

Brookline Advisory Committee

Public Safety Subcommittee Hearing on Warrant Article 22

March 19, 2019

A public hearing by the Public Safety Subcommittee on Warrant Article 22 was held in Room 103 of Town Hall from 6 pm to 7:30 pm on Tuesday, March 19, 2019.

There were eleven attendees at the hearing: the four members of the Public Safety Subcommittee – Janice Kahn (chair and TMM15), David-Marc Goldstein (TMM8), Susan Granoff (TMM7), and Alisa Jonas (TMM16); the petitioner, Frank Caro (TMM10, BrooklineCAN co-chair, and Pedestrian Advisory Committee); and six others: Carol Caro (TMM10 and AC), Jane Flanagan (TMM15), Richard Nangle (TMM15), John Shreffler (TMM2 and Pedestrian Advisory Committee), David Trevvett (Pedestrian Advisory Committee Chair and BrooklineCAN Steering Committee), and Henry Winkelman (resident of Precinct 13).

SUMMARY OF PROPOSED WARRANT ARTICLE

WA 22 is a resolution requesting that the Select Board appoint a committee to (1) determine the extent to which there is a public safety need for improved lighting for pedestrians, (2) identify locations where improved pedestrian lighting is most needed, (3) examine the costs of installation and operation of new pedestrian-friendly street lighting, and (4) develop a plan to extend pedestrian-friendly lighting, especially along sidewalks with, or leading to, streets with extensive pedestrian activity. The resolution requests that the committee report its initial recommendations to the fall 2020 Town Meeting.

The Subcommittee recommends Favorable Action on WA 22, as amended, by a vote of 4-0.

BACKGROUND

This warrant article is an outgrowth of efforts by the Livable Community Advocacy Committee (LCAC) of BrooklineCAN (“The Brookline Community Aging Network”) to respond to concerns about inadequate sidewalk lighting for pedestrians on a number of north Brookline streets that were first brought to its attention by one of the LCAC’s committee members in 2015. The poorly lit sidewalks causing concern included some directly leading to the Coolidge Corner shopping area, the Senior Center, the Coolidge Corner movie theater, the Coolidge Corner library, the Brookline Village library, Town Hall, the High School, the Brookline Housing Authority residences for seniors, and the Stop & Shop supermarket – all areas that are likely to experience heavy pedestrian traffic after dark, especially in the fall and winter months.

To address these concerns, BrooklineCAN volunteers conducted extensive surveys of the sidewalk lighting conditions in these and other areas of north Brookline after dark during the early fall months of 2015 and 2016 when leaves were still on the trees. Each team of volunteers made a record of the locations of problematic dark sidewalk areas and noted any contributing factors at each location, such as nonfunctioning utility pole light bulbs, excessive distances between utility poles, and tree canopies

blocking light from reaching the sidewalk. The volunteers were aided by maps showing the location and identification number of all light poles, which were provided by the Information Technology Department. These locations were reported to the Department of Public Works. The DPW responded promptly to reports of street lights that were not functioning. The DPW made an effort to address the other reported problems by installing some brighter lights on existing poles and tree pruning. However, despite these efforts, there currently are still many problematically dark areas on sidewalks that receive heavy pedestrian traffic.

DISCUSSION

Petitioner Frank Caro explained that the town currently uses a "*highway lighting strategy*" to light almost all of Brookline's streets and sidewalks. This strategy uses tall, widely-spaced utility poles with lights that extend over the street (rather than the sidewalk) so as to cast light over a long distance with a focus on facilitating automobile traffic. The poles may be as much as 150 feet apart with lights placed as high as 25 feet above the street. According to Mr. Caro, this form of lighting often fails to provide adequate lighting for pedestrians, especially on sidewalks with mature trees where dense leaf canopies block light from reaching the sidewalk. The poor lighting of sidewalks with mature trees is especially troublesome because it can be hazardous for pedestrians not to be able to clearly see the irregular walking surfaces that are caused by the roots of mature trees. Additionally, highway lighting is a source of glare that can interfere with the vision of many pedestrians and has been the subject of complaints from some homeowners concerned about too much glaring light coming into their homes.

Mr. Caro reported that a number of Brookline streets have begun to use more "*pedestrian-friendly lighting*." In this strategy, lights are placed on relatively short poles that are positioned closer together. Utility poles might be 75 feet apart with lights only 15 feet above the sidewalk so as to be below tree canopies. In some Beacon Street commercial areas, the utility poles have two arms, with the taller arm reaching out over the street and the shorter arm extending over the sidewalk. In other areas, such as on Washington Street in Brookline Village and on all of Harvard Street, lighting is made more pedestrian friendly by having light poles that are closely spaced and more modest in height, so that light shines directly onto sidewalks but also illuminates streets. Additionally, all of Harvard Street now uses softer lights, which are free of glare and better for pedestrians.

According to Mr. Caro, although the Town knows how to provide pedestrian-friendly street lighting, currently no more than about one to two miles of Brookline sidewalks contain such lighting.

Mr. Caro believes that a Select Board committee is needed to study the extent of the need for expanding pedestrian-friendly street lighting in Brookline, and the costs, complexities, and options involved in doing so. One particular area of concern for Mr. Caro is Winchester St., where a number of seniors on their way to and from the Senior Center after dark have fallen. He noted that many older residents have poorer night vision than do younger residents and would especially benefit from more pedestrian-friendly lighting.

All of the public comments made at the hearing were in support of WA 22.

The subcommittee was told that the Pedestrian Advisory Committee has informally informed the Transportation Board that it supports WA 22.

Ms. Kahn, Chair of the Subcommittee, said that she believes that the town currently has installed LED lighting on all utility poles.

