

**Town of Brookline  
Advisory Committee Minutes**

Sean Lynn-Jones, Chair

**Date:** October 26, 2016

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**Present:** Carla Benka, Clifford M. Brown, Carol Caro, Lea Cohen, Harry Friedman, Janet Gelbart, David-Marc Goldstein, Neil Gordon, Sytske Humphrey, Angela Hyatt, Alisa G. Jonas, Janice S. Kahn, David Lescohier, Sean Lynn-Jones, Shaari S. Mittel, Bobbie Knable, Fred Levitan, Mariah Nobrega, Michael Sandman, Lee L. Selwyn, Stanley L. Spiegel, Christine Westphal

**Absent:** Amy Hummell, Dennis Doughty, Steve Kanes, John Doggett, Robert Liao, Pamela Lodish, Kelly A. Hardebeck, Charles Swartz

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

**Also attending:** Petitioners Henry Winkleman and Kenneth Goldstein

- 1) A MOTION was made and seconded to reconsider Article 34: Resolution in Support of Affordable Senior Housing Development Using Air Rights over Town-Owned Parking Lot in Brookline Village (Kent/Station Street Parking Lot)

By a VOTE of 16 in favor, none opposed and 4 abstentions, the Advisory Committee agreed to reconsider Article 34.

At the September 29th Advisory Committee meeting Mr. Sandman moved Favorable Action on WA 34; Ms. Nobrega moved to amend.

The following amendments were duly moved and seconded:

In the fifth Whereas clause, delete the words “Brookline Village” and replace them with “North Brookline”;

In the seventh Whereas clause, delete the phrase “including the Town-owned site situated between Station and Kent Streets in Brookline Village”, delete “a” between “as” and “suitable”, add the letter “s” to “location” after the word “suitable”; and

In the Resolve clause, add the letter “s” to “lot” in the fourth line; delete “Brookline Village situated between Kent and Station Streets across from the Brookline Village MBTA station (Parcel No.140-05-00); and add the phrase “North Brookline, in alignment with any Town Strategic Asset Plan, if available” after the word “in” in the fourth line.

The Chair called for a separate vote on each amendment.

The first amendment was approved by a vote of 17 in favor, one opposed, and two abstentions.

The second amendment was approved by a vote of 16 in favor, three opposed and one abstention.

The third amendment was approved by a vote of 14 in favor and six opposed.

A MOTION was duly made and seconded for favorable action on the following:

Whereas, the Town of Brookline has committed to taking meaningful actions toward becoming a more age-friendly community;

Whereas, the aging of the baby boom population cohort has created a need for a substantial expansion of Brookline's supply of housing for seniors;

Whereas, Brookline's need for more affordable housing for seniors with low and moderate incomes is already acute;

Whereas, senior citizens benefit from living within walking distance of public transit, services, shopping, and cultural resources;

Whereas, North Brookline is a pedestrian friendly location that meets the living needs of seniors, including those who do not own an automobile;

Whereas the Town's municipally owned parking lots offer an opportunity for attractive air rights development of senior housing, including for low and moderate income households; and

Whereas the public process leading to the Town's Housing Production Plan identified Town-owned municipal parking lots as suitable locations for affordable senior housing development;

THEREFORE, be it resolved that Town Meeting urges the Board of Selectmen, the Planning Board, and the Housing Advisory Board to pursue a suitable air rights development of age-restricted affordable mixed-income housing over the existing Town-owned parking lots in North Brookline, in alignment with any Town Strategic Asset Plan, if available.

The Motion was approved by a vote of 14 in favor, 5 opposed, and one abstention.

The Town Moderator rejected the Advisory Committee's amended language as it was deemed outside the scope of the Warrant.

The Petitioners were asked by the Chair to make a brief statement on the proposed article. Mr. Goldstein stated Article 34 simply asks if the Town would look at this location and see if they agree that senior housing would be an appropriate use on it. The Article, if passed, doesn't bind the Town to anything. If it were approved, the next step would be for an oversight committee to study it, RFPs issued to get proposals for development of the site, and eventually a return to Town Meeting for its approval of the project going forward. The Selectman made a minor change, replacing "pursue" with "develop a proposal" that reinforces the notion that article seeks only further investigation of the concept of senior housing to be built using air rights over the parking lot.

#### **Comments and Questions:**

Mariah Nobriega provided information on why she could not support Article 34 (either version – original or amended by the Selectman). This is not an appropriate Resolution – four points on her handout – attempt to accelerate and bypass the process that is already in place.

What is the process alluded to?

Typically, there should be a study of what is the best site we have. Let's evaluate them. Is it the right thing for a senior housing development, a park, a library or some other use? What do we own and what is its best use?

Supportive of the concept of income restricted senior housing however it is inappropriate to short change the Strategic Asset Planning process that is underway, that Town meeting has appropriated money for, and that we have in other circumstances used as a justification for saying "No" to other proposals. This parking lot is part of our inventory – it may come back that nothing can be done here but Senior Housing but let's stick to the plan and do what we said we would do specifically as it relates to the Strategic Asset Plan. We cannot start picking it apart, piece by piece. Also, agree that a resolution is not just a resolution. Typically suggests we are all in favor of an idea.

Comment: Would like to suggest the concept of multi-tasking; this other plan is going to go forward like a snail, this other option could move forward simultaneously. Don't agree that resolutions suggest a done deal. This give us both – pursue PB strategic use of land in the town and also be looking at what we could do with the parcels. I don't think one contradicts the other.

