor it more closely. We have a contract with a mosquito control program and they have been asked to transition to tick control.

Q: Your budget is always the same and yet your role is growing with everything you are increasingly doing and dealing with. Do you need additional funding in any areas?

A: Not at this point but maybe in the future for substance abuse and violence prevention in the schools. Current positions are funded with soft money. Maybe more funds for vector borne disease.

Q: Food inspection – is the system that we have in Brookline, are restaurants quick to respond and correct violations and citations?

A: With a few exceptions, but they correct it in short order, sometimes try when we are there. Food handling people are anxious to take care of it immediately before sanction; if it's a plumbing issue, the establishment may have to be closed down for a while.

Q: Lyme disease question – are health care workers improving their ability to diagnose Lyme disease?

A: Yes.

Q: Is Lyme disease pervasive enough to do an annual screening test for Lyme?

A: I don't know what the screening test is.

A MOTION was made and seconded to recommend approval of the FY2017 Health and Human Services budget of \$1,162,496.

**Vote:** With a vote of 22 in favor, 0 opposed with no abstentions, the Advisory Committee recommended approval of the FY2017 Health and Human Services budget of \$1,162,496.

### **REVIEW OF FY2017 BUDGET: HUMAN RESOURCES OFFICE**

Janet gave an overview of the HR budget request.

Sandra Debow-Huang, Director of Human Resources, introduced her colleagues, Leslie Ann Noble and F. Scott O'Shay and gave an overview of HR activities.

There have been a lot of changes in many administrative operations. We have a new payroll system. Not elegant and a little quirky. Getting ready for the ACA, almost complete and online. Payroll struggles here and there. We adopted an accrued sick time for people who don't have benefits. Not going smoothly in our payroll system.

New class in pay plan last published in 2000. Spent a lot of time with it and is published, did training on it in the fall. It was good because people know what the rules are and have a ready resource.

We will be conducting an engagement survey. We did a diversity survey a few years ago at our health fair, but we wanted to look at this from a different angle. Need to get at what motivates employees to stay in the employment of the town –stability, pension system, good health care. Gear training and education in culture change. We have a baseline and we are going to do it again and use data to target new initiatives.

We are actively working with Lloyd Gellineau. His commission and subcommittees are up and running and they are starting to bring their agendas forward and we are confident we will do some really good work together.

Mix groups together from different departments – discussed but haven't formalized it.

We brought back Minutes in Motion – wellness program.

We have sent nearly 50% of our mid -managers to supervisory leadership training – 6 weeks training, one day a week that we could not do in house but small budget to get training off site. Managing skills, conflict resolutions, etc. which is important for succession planning. Weaving into that will be diversity.

Joint Labor Management Committee – Binding

Q: Regarding the lousy software - is it off the shelf or did we pay to customize it to be lousy?

A: It is a financial software program that has a payroll add-on; they also tried to add HR but not sure they understand the difference between HR and payroll. We continue to work with it and get processes in place but we have a very complicated workforce with very different hours, pay levels, etc. It takes a year or two to make any of these programs work.

Q: The studies done with employees, how do they feel? Is it department dependent or overall working for the town?

A: Brookline has some of the best department heads around and they allow me to partner with them closely when they have questions about work rules in their departments. I think our employees are treated very well however there will always be people who are dissatisfied.

Q: Difficulty with unions may be perhaps when they compare themselves less with other departments within the town but with other towns.

A: All unions bring comparable communities to the table.

Employees who have been here less than 10 years are more diverse than those who have been here over 20 years. There is growing diversity in the town.

Q: Do you work with kids in the schools to let them know about the opportunities here in the town?

A: Many different programs and departments are doing the work, not HR.

Q: In the budget book is that figure what your position is for arbitration? What is the delta between what is in the budget and what is being requested?

A: Can't discuss at this time. We are seeking what has been projected.

Q: The topic of diversity training has been making the rounds, what are the basic components of a workshop?

