

Town of Brookline
Advisory Committee Minutes – DRAFT
Tuesday, March 7, 2022

Meeting Recording: https://brooklinema.zoomgov.com/rec/share/_0RGeDWNrQXv8fA3vD0F3b_jotgAf-B27sNXPFNm9K53Y12NMUvzKhrnWjO4FS8Z_YhDH9AVb8XyL9uI

Present: Ben Birnbaum, Harry Bohrs, Cliff Brown, Patricia Correa, John Doggett, Dennis Doughty, Katherine Florio, Harry Friedman, David-Marc Goldstein, Neil Gordon, Susan Granoff, Kelly Hardebeck, Amy Hummel, Anita Johnson, Alisa Jonas, Janice Kahn, Pamela Lodish, Joslin Murphy, Donelle O’Neal, Linda Olson Pehlke, David Pollak, Stephen Reeders, Carlos Ridruejo, Lee Selwyn, Carolyn R. Thall.

Absent: Alok Somani, Carol Levin, Markus L. Penzel, Christine Westphal

Also Attending: Town Administrator Charles Carey, Deputy Town Administrator for Policy and Fiscal Affairs Melissa Goff, Town Counsel Joe Callanan, Assistant Town Administrator for Finance Charlie Young, Select Board Member John VanScoyoc, Mark Gray, Frances Shedd-Fisher, Carla Benka, John Bowman, Perry Grossman, Brian Bergeron, Fran Perler, David Trevvett, Hugh Mattison, Arlene Mattison, Alec Lebovitz, Yolanda Rodriguez 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 (no public comment was offered)

7:15 PM Presentation of FY 24 Financial Plan and Continuation of the Advisory Committee’s February 14th discussion of the May 2023 Override

Town Administrator Charles Carey acknowledged and thanked Administration and Finance Department staff. He noted this is his first year delivering a budget to this community, and he could not have done it without the incredible Select Board staff. Melissa Goff, has been incredible as always; Charlie Young, the new Assistant Town Administrator for Finance, really had to jump into this in the fall and excelled. Grateful to Devon Fields for all of her efforts in making sure these regular operations run. Tyler Belisle Toler, Budget Analyst and Grant Administrator for his ceaseless work on the American Rescue Plan and other Federal sources of funding, which has been more than a full-time job and Tyler does excellent work handling all of those issues; and the remainder of the staff Kate, Tiffany and Rochelle, who manage the day in, day out of so many things that go on. He also welcomed the Town’s new Finance Director and Treasurer, Lincoln Heinemann who has just played an incredible role and also hit the ground running, coming here in the fall. Thank you to all of those people.

He then gave a presentation of the FY 24 Financial Plan, a copy of which is linked to these minutes. For specific details, please review the meeting recording linked above.

2024 is an inflection point. We are turning a corner from the maintenance budgets of the pandemic which were about survival and maintenance of services to endemic COVID. There are things that changed during the pandemic that will not change back. Some of those are pandemic-related like outdoor dining, the increased cost of solid waste disposal, the rat problem. And then there are some things that are unrelated to the pandemic, but are part of the broader culture. For example, the decrease in marijuana taxes and the end of the original HCA, the host community agreement process. All of these things are happening simultaneously with the shift to endemic COVID 19 as opposed to pandemic COVID 19 which the virus will obviously stay with us and be a going concern, but it is no longer the top line concern of our municipal budgets. Unfortunately for us, this shift also comes at a difficult time in terms of the town's finances. We continue to experience a structural gap between revenues and municipal expenses.

Comments, Questions, Discussion

Q: Increase in MBTA assessment – renovation at High School, MBTA benefited by that renovation. How much of that cost did the Town assume? A: The MBTA assessment is a formula driven deduction off of our cherry sheet. It is driven by increase in ridership. So the Town assumed all the cost.

Comment: Social Services Study – services available to the Town, we can reach out and get services outside of our borders. When the analysis is done I hope that is factored in. We can leverage services from neighboring communities.

Q: Can you clarify trends in new growth? Trends in commercial vs residential tax are we seeing a decline in commercial? A: Trend in new growth is going down. 3.3, 3.5 this year budgeting...We have potential of Waldo Durgin but it hasn't picked up. New growth will be upgrades to existing units and additional 40Bs. We want to strike a balance ... We can have Rachid (Town Assessor) provide additional information. The State is spooked because they still don't understand. Not clear why tax revenue is not being collected at the rate they expected. Population is decreasing, that may also be a contributory factor.

Q: When the building department submits their budget, they do an allocation between how much they're doing for the town, and how much they're doing for the schools, and then the school part gets charged back. Do all the departments do that or is it just limited to building? A: In the building department budget there is a sub-program called school plant and all of the school related expenses live in that sub program. Other departments are required to provide expenses for the school end of the year report, where they have to estimate what they provide for school services for the prior year. So, at the end of fiscal 2022 departments submit what they spent on behalf of the schools, and that's part of what we provide to the Department of Education. Departments submit what they presented and we provide that to the DESE. But the Schools do not pay for this like they do with Building.

Q: Changes in the Building Department, the Wellesley Model? A: It is about balancing and insuring a succession plan and reallocating tasks accordingly. Horizontally spreading out responsibility and having clearer lines of succession are part of that.

Q: Override on Composting – why is Town stepping in when there is a private contractor that is doing a good job?

A: We have heard a need for this since surrounding communities are doing it. If the Select Board considers it may be a ballot question.

Q: Can you repeat what you said about participation in a particular program that would be dependent on us staying above the 10% affordable housing level for 40b projects? A: Fossil Free Fuel Construction. We might fall below 10% because of Puddingstone, we always knew Puddingstone would fall off. Units falling off for a number of reasons.