Comment: With 2 pronged-approach - what if there are two conflicting results? One might just not be a suitable solution. What if both suitable?

Comment: One of the problems of a Strategic Asset Plan is what if you don't know what you will do with the assets going forward – also excruciatingly long process. In terms of the resolution, that is complex because we do take that as it is a good idea going forward but then how much effort do you want to put toward something that people are not in favor? Someone will put in the work and maybe it will fly or maybe not but good luck with that.

Comment: People doing the work on the senior housing proposal will be people in Planning Department, the same people who are doing the Strategic Asset Plan. Do we have the staffing to do both things?

Comment: I am Pro density and pro senior throughout the Town. Not against affordable housing for seniors but this is being pitched – air rights is a bit of a euphemism – as having a modest impact on the environment. But reality is it would be a cover over the parking lot, kept low to keep it economical so a dark parking lot. The slide illustrates it – not a missing tooth that needs to be filled in with a building. Other homes on the street use the space for access to air and light. Community/abutters weren't appropriately involved.

Good idea but this is the wrong place and time. That parking lot holds 39 cars. Spaces are needed for Brookline Village for merchants and impossible to find overnight parking. What will we do for those spots during construction? The area is greatly impacted by the density. Good idea to wait and look at other lots.

Q: What is the status of the Strategic Asset Plan?

A: Alison and Kara email to Carla. In house staff is conducting interviews with Department and Division Heads about needs, and getting other Town studies – baseline information will be posted after Town Meeting and before they post the RFP. Studies have been gathered and scanned. Study will be completed by the end of this fiscal year June 2017. Kara’s top priority now and will be carried out by the Economic Development and Long Term division of the Planning Department. Major parcel study will follow close on its heels. Town owned and privately owned large pieces of property. Then match Town needs with what is held. There will be opportunities for public comment and input throughout the process.

Q: There are other senior housing developments coming online. What about the other parking lot that doesn’t abut any houses?

Q. What about the Belvedere (wall)– mow it down or keep it?

A: Petitioners noted that that can’t be answered because we are just beginning the process. There is no current design yet. There may be more merchant parking after the fact.

Q: Why didn’t consider other lot between Kent Street and Webster Place?

A: It might be better suited for economic development and some other reasons.

Q: What if you were to study suitability for this site rather than developing a proposal, could you get information that can would inform other studies or produce learning?

A: Need for this housing now and a growing need, doesn’t take a masters in planning to see this site is appropriate for this and not anything else. Unrealistic expectation of what a strategic asset plan will do. It will list sites, list needs and tell you which sites might be suitable for which needs.

Comment: Feel that the petitioners have been very transparent and inclusive in their process. I feel that a process that began so well and was so transparent has, because of PR issues, is falling by the way side. I have no qualms about the resolution as it is a start to begin to address some concerns that have been raised over the last three years.

Comment: This parcel is zoned G-2 district and there are a number of permissible uses for G-2 properties in our Zoning By-Law –some 23 potential uses, and one is a life care facility with independent living apartments and other shared facilities, but others include restaurants, retail stores, barber shops, etc. Can’t see justifying jumping the gun and by-passing the process. If you support this resolution, it will get out of control and next spring you may see resolutions identifying town owned land for indoor hockey rinks, outdoor swimming pools, and day care centers.

Comment: There are over 1400 seniors waiting for apartments. If that isn’t demonstrating a need, I don’t know what is and it is growing all the time. This is moving us forward with exploring this and toward something that is desperately needed.

Yes there is a great need but we don't know if it is the greatest need. If we left it as a study, conflicted sending a mixed message about whether it is appropriate or not.

Comment If AC's original vote was to remove this specific site and expand the number of sites in other parts of Town, then that was essentially a vote for no action. Basically that was our position before. Air rights over parking lots have their own complications. We shouldn't be approving land use for one purpose over consideration of others.

Comment: If we don't do anything specific, 5 years hence this will still be a parking lot. Maybe unsuitable and in that case it won't be done.

Comment: Not a concrete proposal but will give us some information to fulfill the goals represented. We have chances after this is done about how we feel about that use and how it measures up to other possibilities. Senior housing could be counted as a real priority.

Petitioners responded – Address the Housing Production Plan and states many reasons for the need. Regarding the SAP's RFP it was released last December and there no one responded, received no answers, no interest in helping the town. [NB: the previous statement is incorrect.] Are we waiting for this to take action? Also parking requirements are less for seniors.

SAP has a great deal of value in long range planning but not specific planning about specific sites. The adoption of the Strategic Asset Plan was not a mandate to cease all other planning about sites and needs. No process we are trying to make an end run around. We made up the process. We involved the community from the very beginning. The idea that there is some intent to use the resolution to speed the process, yes, make it clear to BOS and rest of town something we believe in and not two years from now, and another year of study. This site is ripe for exploration and we want to explore right now.

A MOTION was made and seconded to recommend no action on Article 34.

By a VOTE of 10 in favor, with 9 opposed and 2 abstentions the Advisory Committee recommends no action under Article 34.

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Upon a **MOTION** made and seconded to adjourn, and voted unanimously, the meeting was adjourned at 8:50pm

**Documents Presented:**

For WA 34

- BoS motion and vote
- Advisory Committee motion and vote