Town of Brookline
Advisory Committee Minutes
March 5, 2020

Present: Vice-Chair Carla Benka, Clifford Brown, Carol Caro, Dennis Doughty, John Doggett, Janet Gelbart, David-Marc Goldstein, Neil Gordon, Susan Granoff, Amy Hummel, Alisa Jonas, Janice Kahn, David Lescohier, Fred Levitan, Carlos Ridruejo, Chair Michael Sandman, Kim Smith, Claire Stampfer, Christine Westphal, Neil Wishinsky

Absent: Ben Birnbaum, Harry Bohrs, Harry Friedman, Steve Kanes, Pam Lodish, Carol Levin, Lee Selwyn, Charles Swartz, Paul Warren

Also present: Director of Health Department Dr. Swannie Jett, Director of Human Resources Ann Braga, Assistant Director of Human Resources Leslea Nobel, Deputy Town Administrator Melissa Goff, Director of Public Buildings Charlie Simmons, Building Commissioner Dan Bennett and Building Department Staff Member Ray Masek.

Announcements:

The Chair asked if the members had any interest in having a ten minute public comment period at the start of each meeting.

It was suggested that this should be discussed more thoroughly at a separate meeting where we will review other outstanding issues.

Set up ground rules for people who will be speaking and set a time limit. We could maybe model after Select Board or School Committee.

Melissa Goff gave a brief preview of the Warrant Articles.

AGENDA

7:30  Review and Possible Vote on FY 21 Operating Budget and Capital Improvement Project Requests - Building Department

Amy Hummel summarized the Capital Subcommittee’s review of the Building Department operating budget, the substance of which is captured in the subcommittee’s report.

Highlights: new full time inspector position that will focus on multi-family inspections; struggling to hire qualified HVAC professionals but will work with new HR Director to offer higher pay; will be hiring a new custodial foreman; pending request to Town/School partnership to support Building Department to properly maintain schools.

Dan Bennett added a few comments: The department continues to focus on three things in the Town – additional inspector, fee associated with this and may recoup a portion of the salary; filling HVAC positions continues to be a struggle, we look at salaries at other communities and have proposed foreman positions that would get a stipend thinking that might help; the School repair and maintenance is a game of catch up.

Questions & Comments

Q: There was some discussion that for the Driscoll project the School Department would use construction dollars to fund a liaison position between the project and the school department. Has that been resolved? A: There was a number presented at a Building Committee meeting to fund this followed by discussion and a memo and they were ultimately advised that at a minimum they should seek approval from the 3 boards that oversee the
project for this position. It is a half time position. Concern about putting in a line item without the proper approvals but it has since been granted. Three year commitment for a half time position.

Concerns were raised about having a clear chain of command, roles and responsibilities for this position.

Q: have you been able to participate enough in the Driscoll project with views of maintaining the building in the future the way it has been designed? A: Yes and I will continue to be involved.

Regarding the inadequate School repair and maintenance funding, we could recommend a reduction of the School budget and shift it to the Building Department budget.

The Schools have generally not allocated everything the Building Department has suggested is needed to maintain facilities and as a result there has been deferred maintenance.

This is similar to the issue regarding Legal services support with School issues.

The whole Town / School partnership will be looked at under the BFAC recommendation.

Charlie Simmons explained that the Schools have different issues – they want to teach kids, not create budgets for washing windows, fixing floors, painting or preventative maintenance of plumbing and electrical systems. This falls to him but they never provide sufficient funds, the amounts necessary to address these issues. They were doing a good job maintaining buildings but they have been falling behind for the last ten years.

Q: How does your budget match their line item funding? A: Get a certain amount from their budget that gets appropriated to the Building Department budget.

Melissa Goff clarified that $325,000 is being considered by the School Committee right now but the Building Department has requested more.

The deferred repair and maintenance items amount is staggering. We need to begin to address this.

Q: What is the increase in maintaining the new school? A: Coolidge Corner is complicated and has high end stuff difficult for tradesmen to maintain. Still have to meet energy code and building code ...

Q: Is there commonality among the systems? A: Yes with the exception of the lighting system.

