

Town of Brookline
Advisory Committee Minutes

Sean Lynn-Jones, Chair

Date: March 31, 2016

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

Absent: * Stanley Spiegel, Lee Selwyn, Steve Kanes, Alisa Jonas, Harry K. Friedman, John Doggett

Also attending Gary McCabe, representing the Board of Assessors and WA 6; Barbara Brown and Rob Daves, Petitioners for WA 19; Susan Wolf-Ditkoff, School Committee Chair

The meeting was called to order at 7:40 PM.

1. REVIEW OF WARRANT ARTICLE 6: ACCEPTANCE OF LEGISLATION TO INCREASE PROPERTY TAX EXEMPTIONS

Robert Liao gave an overview of the subcommittee's report.

An annual warrant article, a particular section of state law allows for tax exemption of certain classes of individuals. Law allows local town to increase maximum amount to 100% if it is passes every year which is what we have done.

Assists certain homeowners stay in their homes. The Board of Assessor's will increase the amount of exemption and provides greater benefit. There are some additional tax exemption programs not included – tax deferral system (11 participants), senior work off program (30 participants).

How much overlap with these programs?

Any of these statutory exemptions can be applied in addition to the residential exemption. People are eligible for more than one exemption and can get more than one type. Thanks the committee and notes that this is an opportunity for outreach not just adoption.

A MOTION was made and seconded to recommend favorable action on Warrant Article 6.

Vote: With a vote of 23 in favor, 0 opposed with 1 abstention, the Advisory Committee recommends favorable action on Warrant Article 6.

2. REVIEW OF WARRANT ARTICLE 19: RESOLUTION HONORING FORMER TOWN RESIDENT ROLAND HAYES

Sytske Humphrey gave a summary of the subcommittee report and noted that they support the resolution. This plaque is funded with private funds. Hidden Brookline is a standing committee of the Office of Diversity, Inclusion and Community Relations (ODICR). Celebrations planned to honor Roland Hayes, including the observance of his birthday on June 3rd.

At a time when people are struggling with diversity issues, this is a peaceful gesture.

Barbara Brown explained that the mission of Hidden Brookline is to bring to light the history of slavery and freedom in the town. We have worked on the slavery piece and are pleased now to be able to work on the freedom part.

Rob Daves shared a PowerPoint presentation regarding the life of Roland Hayes. (Get PPT)

The plaque will be installed at 58 Allerton Street on June 12th and there will be music performed by Roland Hayes's great grandson and PALS. Many notables have been invited to participate.

Town Counsel had no object to the phrase "Brookline's past pattern of racial exclusion"

Who were the Fisk Jubilee Singers? Do we need to have more information about them in the Resolution?

Did he arrange and compose music other than just sing? Yes so in which case "teaching of the music and legacy of Roland Hayes" should suffice.

A MOTION was made and seconded to recommend favorable action on Warrant Article 19 as presented to the Advisory Committee meeting as edited by the subcommittee.

A proposed amendment to change the word "pattern" to "history" –

Pattern suggests that it continues past the past and that was what was considered at length by the petitioners.

Suggest that the word pattern needs data behind it.

Feel like trying to white wash and dilute the reality.

13 in favor, 9 opposed with 2 abstentions vote to substitute "pattern" with "history"

Vote: With a vote of 24 in favor, 0 opposed with 0 abstentions, the Advisory Committee recommends favorable action on Warrant Article 19 as amended.

3. PREVIEW OF FY 2017 OPERATING BUDGET – SCHOOLS

Michael Sandman gave a preview of the FY17 School Operating Budget and noted it is a more gratifying budget and positive process and procedure to work with. See the School Subcommittee report FY 17 Budget Preview 3.31.16 – Final for more detail.

Mary Ellen Dunn, David Pollack met with the Capital Subcommittee of the AC and discussed the Schools CIP. One subcommittee concern was that leases for rental space are not consistent in terms of what they cover, some don't cover utilities or custodial care so we don't have a full grasp of costs for those facilities. We would like to have all the numbers in one place – a matter of approach rather than actual numbers.

Also talked about timing for feasibility study for 9th school and high school expansion - \$2.3 million would have to come out of a CIP, then cost of construction and those would be combined in a debt exclusion – the way the Town's bylaw for public buildings reads, you fund feasibility, design and then construction.

Q: Stop gap measure – positions that have been suspended – won't they need to be filled eventually?

A: The money is actually saved now but in FY18 those items will have salary lines associated with them so the budget will have a bit of jump. The budget this year is very tight, very little slack. Good job of reviewing reserves and did not have an increase of GIC costs as expected.

Comment: Part of the discussion about a future override, getting those costs down, as we plan we don't want to keep coming back for overrides.

Q: \$800,000 difference in what is presented in the budget book and what is in the report?

A: It will be distributed and will show on what lines everything is represented.