Carol Caro (TMM 10 and AC) said that the new pedestrian-friendly lighting on Pleasant St. is "very wonderful," while there are certain streets, such as Crowninshield, that are so dark and have such uneven sidewalks, that "you don't want to go down them." Ms. Caro suggested that the town consider setting aside a certain amount of money each year for improving pedestrian lighting. (It was noted that the town re-paves every sidewalk about every 25 years, and perhaps improved pedestrian lighting could be incorporated into this process.)

Jane Flanagan (TMM15) said that she believes WA 22 is a "fabulous resolution." She noted that social isolation among seniors is a huge problem and that many seniors won't go out of their homes after dark if sidewalks are poorly lit. Additionally, seniors with macular degeneration are especially bothered by the glare of highway lighting. Ms. Granoff, a Subcommittee member, recounted a conversation that she had had with a resident of one of Brookline's senior residences. When asked if poorly lit sidewalks were ever a problem for her or her fellow residents, the senior had said "No, they weren't -- because no one living here ever goes out at night, it's just too dark."

Henry Winkelman (a Brookline resident) stated that extending pedestrian-friendly lighting would make Brookline a safer community for all ages and noted that anyone on an inadequately lit street is in danger of falling.

David Trevvett (Chair, Pedestrian Advisory Committee, and member of BrooklineCAN's Steering Committee) told the Subcommittee that he was one of the BrooklineCAN volunteers who had participated in the lighting survey, and that he was struck by the disparity between the bright lights in commercial areas and the poor lighting in other areas. He noted the irony of having well lit roadways for cars with headlights but poorly lit sidewalks for pedestrians who don't have headlights. He stated that fall is an especially dangerous time for pedestrians because it gets dark early but dense foliage is still on the trees. But, he added, even when there are no leaves, sometimes the trunks of old trees are so wide that they block light from reaching sidewalks. He reminded the Subcommittee that if a senior trips and falls, it could ultimately turn into a fatal accident for that senior.

Like many other people, Mr. Trevvett moved to Brookline in part because of its walkability. He believes that the town needs to make better pedestrian lighting a higher priority goal and to do more to enable pedestrians of all ages to walk to commercial areas more safely. He thinks the town needs to space utility poles more closely together, position the height of lights lower to sidewalks, and use warmer lighting levels because they produce little or no glare and won't be disturbing to people living near the lights.

Subcommittee members asked the petitioner why he was seeking a Select Board committee rather than a Moderator's committee. Mr. Caro said that he thought doing so would insure the active participation of the DPW on the committee.

The Subcommittee then were shown slides provided by Mr. Caro. One slide showed an example of good lighting on Station St., with an older, shorter fixture oriented toward the sidewalk rather than the

street. Another slide showed one of the newer lights along Harvard St., in which the light was directed onto the sidewalk and not into the windows of a nearby building. Still another slide showed a utility pole with two arms, the higher one facing the street and the lower one directed at the sidewalk, which is located between Charles and Center Streets.

The Subcommittee also briefly discussed a letter it had received from Ira Krepchin (TMM15), a retired energy efficiency consultant who has served for many years on the Newton Citizens Commission on Energy and, until recently, on the Board of Green Newton. The letter contained a list of numerous considerations and possibilities for lighting improvements that a WA 22 committee, should it be formed, or the town might wish to study, as well as links to pertinent websites and specific US Dept of Energy and US Department of Transportation publications dealing with the subject of sidewalk and street lighting.

VOTE

The Subcommittee suggested some wording changes to Article 22, to which the petitioner agreed.

The Subcommittee by a vote of 4-0 recommended Favorable Action on WA 22 as amended below:

(Additions to the language of the Warrant are in **bold**; deletions are in ~~strikethrough~~.)

ARTICLE 22

Submitted by: Francis G. Caro, TMM10

Resolution calling for a study of pedestrian-friendly street lighting

To see if the Town will adopt the following resolution:

WHEREAS the Town encourages walking as a mode of transportation, especially in densely developed areas,

WHEREAS, residents and visitors walk on sidewalks and across streets after dark,

WHEREAS, safety is a concern for people of all ages and abilities who walk after dark,

WHEREAS the Town, for illumination of its streets and sidewalks, currently relies primarily on "highway lighting" that fails to provide consistently adequate lighting for pedestrians, especially where there are mature street trees,

WHEREAS "highway lighting" is a source of glare that can interfere with the vision of pedestrians,

WHEREAS pedestrian-friendly lighting reduces such glare and allows improved illumination

so pedestrians can see obstacles such as uneven, raised black asphalt pavement covering tree roots,

WHEREAS pedestrian-friendly lighting reduces dark shadows that may make pedestrians feel ~~†~~ insecure;

WHEREAS the Town's Complete Streets policy states that "Sidewalks and crosswalks should be adequately lit,"

WHEREAS the Town already has some pedestrian-friendly street lighting **predominantly in commercial areas** that demonstrates the benefits for pedestrians of this form of street lighting,

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that Town Meeting requests that the Select Board appoint a committee to develop a plan to extend pedestrian-friendly lighting **with a focus on ~~along~~ sidewalks with, or leading to,** extensive pedestrian activity;

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED THAT Town Meeting requests that the committee be charged to determine the extent to which there is **a public safety need ~~demand~~** for improved lighting for pedestrians, identify locations where improved pedestrian lighting is most needed, and examine costs of installation and operation of new pedestrian-friendly street lighting;

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that Town Meeting requests that the committee report its **initial** recommendations to a ~~future~~ **fall 2020** Town Meeting.

Or act on anything relative thereto.

DOCUMENTS REVIEWED

Slides of light poles provided by petitioner

Letter from Ira Krepchin (TMM15), March 19, 2019