

**Town of Brookline
Advisory Committee Minutes
Tuesday, February 14, 2023**

Meeting Recording:

https://brooklinema.zoomgov.com/rec/share/fZ5g_Z13F83PVrj57mEw5YOo4HeWXLWO4Jd2zDdKtPbhoLR7Onz8iWfk_tv5H22L.2qJBMzF9Phv5nehU

Present: Ben Birnbaum, Clifford Brown, John Doggett, Dennis Doughty, Katherine Florio, Harry Friedman, David-Marc Goldstein, Neil Gordon, Susan Granoff, Amy Hummel, Anita Johnson, Janice Kahn, Carol Levin, Pamela Lodish, Joslin Murphy, Donelle O’Neal, Linda Olson Pehlke, Markus L. Penzel, Stephen Reeders, Carlos Ridruejo, Lee Selwyn, Alok Somani, Carolyn R. Thall

Absent: Harry Bohrs, Patricia Correa, Kelly Hardebeck, Alisa Jonas, David Pollak, Christine Westphal

Also Attending: Town Counsel Joe Callanan, Paul Trahon, Carol Caro, Joel Shoner, Carla Benka, Jonathan Golden, Ryan Black, Mark Gray, Mariah Nobrega, Bonnie Bastien, Sean Lynn-Jones, Paul Warren, Kevin MacKenzie, John VanScoyoc, Patricia Cripe, Mike Toffel, Marissa Vogt, Richard Nangle and other members of the public.

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

Announcements: Pursuant to this Board’s Authority under 940 CMR 29.10 (8), all but one of the committee members will be participating remotely via telephone or video conferencing due to emergency regulations regarding the Corona virus. The Chair has reviewed the requirements of the regulations. There is a quorum physically present and all votes taken will be recorded by roll call so all above listed Advisory Committee members will be allowed to vote.

7:00 pm Public Comment There was no public comment.

7:15 pm Discussion of FY24 Financial Plan – Review presentation and hold a preliminary discussion on the components of a potential Town and School operating override.

Stephen Reeders: No listing of priorities is given. Purpose is to override the rule of 2.5% of taxes and the Town/School should ask for more. With no clear priorities shared it makes it difficult to evaluate and recommend next steps. Screaming needs in the school system not being addressed and how do we get to the bottom of this. MCAT scores cited. Really more of a question of methodology. Can AC poll people to get a sense of priorities?

Cliff Brown: On the school ask, the world language request is not to add anything but do a study to determine how to do it better. Not satisfied with how the program is doing. Hire someone to do the review. Distinction between first year and subsequent years. This is a good thing. Made a case for why they need that extra personnel and also why the bus program is included. Regarding an achievement

gap, this has been an issue for quite some time. Not unique to Brookline but that doesn't excuse it. Addressing this within the framework of what the school is doing with those areas of study, how are they allocating/reallocating resources to address these problems. Continue to try a variety of different approaches. School Department might be able to provide some insight on this. Came away from the meeting tonight seeing hear clear priorities.

Dennis Doughty: There continues to be outreach sessions with the broader community and the Town Administrator and people should be encouraged to attend. Many of the items discussed tonight were expressed as priorities by Town Meeting, i.e. rodent control.

Mariah Norbrega: The school committee guidelines discuss equity. Education for all is part of our base effort and is a huge focus. See the School slide presentation from tonight from Dr. Guillory.

Pam Lodish: Concern about override for Recreation Department and think it is an end run around the budget process. Concerned about idea of picking up one thing. Should we as an Advisory Committee be supporting an override that is structured that way?

Dennis Doughty: Still waiting for what we will get from the Select Board and we will be able to weigh in on all of it and can discuss when the time comes.

Alok Somani: The override discussion and items included don't really seem to be the result of a robust budget process. Priorities should have been identified and ranked and revenue applied then a discussion about should these be funded and if so how. Concerned about this whole process.

Dennis Doughty: What is the AC's role in the language that goes onto the ballot or into the descriptions? The extent of our involvement is to either have a meeting or send a letter to the Select Board once we see what is being proposed but have no official role in that at all.

Harry Friedman: Town Counsel is supposed to come up with booklets that articulate pros and cons. Chance for someone to be part of the committee to be part of this.

Janice Kahn: Above 2.5% is annual 4.3% is cumulative and then there is Pierce which has to be added in. Look at next year – what is that mean in terms of the public, what do they need to know about cumulative impact of these? Building Department reorganization to build redundancy in the department – what is the Wellesley Model?

See Estimated Tax Impact slide.

Carla Benka: The reorganization of the Building Department is because there are a number of retirements including Charlie Simmons. Looking at doing another way of doing business but don't have granularity on this.

