

Moderator's Committee on Elderly Tax Relief
Room 408, Town Hall
January 14, 2019

Committee Members Present: Susan Granoff, Ben Franco, Tom Elwertowski, Bob Lepson
Committee Members Absent: Jeff Kushner
Others Present: Harold Petersen, Regina Frawley

The meeting began at 6:33 pm.

The committee approved, as amended, the minutes for the meeting of November 19, 2018.

The committee then discussed the recently released US Census/American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates, 2013-2017, of Brookline's "Population 65 Years and Over." Mr. Elwertowski explained that each year, a different 5% sample of Brookline's population is surveyed, so that the five years of data in this survey represents 25% of Brookline's population. He also noted that all dollar amounts are expressed in 2017 dollars. The committee also compared this survey for the years 2013-2017 with the comparable survey for the years 2006-2010 to identify trends.

Ms. Granoff presented a summary report on this census data, highlighting the information that was especially pertinent to the committee's work. She noted that seniors age 65 and older during the years 2013-2017 made up 15.6% of Brookline's total estimated population (in contrast to the years 2006-2010 when they were 12.6% of Brookline's population). Of these 9,233 senior residents of Brookline, approximately 57% were female and 43% male.

In summarizing the portion of the 2013-2017 census data that focused on senior housing, Ms. Granoff reported that over two-thirds of Brookline's seniors (67.6%) lived in owner-occupied households; less than one-third were renters. This was a significant increase from the 2006-2010 period when only 55.6% of seniors lived in owner-occupied households. Nearly 29% (1,152) of owner-occupied senior households paid 30% or more of their household income on selected housing costs. The median selected monthly housing costs for owner-occupied senior households with a mortgage was \$2,846 (\$34,152 annually); for senior owner-occupied households without a mortgage, the median selected monthly housing costs was \$1,335 (\$16,020 annually). Ms. Granoff noted that a key factor in identifying need among senior homeowners with modest household incomes may be whether or not the household has mortgage debt.

Ms. Granoff then turned to the 2013-2017 census data that dealt with senior household income. Nearly 39% of seniors were still in the labor force and over 54% of senior households had earned income. Those senior households with earned income averaged \$119,699 annually. Slightly under 76% of senior households had social security income, which averaged \$22,851 per household. (It was pointed out that, since 49% of senior households consisted of married couples, with both receiving social security in most cases, the average social security income for a senior living alone was probably considerably less than \$22,851.) Approximately 36% of senior households had retirement income, which averaged \$36,000 per household. 4.4% of senior households received supplemental security income, averaging about \$7,900, and 9% of senior households received food stamps/SNAP benefits.

The committee then discussed a variety of research articles and reports on demographic factors related to financial insecurity in seniors. The factors that seemed to be most closely associated with senior financial insecurity, in addition to income, were gender, age, and race. The research concluded that economic insecurity is a particular threat for older women for several reasons: women 65 and older typically outlived men of comparable age and were more likely to live alone and have fewer financial resources in retirement because of life-long differences in their work experiences and pay levels. Occupational segregation, pay inequity, and greater caregiving responsibilities contributed to reduced earnings during older women's working age years and to lower savings, a reduced likelihood of retirement income or pension income, and to lower Social Security payments in retirement. In 2016, nearly one out of three older women living alone relied on Social Security for 90% or more of her total income.

The research also concluded that seniors age 85 and older were more likely to experience economic insecurity because they were more likely to live alone, were more likely to be women, and, in contrast to adults age 65-74, were less likely to have employment income. In 2016, nationwide, 45% of adults age 85 and older lived alone (compared to just 22% of those age 65-74) and 65% of adults age 85 and older were women.

In the discussion that followed, it was stated that according to the Gini Index for 2011-2017, Brookline was becoming more equal in income.

Mr. Franco reported that the Select Board had recently voted to increase the residential property tax exemption from 20% to 21%.

The committee discussed the need to better publicize the town's senior tax deferral program. Ms. Frawley noted that seniors living in South Brookline may have difficulty attending informational meetings at the Senior Center and recommended that the town hold additional informational meetings at the Putterham library or Temple Emeth, preferably in the daytime. It was also suggested that an informational meeting be held at Town Hall in the evening so that the children of seniors or other family members could attend.

The committee next turned to a discussion of the committee's planned survey of Brookline's senior homeowners. Mr. Elwertowski said that SDAPS, the free software being used to print the survey, requires a Linux operating system to tabulate the results but the scanning of completed surveys can be done using any operating system. Because our committee is planning to send the survey to all senior owner-occupied households rather than just to a small sample, it was pointed out that response bias will be of greater concern than sampling bias.

The committee discussed the pros and cons of providing stamped return envelopes with the survey. While stamped return envelopes might improve the return rate, it would be very expensive to do so for the nearly 4,000 surveys that would be sent out. It was pointed out that the town's annual census questionnaire that is sent to all Brookline households each January does not include stamped return envelopes.

With respect to the timing of the survey, it was suggested that the survey be sent out in late April, after the April 15 federal and state income tax return deadlines, because the prospective responders to the survey will have already gathered much of the information needed to fill it out.

It was decided that at our February meeting, we will hold a working session to finalize the wording of a

test survey. We will then ask approximately 15-20 seniors to fill out the survey and give us feedback on it. At our March meeting, we will use this feedback to prepare a final version of the survey.

The meeting was adjourned at 9:15 pm.

Documents reviewed:

- Minutes for meeting of November 19, 2018
- US Census/American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates, S0103, "Population 65 Years and Over" in Brookline, 2013-2017 (2018)
- US Census/American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates, S0103, "Population 65 Years and Over" in Brookline, 2006-2010 (2018)
- Summary Report of Selected Pertinent US Census/American Community Survey Estimates, 2013-2017
- Elder Index Result for Norfolk County, Mass.
- "The Gender Earnings Gap and Retirement," Forbes Magazine, July 12, 2018
- "Women 80% More Likely to be Impoverished in Retirement" (March 2016), National Institute on Retirement Security
- "Shortchanged in Retirement" (March 2016), National Institute on Retirement Security
- "Living Below the Line: Economic Insecurity and Older Americans, Gender Disparities in Insecurity, 2016" (2017), UMass Boston Center for Social and Demographic Research on Aging
- "Living Below the Line: Economic Insecurity and Older Americans, Age Disparities in Insecurity, 2016" (2017), UMass Boston Center for Social and Demographic Research on Aging
- "Living Below the Line in Massachusetts: Disparities in Economic Insecurity by Gender and Household Type" (2017), UMass Boston Center for Social and Demographic Research on Aging
- "Living Below the Line in Massachusetts: Disparities in Economic Insecurity by Age" (2017), UMass Boston Center for Social and Demographic Research on Aging
- "Living Below the Line in Massachusetts: Disparities in Economic Insecurity across Racial and Ethnic Groups" (2017), UMass Boston Center for Social and Demographic Research on Aging