

TOWN OF BROOKLINE ADVISORY COMMITTEE
Land Use, Zoning, and Sustainability Subcommittee Report
Department of Planning & Community Development: FY23 Budget
Public Hearing: February 24, 2022

Attendance: Chair Carlos Ridruejo. Members Scott Ananian, Anita Johnson, Georgia M. Johnson, Linda Olsen Pehlke, David Pollak. Department Director Kara Brewton. Deputy Town Administrator Melissa Goff. Select Board Member Raul Fernandez. Members of the Public.

Recommendation: Favorable Action by a vote of 6-0 with no abstentions

Executive Summary:	The Planning and Community Development FY23 budget of \$1,311,484 represents a 3% increase, reflecting the addition of 0.5 FTE to support Community Preservation Act implementation 0.5 FTE to support the Preservation Division.
Voting Yes will...	Approve the departmental budget request as proposed by the Town Administrator and Select Board. This should be understood as a bare maintenance budget enabling continued but slow progress on some but not all of the priorities promoted by the Department (DPCD), Select Board (SB), the Town Administrator (TA), and Town Meeting (TM).
Voting No will...	Reject the budget/priorities as proposed.
Financial impact [if any]	DPCD is under-resourced to manage its regulatory workload and advance the town’s planning agenda. This budget is a compromise reflecting the SB and TA’s overall priorities across all departments. The impact is that regulatory work will get done but other priorities including planning and sustainability work will be slow and incremental.
Legal implications [if any]	The online version of the Zoning Bylaw is being made current and indexed, but the much-needed work of updating Brookline’s zoning – work requiring staff, community, and consultant effort – is further deferred due to funding constraints.

Budget Overview

The DPCD budget proposal includes 19 FTE staff organized into the Director’s office and four divisions or Sub-program areas, as follows:

Director’s Office (3 FTE)

- Regulatory Planning Division (7 FTE)
- Economic Development & Long-Term Planning Division (3 FTE)
- Community Planning Division (5 FTE)
- Sustainability Director (1 FTE)

This is an increase of one FTE in the Regulatory Planning Division that combines two 0.5 FTE needs in a single hire to address increased work in preservation planning and administration of the Community Preservation Act (CPA) respectively.

Staff salaries make up 92% of the DCPD budget.

There is an additional \$25,000 in consultant funding for Sustainability that is located in the Town Administrator's budget.

Administration

DCPD is committed to advancing the Town's Policy Issues and Initiatives with the following specific objectives:

- Publish Disadvantage Business Enterprise (DBE) status for all Department contracts – including certified and non-certified entities.
- Add racial equity criteria to all formal staff recommendations.
- Incorporate community engagement and racial equity goals into all Scopes of Work – both internal projects as well as standard language for all technical consultant contracts.
- Transition all public meeting agendas and meeting materials to the Town's OnBase software system.
- Analyze additional budget funding required for implementing a language access plan and fully staffing required hybrid public meetings.
- If funding is available, provide four hours of foundational racial equity training for all staff and then create a Racial Equity Action Plan with full staff participation.

Regulatory Planning

- This division's work is predominately reactive, supporting and processing regulatory permitting at all levels. This includes large public and private projects like Pierce Elementary, Colonel Floyd Apartments, Kent/Station Street, 10 Brookline Place, and Waldo Durgin.
- It also includes the dramatically increases caseload of demolition and historic district applications which have recently risen by a factor of 1.5-1.7. In response, they are ready to present to the SB a proposal for increases in preservation-related permitting fees that will more accurately reflect the cost of administering these permits.
- The division also provides technical assistance for by-law changes, both in the Warrant Article and implementation stages.

Community Planning

- This division's work is predominantly supporting the creation and preservation of affordable housing, including permitting new units, preserving existing units, transitioning ownership of subsidized home-ownership units, and supporting Brookline Housing Authority (BHA) projects. Like the Regulatory Planning division, the workload has exploded, with the inclusionary zoning caseload up by a factor of 4-5x and other affordable unit cases up by a

factor of 3x. This is primarily due to recent changes enacted by Town Meeting, and will also result in increased contributions to the Affordable Housing Trust Fund (AHTF)

- The division is also responsible for advancing the work of the Housing Production Plan.

Economic Development and Long-Term Planning

- This division supports all small business initiatives and problem solving in our commercial areas. This includes the Local Rapid Recovery Plan for Coolidge Corner & JFK Crossing. This work equates to an ongoing 1.0 FTE commitment.

- The division is responsible for all community engagement
- Implementation of the Diverse procurement platform QWALLY

The division carries forward all of the major planning studies.

Currently underway:

- Boylston St. Corridor Zoning
- 10 Brookline Place Committee
- Outdoor Seating

Next up/FY23 priorities:

- Chestnut Hill Village Corridor Study
- Newbury Parcel Reuse Study
- Strategic Asset Plan and Major Parcel Study Implementation

Beyond the limit of both staffing and consulting budget resources are many planning studies that have been cut or put off, including:

- Pre-Comprehensive Plan Scope
- Studies for Local Historic Districts
- Parking Demand Study
- Assisting DPW with tree canopy General Bylaw

Sustainability Planning

Currently staffed only with a Director, this division will rely heavily on collaborative work not only within DPCD but also across all of Town government as well as the newly appointed Zero Emissions Advisory Board (ZEAB). Division priorities include:

- Renewal of the Town's Community Aggregation Electricity Program
- Create a plan to reduce municipal energy use by 20%
- Seek funding to electrify the municipal fleet and build EV infrastructure
- If additional resources are made available, advance the development of a Climate Crisis Action Plan.

Anticipated changes in staffing needs, work methods, and more

The department's greatest resource is its workforce. Recruitment and retention are extremely high priorities. Anticipated changes include:

- Have begun two-way staff reviews.
- Moving to a permanent hybrid model for both staff and public meetings

- Evolving practices through implementation of the racial equity and community engagement plans.
- Staff-supported public meetings will be more expensive, likely less frequent, and hopefully more useful.
- Funding changes with shift to more reliance on permit fees to support permitting planning, and more reliance on local sources (CPA, AHTF) to make up for level-funded federal dollars.

Discussion

Subcommittee members spoke at length about the contrast between staff resources and the growing workload across the department – in terms of caseload in both the Regulatory and Community Planning division, in the many studies on Economic Development and Long-term Planning’s agenda, and the enormous work of Sustainability Planning for the Town. Strong themes in the discussion included:

- Collaboration across the entire staff (which is robust – the divisions aren’t “siloes”);
- The need for more physical/urban planning resources (both staff with GIS/graphic/design capabilities, and funding for consultants);
- The importance of community outreach, participation, and voice;
- The need for zoning reform and frustration with the slow pace of (resource constrained) planning work.

Select Board Member Raul Fernandez emphasized that the budget priorities advanced by the Department are aligned with the goals of the SB and other boards. He also emphasized the particularly time sensitive work of mitigating climate change.

Recommendation

The Subcommittee voted to recommend approval of the Planning and Community Development FY23 Budget by a vote of 6-0 with no abstentions.

Hearing Recording

Click on the link below. Enter the passcode when prompted to view the recording of this hearing.

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