Q: What is the date for releasing the School Budget Book?

A: Useful to say that Mary Ellen has put down a foundation that it will be a quicker process in the next year. We are scheduled to consider the School Budget on April 12th. Mary Ellen is aware of that. What points would you like her to elaborate on so that it is most useful for everyone?

Q: Do you know the farthest distance between old Lincoln School and the Devotion? Wondering about the cost of busing Devotion students to Lincoln (\$400,000)?

Isn't there a way to put a moratorium on housing conversions?

I think you will read in the moderator's committee report about information gleaned by the building department, documenting the conversion of single families to two families, and two families to more housing – most vulnerable area are T5 and T6 districts.

How much of enrollment growth is due to housing additions/expansions or is to families having more children or generational turnover?

A demographic study was done and suggests increase was associated with condo conversion.

Total increase in housing units is nowhere nearly as high as increase in enrollment which suggests generational turnover. Ended rent control and tended to accelerate turnover in the community. The number of kids exceeds the number of new units.

Price increases so people are buying condos because they cannot afford houses. Some people buying houses but don't know if they are using private, public or parochial schools. A lot of real estate transfers relate to owners who are downsizing because they have become empty nesters.

Looking at land use and consider getting housing stock for people who don't have kids. Single women, graduate students, so there is a need for smaller units – won't drive up the school numbers but definitely a need for this type of housing. If we want to be proactive with housing needs, we have ways of incentivizing that would not have an impact on the schools but would support the needs of the town.

Specific guidance for the presentation: last year at this time several line items related to technology and devices in the classroom. It would be nice to have some of those questions addressed. Discussion last time was a black hole.

Another thing – regarding the clearer format, during the last budget it was impossible to determine the total cost for certain programs – because of the way it was formatted. Will that be corrected?

In a word, my concern I'd like to hear more about is sustainability. Operating with very few reserves, changing trends, suspending staffing – we have recommended reserve fund transfers to provide a bridge.

The stated purpose for the override was to fill professional support positions as the school population went up and then suspending those positions.

Supplies are level funded even in the face of school population going up. Have a concern about maintaining level of services.

This budget isn't sustainable and will not be for some time as we are still growing.

Budget implications for administrative salaries – where do they fall comparatively?

Brookline teacher salaries are the 5th highest in the State according to a Department of Revenue report in 2014. There are certain categories where we are more competitive and some where we are less competitive. We have fewer steps than other communities, so difficult to compare apples to apples.

Hard to be a principal, administrator in this town right now. Two new principals and new superintendent and people seem to be excited and positively.

More interested in seeing a ranking of scales rather than apples to apples as more experienced teachers are retiring and younger teachers are being hired.

Built in raises into the override but if things took a different turn.

Would like to hear about efforts to close the achievement gap. Head of Steps to Success has departed and would like to know what will happen with that program.

There was an excellent presentation that was made to the School Committee so perhaps we can get an excerpt of that.

Benefits should be reflected in that budget.

There was a desire on Mary Ellen's part to have more control over what the benefit costs will be. The population in the schools is different than in the town so to use the same broad assumption is not something she would necessarily want to do.

What does the town do with reporting and budgeting – come up with a way that reflects all in costs.

In Beverly benefits attributable to the school were in the school budget line by line. It is reasonable to take a ratio and allocate it. Agree there is a broader discussion we should be having with Mary Ellen and Melissa.

Many more improvements to come but we should be going in that direction vis a vis the benefits.

Precision in accounting for benefits – seems to be rife with uncertainties. Do we make a best guess on percentages from the previous year?

You want each half to make their educated guesses based on their realities, their populations.

Aggregate amount and on the school side – with salaries look individual by individual and look at steps and raises and build up from there. It is feasible to look at what benefits individuals are taking and extrapolate that for the next year.

In deciding the share that goes to the schools, he did line by line this what your cost is and that got built into your aggregate cost. What do you in the middle of the year when things change?

If you build an average, the percentage stays pretty steady.

Might be useful for Mary Ellen to address this and then hear from us on this point. And then something further has to happen whether here or Town/School partnership.

You don't want to be making hiring decisions based on minutia going person by person program by program.

It is a matter of transparency to show actual cost of the schools. A 50 / 50 split is not the reality. People should be able to understand the true cost and the schools will require what they are going to require.

Next Meeting: The next meeting of the Advisory Committee will be on April 5.

Upon a MOTION made and seconded and voted unanimously, the meeting adjourned at 9:45 pm.

Documents Presented at Advisory Committee Meeting:

HUMAN SERVICES SUBCOMMITTEE REPORT ON WA 6

HUMAN SERVICES SUBCOMMITTEE REPORT ON WA 19

SCHOOLS SUBCOMMITTEE PRELIMINARY REPORT ON FY17 SCHOOLS BUDGET