Comment: People who live in large buildings that have to private contract trash and other waste disposal are being doubled taxed. In a sense, we are paying to subsidize the trash removal for all the people on the town service, and we have to hire our own haulers. And the reason that we have to hire our own haulers is because, for whatever reason, the town cannot figure out the fact that it should be cheaper for people living in multi-unit buildings per unit, or we don't generate as much trash. It all gets picked up at one place. It's a lot cheaper for us to private haul, but yet that is wear and tear on the roads. It's not environmentally sound with all these trucks. I've been trying to get this fixed, for maybe as long as I've been in town meeting, so please do not continue to double burden the individual households that have to buy private hauling. If that goes on the ballot, I hope it's done in a way that is reflected in the fee that people pay to use it. Thanks.

Q: Property Tax Increase is from residential improvements. Base of 1.2M of new growth and that is renovation and improvement and it doesn't include Balfour project yet. No estimate from Assessors Department yet.

Q: Anything going off tax roles because they go to nonprofit status? A: None at this time. Always a threat but not certain.

Q: Does trash from schools get charged back to the schools? A: No, it is part of the overall sanitation budget.

Q: Vacancies that exist in multiple departments, should override not pass, what process is being used to determine which vacancies will be eliminated? A: Where the major drivers of cost are – settlement of union contracts, specifically with the Police Department. Drain on Collective Bargaining Reserve. Without the possibility of this drain, we could transfer to cover our costs this year but that isn't the case. Vacant positions in the Police Department at the patrol level would be the ones to go.

Q: Fastest growing demographic in Town is 60 and over. Ticking time bomb. The need for social services will greatly increase with this growth in elderly. No strategic plan for elder services. This might be an excellent opportunity to this type of analysis. The Council on Aging has expert geriatric social workers but they will not have sufficient number to deal with community in next 6 or 7 years. Are you going to look at the extent of need and the best way to deliver or solely focused on extent and type of need? A: Primarily on the extent and type of need but hope any RFP will include request for recommendations.

Q: Familiar with Newton's local transportation system for seniors – much interest in the Town to see if this might be feasible to do some sort of version. Any opportunity in the override to fund a feasibility study or pilot program?

A: Yes, Council on Aging has already requested this.

Q: Town School Partnership – charge backs for services that Town departments furnish to schools. Report some estimate of others to the State. Is the amount of charge back or estimate that is reported to DESE included in the School number in the pie chart? A: Yes, it is included. We can show you the data behind the pie chart and what was submitted to DESE.

Q: Debt exclusion – voters will be asked to authorize the entire debt for Pierce but as we get reimbursement from MSBA we would be reducing the amount of the debt. If the voters authorize \$209M dollars and the Town were to get \$60M back from MSBA so we only had to borrow \$150M is the debt exclusion still go to the whole \$210M? A: No, we only borrow for what we need. Borrowed more than we needed for Ridley and there is a surplus so we can reapply that elsewhere.

So, this amounts to a debt slush fund – we wouldn't have to go back to the voters. It can be reapplied to another bond project but I will double check that with Lincoln Heinemann.

Q: Is the debt service associated with school building projects included in that pie chart? A: Yes, because it is reported in the end of the year report.

Melissa Goff continued the presentation which is linked at the end of these minutes. She acknowledged the work and support of Charlie Young who has been invaluable to this process, hit the ground running and mastered Open.Gov. Provides nitty gritty details and Devon and Tyler were also helpful in getting this finished.

Financial Plan Summary presents a Non-Override Budget but there would be a separate statement of what would happen in the event of a successful override.

Q: Rec Revolving Fund related to ballot question. \$1M for scholarships. Approved by voters and comes in as tax revenues how does it work its way into the revolving fund and then how does it relate to spending? A: The General Fund provides a subsidy, just like the Pool, the expenses would sit in General fund that provide subsidy for other activities in the Rec Revolving fund. Be able to offer more programming and covers additional staff cost.

Q: Excise Tax Increase Tax Revenues – more cars or cars move valuable? A: Charts in revenue section can answer this question.

Q: Liability Reserves – \$381K in – is that the total amount currently in that account? How does it compare with average payout annually in damages? Criteria for two vacancies that would be cut at the Police Department – why was it determined that these were the best to select? A: Regarding vacant positions we have looked at many others that are vacant that would be difficult to cut; can't cut in the Schools they have to make their own decisions on that. Again, it goes back to where the costs are already the highest. Working to solve some of the issues in that department but these two positions plus benefits represent a (cost / benefit analysis). Regarding the Alston settlement \$11M was funded by financing over 10 years and is coming out of Debt Service budget and not Liability.

Q: Override for Recreation Scholarships but not the only need in Town – why this one particular item? Why not affordable housing or a swimming pool? A: Combination of analysis done by Warrant Article 26 Committee to demonstrate the benefit. We are not at a space yet where we are going to put a line item on the budget yet for a pool, more information would be needed. This project has back up and analysis and support and subject of

community discussion and the information is present that if the community wants to move forward with it, we can make it happen, operationalize it quickly. Community engagement and activism has kept it in the Select Board's eye. Welcome more feedback from the community.

The Chair thanked Chas and Melissa. If there remain unanswered questions. We are doing more deep dives into individual budgets so come to those hearings. The information presented was very digestible.

8:30 PM Other business

Upon a **MOTION** made and seconded to adjourn, and voted unanimously, the meeting was adjourned at 9:06 pm.

Documents Presented

<https://stories.opengov.com/brooklinema/published/Po4nvl8c1> Online Budget

<https://www.brooklinema.gov/DocumentCenter/View/39878/FY2024-Budget-Presentation> FY24 Budget Presentation

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