Link Shared by Joslin Murphy: Prop 2 1/2 Ballot Question 101: <https://www.mass.gov/doc/proposition-2-12-ballot-question-requirement-and-procedure/download>

Lee Selwyn: Don't think it includes other items they plan on voting on separately. Closer to 5% or 6% rather than 4% plus Pierce Debt Exclusion, etc. so by the time you get to the 3rd year looking at 14% or 15% escalation relative to where we are today. People will begin to focus on overall magnitude and there is a good chance both will fail. The Town side needs more attention notwithstanding what we are hearing from the School. We are beginning to push the envelope. 20% of town voters have children in the school system. How many kids have opted out of the public schools for private. Hope they don't jam these all together.

Neil Gordon: Equally disappointed with the presentation. School side, Town side with a giant wall in between with no prioritization. Regarding collective bargaining question also disappointed in the response. School has settled their agreements and built it into the override. From the Town side Prop 2.5 seems to be being used as a negotiating tool, no specific funds in the override for collective bargaining.

David Marc Goldstein: With Pierce added, we're talking roughly 3/4 *Billion* Dollars of debt we have to pay off (before Baker is added) - this not including operational overrides, of course...

Linda Pehlke: Agree we should have the two operating overrides separate for the voters. Flummoxed about the 3 years and seems disingenuous to the voters...not being honest what we are asking for with those amounts. Hearing from Department Heads and Town Meeting is not getting at what people who live here really feel about – maybe roads, but electrifying the Town fleet are people's pet projects and not sure voters would consider it a priority. Maybe a survey to get to the real needs. Grow sustainability, spend money to save money – don't see that being carried out through this budget proposal.

Carolyn Thall: Echo and build on what Linda has said. Question of sustainability. We do this and taxes go up and the cost burden on renters goes up, we become a less inclusive town by the day, people can't afford to move here and at the end of three years we still have to pay for all of this.

Carlos Ridruejo: I think in 3 years we are going to be back at the same issue. We need to focus on shifting the tax base to commercial and don't see how we can do that. All other towns we use as examples Watertown, Somerville, etc. if we are running out of space to do it we will price ourselves out of residents. No one will be able to live here and the services won't be that great. It becomes a regular cycle. Worry that there is the perception that we are a wealthy town but people need to realize that is not the case.

Amy Hummel: Even asking voters about priorities is the same problem because they don't have the full view of the budget process. Same with the schools – the information has to come from the School Committee and that is the way things are done. We can voice opinions but we can't ferret out a difference answer just because we want one. Agree with commercial base but we only have limited space.

Dennis Doughty: Need to talk through 2 things – seeking feedback and ideas.

7:45 pm Advisory Committee Organization

- Updates on schedule

Dennis Doughty: Need to talk through 2 things – seeking feedback and ideas. See draft AC schedule. Difficult to hold all of our hearings and meetings given tight timelines and limited information.

Carla Benka: Which budgets to take up first was determined through discussions with Melissa Goff and based on the effect of the override or not. Some departments are more flexible than others.

Susan Granoff: Our time and department heads time are valuable. Don't want to go through the motions of hearings with budgets that are in a preliminary stage. We want to dig deeply. Some departments could be done because they will not be impacted by the override and their expenses don't change that much – Library, Veterans' Affairs for example but three others might – Health Department with rat control, Council on Aging and staffing based on override passing, and Office of Diversity has new responsibilities about hearing complaints of discrimination. We need more information that won't be available until March 8th at the earliest. Our schedule may have to go more into May than we are accustomed to.

Dennis Doughty: We have often taken 2 votes – one on the base budget and then one based on the override. If one or if the other. We can accommodate that as long as when we have the hearing and issue the report the information is substantial enough. Between now and next week, we need to continue discussion with Chas and Melissa and last thing we want to do is hold a useless meeting. Hold his feet to the fire on that topic.

Carla Benka: Library will receive whatever increase is necessary to insure they receive funds from the state library. The departments like Health and CDICR which will be receiving additional funding via an override – will have that information in time for a public hearing. For Veterans Services they will have the information because nothing changes in that budget; and Library will get increase. Other departmental budgets for COA, CDICR and Health will be held later. We will have to take two votes. Hopefully we won't have as many warrant articles this spring.

John Doggett: Agreed procedure on how to deal with overages. Can we have a procedure – take a vote on an addition to staff understanding it is a pro temp vote and hear all from all departments additions and then figure out how to fund them. We then have to trade off if funding is not found.

Dennis Doughty: Valid point to raise and perhaps we can squeeze that discussion in during Subcommittee Reports. Not prepared to make a motion or take a vote. We can discuss on March 2nd meeting.