Q: Tree Protection Plan is a misnomer -- a developer is allowed to remove any tree as long as there is a compensating drainage plan for the property which is typically a ditch filled with rocks. How well is the plan working for protecting the trees? A: There is a new bylaw under the storm water bylaw overseen by Engineering Department. The issue that has happened -- without more education people do come in a cut trees not knowing there is a bylaw -- the plan is to replant trees. There are two visible sites within the last 2 years on Woodland Street -- some trees cut down without approval and the Engineering Department took action; same at another site -- private trees but violated the bylaw. It is happening less since more people are aware of it. Can only enforce what is under the department’s jurisdiction. Sustainability initiatives -- some geothermal and solar systems but don’t know how to promote this further. We as a Town are trying to get solar on our roofs. Conversations do happen.

Q: If Library is using an outside company why do they need a director? A: Director makes sure the cleaning is done well and the building quality is maintained.
The Building Department has been scanning some building records for those buildings that are demolished. There was a recommendation to check with the Boston Public Library about free scanning and archival services.

The School has revolving funds from space rentals.

Difficulty in filling positions because of pay scale is a common theme and we may not be getting the best employees or we are but they leave because they can get something better elsewhere.

Q: What can apprentices do without licensed supervisors? A: Just maintenance.

As we create these new buildings that are harder to maintain we have to think about that when we are approving budgets to design them.

Room scheduling – recommend looking into having a digital board or sign outside of main meeting room to show what is scheduled there.

A MOTION was made and seconded to approve the FY 21 Building Department operating budget of $9,010,485. By a VOTE of 18 in favor, none opposed, and 1 abstention the budget is approved.

Carla Benka, chair of the Capital Subcommittee provided descriptions of the Building Department’s Capital Improvement Project requests for FY 21 (See attached list and amounts at the end of these minutes).

Questions & Comments

Q: Unexpended CIP funds – does the Advisory Committee have to move it from the CIP or does it have to go to Town Meeting? A: Town Meeting has the authority ultimately to move that money around but we could recommend how we would like it to be allocated.

There is an account we could potentially close out – Zoning By Law.

A MOTION was made and seconded to approve for Capital Improvement Projects requested by the Building Department. By a VOTE of 18 in favor, none opposed and no abstentions, the CIP requests are approved.

8:10 Review and Possible Vote on FY 21 Operating Budget - Health Department

Kim Smith, co-chair of the Human Services Subcommittee gave an overview of the Subcommittee’s review of the Health Department budget, details of which are contained in their report.

Highlights: The budget is increasing in part due to expansion in personnel, utility costs, and replacement of an old vehicle with an electric one.

Host Community Funds breakdown by department is on page 1-8 in the Budget Book.

Questions & Comments

Q: Is there any money set aside to deal with a medical community crisis or would that need special funding? A: Epidemiologist would be used for infectious as well as chronic diseases. Currently just two people who have capacity to do this – nurse who will soon be retiring and Dr. Jett himself. One of the jobs is to track people down and follow up on potential cases. Health Commissioner takes these calls personally.

Q: Do we have test kits in Brookline? A: The State does and they will send it off to CDC for confirmation.
Q: What determines the need for a test? A: Close to someone exposed and they begin to exhibit symptoms. People coming in with pneumonia-like symptoms you will be tested and the turnaround is 24 hours.

A new epidemiologist would support with contact tracing. Project-based with potential published results.

Q: Funding positions on soft money/money that would disappear after a while – pool of marijuana funds. A: We have to be careful how we grow this and how we appropriate the funds – will need to reduce the positions after 3-5 years. Creating HCA Fund will be helpful – accrue funds in this account and be judicious about how we would be spending it.

The immediate need for an epidemiologist is critical now as is the policy analyst who can determine the implications for the community. Need to consider the long-term benefit to the community outside of the HCA funds. No ability to negotiate for the funds after the 5 years termination. The funding is supposed to be used to address the effect of marijuana on the community.

A MOTION was made and seconded to approve the FY 21 Health Department operating budget of $1,598,907. By a VOTE of 18 in favor, none opposed and no abstentions, the budget is approved.

8:50 Review and Possible Vote on FY 21 Operating Budget - Human Resources Department

Janet Gelbart, chair of the Personnel Subcommittee reviewed the discussion about the Human Resources and Fringe Benefits budgets details of which are included in their report.

Q: Is 40% typical the amount of time you spend on employee relations and discipline? A: We only had 4 staff people out of budgeted 7 and we now have 6 so we now have 3 people who can do this work now and hope the percentage will go down. The significant impact is making sure supervisors are trained around their responsibilities and that they now are held to a high standard, and staff is trained on appropriate behavior and respect in the workplace. If someone is being promoted make sure they are clear that if something inappropriate happens you need to report it within 24 hours. HR is your partner.