A: The training we do is on our policy and the law, this is the behavior you can engage in, you as a supervisor has a responsibility to bring situations to us or you will be liable, etc. We want to do other things, implicit bias, how people really interact with each other, respect and inclusion but it takes time, a strategic plan and resources.

Q: How are Brookline salaries compared with those in Cambridge and Boston; what are you doing to insure that we aren't losing good people?

A: We are competing against everyone. We tackle issues on a department wide basis. It's not all about money. You are going to lose a certain amount of people if it is only about the money. But no real threat of massive turnover.

Q: Not all turnover is bad. Looking back over the last year, with the turnover, do you know what percentage were you glad about and what percentage were you bummed? Do you do exit interviews and what are you hearing?

A: Yes, and I have questioned a couple but we don't do them on a regular basis. And we'd have to train on them. My philosophy is, this engagement study was a little puzzling to me, because people are comfortable where they are. You want to be building people forward.

Q: What is being done about sensitivity – what types of language is demeaning, are you doing targeting recruiting?

A: Professional Development Network will be doing targeted recruitment for us. And they are interested in moving into municipalities. One training is for supervisors and the other is for employees. It explores their rights and their responsibilities as employees. It was created by the MCAD. It is very participatory, includes one on one activities, role play, engaging people from different departments and different levels of the organization, going over scenarios. More than just telling people what the laws are but exploring how we are benefiting from all of the diversity in our groups.

Q: Is there any opportunity for these groups to have support groups once they are outside of the training and back in their work spaces?

A: Hopefully will be working with Lloyd on this and getting to that level of education specifically.

Q: The question about contracts in general, it is the whole package not just salary but other benefits. Have you thought about going to the employees or their representative and saying we can shift the balance, raise here if we can lower elsewhere? In terms of budget presentation, we don't put the benefits cost into the cost structure of the personnel line, true from the employee's point of view.

A: On the employee paycheck there is the actual employee cost and how much we cover of that. Also have employee self-service where they can go on line and see all information there.

Q: What about vacation and other soft costs? Do you monetize them?

A: You are paying this much and this is how much we are paying for you. At the bargaining table but not directly with employees.

Q: How can we find out about the Professional Development Network?

A: Will share details.

Q: When and how do you track the retention of staff and if you do is there a difference between staff of color, LGBT, etc.?

A: Who is coming in when and when are they leaving. We don't currently have the capacity or tools to track this but do want to do it eventually.

Q: Do you publicize any raw data?

A: EEO reporting every year. And it is on the website. They measure race groups in a particular way and we would probably do it differently. It is a snapshot of just one day and isn't accurate for us over time. We have a payroll system and not an HR system which wants information from the specific day whereas HR system would focus on broader span of time.

A MOTION was made and seconded to recommend approval of the FY2017 Human Resources Department budget of \$544,018.

**Vote:** With a vote of 21 in favor, 0 opposed with no abstentions, the Advisory Committee recommended approval of the FY2017 Human Resources Budget of \$544,018.

Bobbie Knable gave a brief summary of the new school superintendent hiring process and the initial reactions to the primary candidate. He gave every sign of being a very exciting and capable employee. Some concern over lack of experience in high school. Feel sure he will make every effort and use every resource to fill in the blanks and make him informed and capable. Overall, there was a very qualified pool.

Comment: We in the Town have a tendency to push people past their capabilities; worry this is happening with him due to fear of losing him to another district.

**Next Meeting:** The next meeting of the Advisory Committee will be on March 8<sup>th</sup>.

Upon a MOTION made and seconded and voted unanimously, the meeting adjourned at 9:35pm.

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**Documents Presented at Advisory Committee Meeting:**

1. PERSONNEL SUBCOMMITTEE REPORT ON HUMAN RESOURCES FY17 BUDGET
2. HUMAN SERVICES SUBCOMMITTEE REPORT VETERANS' SERVICES FY17 BUDGET
3. HUMAN SERVICES SUBCOMMITTEE REPORT HEALTH DEPARTMENT FY17 BUDGET
4. HUMAN SERVICES SUBCOMMITTEE REPORT COUNCIL ON AGING FY17 BUDGET