Mark Penzel: If the state doesn't tell us how much we are getting until March 1 and budget doesn't have to be finalized until March 7 how does this effect our consideration of those budgets if we don't know what those numbers are? If the state gives us \$1M extra would we throw that at the override or what?

Dennis Doughty: Will not impact the initial departmental budgets we will review as they are unlikely to change such as Advisory. See also Carla's comments above.

Neil Gordon: Have a tiered system with various estimates within which we will work.

Cliff Brown: Different timing for different pots of money coming in, don't view what is happening is any different than previous years. Discuss override situation and when data comes in we refine and take a final vote. Don't need to delay because that would be a problem at the end of the day.

Janice Kahn: The work is the work, given the lateness of the state allocation and financial plan not sure it is all that critical to get it done; we don't actually deep dive on the school budget until well into the season. Concerned about public safety and those departments seems very effected by restoration. Red flag for the Police Department. Both unions are in arbitration. So many question marks.

Dennis Doughty: Many moving parts. Always have some uncertainty.

- Meeting protocols in the face of in-person meetings returning.

The chair noted that the legislature has not extended the remote meeting rules so beginning April 1st, we revert to previous guidelines. This group and the public have gotten use to Zooming in...will have to hold in person meetings with a noticed time and place and have a quorum in the room, and have the ability to have members join remotely if requested. So, suggest holding hybrid meetings where members of the committee and public could participate remotely by Zoom. We need to determine if this will work for us.

Comments, Concerns, Suggestions?

Carolyn Thall: Concern about this for AC and Town Meeting. Effort to codify boards and commissions and groups to be able to offer remote participation. I was part of that conversation with Kate Silbaugh and Jennifer Goldsmith. Single parents with young kids and they will not be able to Town Meeting members; others who are elderly who are concerned about driving at night. I hope that all opportunities for exceptions will be clear and publicized so we remain and maintain small gains we have made in terms of inclusion.

Dennis Doughty: We did spend money to upgrade a number of meeting rooms in Town Hall to allow hybrid experiences. There are challenges in terms of seeing people in the room, managing chat, etc. Will we be able to get a quorum in the room? What about subcommittees? May not have the distribution of the people in this case.

Amy Hummel: Assumptions around the fact we do things now and how to replicate that. Not sure it is better, may be worse. No organic back and forth. Disagree that remote or hybrid is the way to go.

Linda Pehlke: I as a newer member, find recordings essential for me to be able to write my reports. Concerns about hybrid – worst of both worlds. It will be hard to get to Town Hall for meetings.

Dennis Doughty: Wonder what the demand may be from the public.

Ben Birnbaum: Each one of us will have a different view of this. Younger folks have less concern about catching COVID show up for meetings, and more mature people participate remotely. What we have

been through with Zoom meetings I would not have wished it on anyone because it feels weird to be talking to you this way. On the other hand, we need to find out for how many people a return to full face to face meetings may be a game changer.

We can do a poll to get a sense of whether a quorum will be possible.

Donnelle O’Neal: When some of us enter a room, it may not be taken in the same way as when we show up remotely. Personal health issues so Zoom has been beneficial. I have had a better experience. And we have been able to get much more people involved and get more voices and input. I don’t want to lose the inclusion part.

Susan Granoff: Some of us are at high risk for developing severe illness with COVID. Take a page from what Town Meeting is planning on doing and make some accommodations for those who need special protections. Town Meeting will have a special section where people are vaccinated and boosted and wear a mask. Don’t think there will be an ideal solution but we need to be sensitive to people’s health concerns or we may lose people. Problem with hybrid you create second class citizens – someone phoning in or having a video connection may not have the same experience and participation is not the same if one is sitting in the same room. Would everyone be willing to wear a mask? Could we set up the tables in such a way to accommodate some. Having good microphones will be essential especially if people are in masks. Make sure air circulation is good. Benefits and drawbacks. I have appreciated Zoom meetings and it works well with the schedule. Didn’t have as many meetings as we have in the recent past.

- Communications strategy for Advisory Committee (combined reports, subcommittee outreach, speaking at Town Meeting, etc.). **This item was tabled until next time.**

9:30 pm Other Business

Upon a **MOTION** made and seconded to adjourn, and voted unanimously, the meeting was adjourned at 9:40 pm.

Documents Presented

<https://www.brooklinema.gov/DocumentCenter/Index/3715>

- Override Presentation FINAL
- 2023.02.08 Master Town Funding Spreadsheet v4b
- AC Schedule Spring 2023 DRAFT 1
- 2.14.23_Town and School Override Meeting_School Presentation Final Version

No votes were taken at this meeting.