Susan Granoff noted that she was very surprised that the request for a new position to support training to build a culture of respectful workplace throughout the Town was denied. Think this is a case of being penny wise, pound foolish. Look at costs associated with the litigation because we didn’t have this sort of professional training. This could ultimately cost us more than the cost of the position. Did Town Counsel weigh in?

Think it would be best to hear all of these needs from all departments and then make a decision.

Melissa noted that there is training money in a variety of budgets that can be aggregated. Make department heads talk to each other when they are planning trainings to be more inclusive.

Ann noted that when the position was declined she realized she had to become creative. She came up with a job description for a co-op assistant for 6 months at a time (1/3 of the wages with no benefits in the non-personnel side of things as an expense). In this way we get the basics for the work done until such time there may be funding for the position.

Having the student role as an assistant would provide support for logistics and scheduling and Ann and others in the department have done training on that content and we can work to have that happen or look to bring outside resources. Training and Development Coordinator could provide training themselves. But assistant can
track what trainings are being given in different departments, advertise it, do economies of scale, conduct and compile and analyze surveys, etc. They obviously would not be conducting the supervisory trainings themselves.

Q: How much would this actually relieve you? A: The student is in the business school and is already in the field of learning and development. Some support and expansion of our capacity but not to the full extent that we would like to do.

Q: Now that we have that new labor attorney in Town Counsel office ask them to design a handout or training online for new hires and supervisors because concerned about Town liability. A: He hasn’t done a lot of training in his experience. Trying to create with large unions that when they are asking questions of HR if it is a labor issue she will send it to him, and vice versa.

Q: Is there a printed handbook that you give to a manager when they are hired? A: No.

Janice attended the hearing and really got the sense that Ann focuses on the Human part of “Human Resources.” She further shared feedback that the Fire Department enjoys working with her and feels very comfortable with her.

We see that fewer people are taking civil service exams. Dispatchers are the step children of Public Safety. They are right in the center of it but they may not get any recognition or accolades for what the Police and Fire do.

Q: How can we fill that gap? A: Part of it is a culture change and requires a discussion with the chief and staff – especially those officers who have been dispatchers. What would you have appreciated? We can send food and employee assistance and do that from our side in HR but is it more simple as saying, “Thank you for your help!”

Q: In lieu of Social Security on paycheck funds taken out of a 457 (deferred compensation plan and it grows tax free – no employer contribution) only one investment choice – a 1% savings account. Town-wide money is going into this and they only have a choice of a 1% savings account? A: For staff not eligible for retirement we have this alternative. Everyone is required to put money away in some form for when you get old, you don’t qualify for retirement, you don’t contribute to social security, for part time employees is this 457 plan.

When an employee goes on leave – maternity for example – and is no longer being paid, they are required to pay the cost of their health care plan, and you need to be notified by the department head and in some cases the School Department is not doing that. It would be interesting to look at aggregate costs and how to fix it.

This is an issue that Town and School HR have been working on. Key is trying to improve communication – challenge is School is paid on different calendars depending on where they work. Can go out on leave – choose one thing and do something else – getting a requirement for the school employees to come see Town HR before they go out on leave. Last day of work, paid time, FLMA time, etc. all has an impact on who pays what and when. It isn’t a standard 52 week payment so they pay their health insurance in advance for a period of time so there is a complicated calculation needed. We are actively meeting to try to align the system so that you are not approved for leave until you have done the following X, Y, Z requirements and steps. We have had success with payment plans. Working collaboratively and will keep Advisory up to date on progress.

We have asked the School for department by department benefits costs. We allocate benefits by department. The group health data base does not provide that level of data.

A MOTION was made and seconded to approve the FY 21 Human Resources Department budget of $638,785. By a VOTE of 18 in favor, none opposed, and no abstentions the budget is approved.
9:30  Review and Possible Vote on FY 21 Fringe Benefits budget

A MOTION was made and seconded to approve the FY 21 Fringe Benefits budget of $68,898,264. By a VOTE of 18 in favor, none opposed, and no abstentions the budget is approved.

A MOTION to adjourn was made, seconded and voted unanimously and the meeting was adjourned at 10:10 pm.

Documents Presented:

• Personnel Subcommittee Report Human Resources Department & Fringe Benefits FY 21 Budget
• Capital Subcommittee Reports on Building Department Operating FY 21 Budget and CIP requests
• Human Services Subcommittee Report on Health Department FY 21 Budget