

Brookline Fiscal Advisory Committee
Financial Policies and Principles Subcommittee
Minutes
February 4, 2019
5:00-7:00 PM

Members in Attendance: Peter Bleyleben, Arthur Segel, Mike Toffel, Nancy Daly, Cliff Brown, Carol Levin.

Guests: Paul Saner (BFAC), Carla Benka (Guest Speaker, Advisory), Sean Lynn-Jones (Advisory) Richard Nangle, Ben Franco (Select Board)

Carol opened the meeting. The goal is to review and discuss the prioritization of the task list. She acknowledged the list is too large for the committee to address all of the topics.

Cliff provided a recap of resources he has identified including: the Pioneer Institute, Sean Cronin, GOFA, [Mass Analysis](#) a Pioneer Institute benchmarking tool with State provided data.

Arthur shared information about resources from the Urban Institute: [RetirementPolicy.org](#), Public Pension Simulator, and [Modernizing Our Retirement Program](#), and Prof. Goldsmith regarding a Santa Monica system designed by RAND: the Santa Monica [Well Being](#) project.

Cliff expanded on the list of possible speakers: Sergio Modigliani (former head of Advisory and Planning Board), George Cole (Building Commission, developer) considers how to get the same product for less; Steve Cirillo (former Treasurer), Beth Jackson Stram (OSC, School Committee), Len Weiss and Mike Sandman (AC Schools Subcommittee). David Pollack (School Committee), Andy Pappastergio (Public Works Commissioner), and Kevin Stokes (Head of IT).

Peter raised the need to hear from people outside of Brookline, other communities and academics. Learn what metrics are used elsewhere.

Discussion of the need to know the Town's Priorities and Vision: Doing so will provide the context for committee's work. Acknowledgment priorities and vision are a political process.

Mike suggested our aim is to bring greater transparency and efficiency to the Town.

Mike suggested using the Newbury College acquisition as a case study.

Guest Speakers: Carla Benka, Vice Chair Advisory and Chair of AC Capital Subcommittee
Sean Lynn-Jones, Chair of Advisory

Carla: There is little overlap between CIP and Comprehensive Plan (2005-2015).

The Town's Financial Plan comes out in February: Prepared by Staff. Each AC Subcommittee has hearings on its section of the budget, makes a recommendation, then the full AC votes. The Budget sent to Town Meeting is the AC budget. The School Budget is a separate process. Town Meeting can only approve the overall size of the School Budget, not line items. That is by state law.

The conversation then turned to whether Advisory is a political or economic/financial body. Carla and Sean acknowledged the financial analysis is limited. The question was raised if it should be the Town staff performing the financial analysis and then providing it to the AC. There are only 3 people in the Town Administrators' office, it lacks the capacity to do the work.

Carla: Items which should be in the operating budget get pushed into the CIP by bundling. (Accumulate paint jobs till \$20K)

Some CIP funds are not spent in a timely function because the Town is lacking personnel/capacity, especially in Engineering Paving jobs are often delayed.

Asked to make School side recommendations: Carla noted the School's have a vision statement with 4 pillars used to justify any expense. Schools also have more staff for financial/budget work.

Sean noted it is fortunate the Town has a CIP. How things get into the CIP is not clear.

Cliff Brown pointed out the composition of the AC leads to a lack of technical skills since most AC members must be Town Meeting Members. Suggested expanding the number of at large members, and reducing TMM. Suggested dividing the AC's work into financial responsibilities vs. resolutions.

Arthur asked who is the Town Auditor and when were they last replaced? Carla responded it is Powers & Sullivan, and has been for approximately 4 years with the same Partner in charge. Arthur indicated best practice would be to change auditors every 5 – 10 years. It's healthier for everyone. The last time to the job was bid, the other firms responding were not as experienced in Massachusetts municipal finance.

Though needs assessment, LR Strategic Plan, nothing happened regarding CIP.

Peter asked what the trend has been over past 20 years regarding the process? Carla responded that things have improved, there are now lists, department heads are more professional, but analysis is still lacking, and operating projects are drifting into capital. In years past, the head of planning and the assistant town administrator would sit down together, and the Planning Board would review. The Planning Department and Board no longer have that capacity.

Carla suggest the group meet with Ruthanne Fuller, a former Brookline resident, FINPAC member, and now the mayor of Newton.

Mike Toffel said he thinks we should not invite people to inform the subcommittee until we finalize which subset of tasks the subcommittee will actually tackle, since that will affect the information needed.

The meeting concluded without establishing a prioritization or paring down of the subcommittee's task list, which will continue to be discussed at the next meeting.