

**2019 03 26 Personnel Subcommittee Report on W.A. 29  
Resolution to Encourage Brookline Town Meeting to Pursue  
Representativeness Among its Membership**

The Personnel Subcommittee of the Advisory Committee held a public hearing on March 26, 2019 at 6:30 p.m. to consider Warrant Article 29: Resolution to encourage Brookline Town Meeting to pursue representativeness among its membership. In attendance were subcommittee members Janet Gelbart, Carol Caro, Chuck Swartz, and Christine Westphal; petitioner Mariah Nobrega (AC, TMM 4), and Kea van der Ziel (TMM 15).

Summary

Warrant Article 29 seeks to raise awareness among Town Meeting Members of the disparity between the demographic make-up of Town Meeting and the Town population overall, and to encourage outreach to underrepresented groups with the goal of making Town Meeting more diverse. Town Meeting embodies Brookline's geographic distribution, but this does not ensure representation of all Brookline Protected Classes as defined in Article 3.14 of the Town bylaws. The petitioner feels that since Town Meeting is often a source of participants for appointment to Brookline boards, committees, and commissions, increasing the diversity of TMMs should lead to more diverse representation on other Town bodies. The subcommittee voted 4-0-0 to recommend favorable action on WA 29.

Discussion

The petitioner attended the Brookline Summit for Racial Equity, and crafted the resolution in response to one of the seven priority areas identified by the Brookline People of Color (POC) Coalition. There is no intent to remove any current TMMs. Instead, TMMs are encouraged to proactively recruit more diverse candidates as Town Meeting membership changes through attrition. This means identifying groups that are underrepresented and actively inviting their participation. It requires extensive outreach beyond the usual personal networks. An example of such outreach is the Diversity, Inclusion, and Community Relations department's pop-up meetings in Brookline Housing Authority residences. W.A. 29 also encourages the Moderator to consider the inclusion of Brookline Protected Classes when determining the order of speakers at Town Meeting.

While supportive of the petitioner's intent, comments from the subcommittee and general public focused on the difficulty of achieving the stated goals. Contrary to the petitioner who sees Town Meeting as a feeder to Town committees, one subcommittee member suggested that it might be easier to start at the committee level because it does not require running for office. Since incumbency is a huge factor in electability, it was suggested that TMMs who were not planning to stand for re-election resign before completing their terms so that more diverse candidates could be caucused in. Though not mentioned in the warrant article, the subcommittee suggested that the Select Board should be encouraged to consider diversity when it appoints committees and commissions.

Diversity should also be considered when the Moderator makes appointments to the Advisory Committee, which must be staffed by at least one TMM from each precinct and can have up to 14 at-large members.

There are economic, cultural, and social network constraints which may limit participation by members of Brookline Protected Classes. For example, the DICR pop-ups have not been well attended potentially because of conflicts with second jobs or the need for child care. Mentorship was cited as one way to help recruits adjust to new roles. All agreed that passage of the resolution would be an important first step in a long and difficult process.

Vote

By a vote of 4-0-0, the subcommittee recommends favorable action on WA 29.