

Town of Brookline
Advisory Committee Minutes – DRAFT
Thursday, April 13, 2023

Meeting Recording: https://brooklinema.zoomgov.com/rec/share/Ki-5bV8-1d0MYrbx6nDbHoxhVEmierw8PF_8297NiHjmrhgR4XZLX6zLXZ9n6O9a.y2NVPcezJNKLLmHH

Present: Ben Birnbaum, Harry Bohrs, Clifford Brown, John Doggett, Katherine Florio, Harry Friedman, David-Marc Goldstein, Neil Gordon, Susan Granoff, Kelly Hardebeck, Anita Johnson, Janice Kahn, Pamela Lodish, Joslin Murphy, Donelle O’Neal, Linda Olson Pehlke, David Pollak, Stephen Reeders, Carlos Ridruejo, Lee Selwyn, Alok Somani, Carolyn R. Thall, Christine Westphal

Absent: Patricia Correa, Dennis Doughty, Amy Hummel, Alisa Jonas, Carol Levin, Markus L. Penzel

Also Attending: Library Director Amanda Hirst; Vice Chair of Library Trustees Jonathan Margolis; Library Trustee Karen Livingston; Assistant Town Administrator for Finance Charlie Young; Deputy Town Administrator Melissa Goff; CIO Feng Yang; Petitioner for WA 13 Chi Chi Wu; Carla Benka; Perry Grossman; Regina Frawley; Judith Vanderkay; Kristine Knauf; Planning Department Assistant Director for Community Development Joe Viola; Bonnie Bastien; Director of Public Health & Human Services Sigalle Reiss; and other members of the public.

The meeting was called to order at 6:30 PM.

Announcements: Pursuant to this Board’s Authority under 940 CMR 29.10 (8), all of the committee members will be participating remotely via telephone or video conferencing due to emergency regulations regarding the Corona virus. The Chairman 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.

6:30 pm Public Comment

6:45 pm Report from the Human Services Subcommittee, Discussion and Possible Votes on Library Department FY24 Budget

David-Marc Goldstein, a subcommittee member gave the report on the Library Department Budget, linked to these minutes below. By unanimous vote (5-0), the subcommittee had voted to recommend a FY24 Library budget of \$4,480,000 (an increase of \$46,278). He welcomed the new Library Director, Amanda Hirst.

Library Director Amanda Hirst noted that the report captured the essence of the subcommittee discussion. She acknowledged the Trustees who were in attendance this evening and showing their support.

The subcommittee had also voted 5-0 to voice approval of the Library’s desire to eliminate overdue fines.

Comments, Questions, Discussion

Q from Stephen Reeders: Political shift in the books in the front area? A: At front of building are “Quick Picks” exempt from holds and currently available. In addition, 2 new book sections for Fiction and Nonfiction and then there are areas in the entry that also provide space for displays which run the gamut of topics – could be seasonal, gardening, beach

reads, cook books, or what is going on in Town or in society. The Library doesn't necessarily have a point of view but we highlight materials that we think people would be interested in exploring further.

Comment: Very excited about the bookmobile for the Town. How will it affect the operating budget? A: The bookmobile will be staffed with existing staff members. It only requires a regular driver's license. It can operate at a variety of times. When kids are in school youth services may not be so busy, so children's librarians could go out to preschools in the morning; perhaps to seniors later in the afternoon. Allows us to partner and deliver services.

Comment: The silence that greeted you demonstrates a vote of confidence in you and the Library. Welcome.

Comments: Trends about Libraries feeling that they don't need physical books anymore, in terms of acquisitions, are we maintaining our collections at the same level? A: Yes, books represent the most cost-effective materials that the Library can purchase. But we are also demand driven, we account for 20% of the eBook check out in the Minuteman Library system. Also consider music changing formats, not going to purchase cassette tapes, only CDs but now the demand isn't there yet. Anything we do would be incremental.

A **MOTION** was made and seconded for Favorable Action on the FY24 Library budget of \$4,480,000.

By a **VOTE** of 18 in favor, none opposed, and 1 abstention, the Advisory Committee recommends Favorable Action on the Library Budget.

There was a discussion of removing fines and fees, pros and con. They had been suspended during COVID. The loss is not significant. Still charge if someone doesn't return an item or damaged item. It is a matter of equity and accessibility. Fines are antithetical to free and open access to all.

Q: When does a book shift from being overdue to being lost? A: In the software it goes into a loss status and people are charged for the full replacement of the items. Then the lost fee is removed. 30 days after the due date, the item goes into loss status. Notifications also send reminders of due dates and renewals that automatically renew.

No monetary change if this policy goes forward.

Q: What is the mechanism for eliminating fines? Select Board approval or no? A: The Trustees have jurisdiction over setting fees and fines.

Comment: Believe this is an overreach for us to opine on this and this is the role of the Trustees.

Comment: Disagree. It is a budget item and 3x what the Fire Department pays for toilet paper. That said, would like to see them eliminated.

Comment: Respectfully agree this is a matter for Library Trustees.

7:15 pm Reports from the Administration & Finance Subcommittee, Discussion and Possible Votes on Information Technology Department FY24 Budget; and Debt and Interest

Kelly Hardebeck, Chair of the Admin and Finance Subcommittee gave the report on the FY 24 Information Technology budget which is linked to these minutes. She further reviewed FY23 accomplishments and FY 24 goals.

The Administration and Finance Subcommittee by a vote of 4-0-0 unanimously recommended favorable action on the Information Technology base budget of \$2,350,179 and the override budget of \$2,375,179. The proposed FY24 budget is a modest 4% increase over FY23 and the base budget reduces the department's General Consulting line item by \$25,000. This item was chosen for reduction because it turned back a surplus in FY22 and is restored to its FY23 level (\$40K) in the proposed FY24 override budget. The IT Department provides services across all departments in the Town and the School.

We are very fortunate to have Feng Yang working for us. She was recently recognized by Scoop News Group as a winner of the fourth annual LocalSmart Awards, a program that highlights the people and projects making city, county and municipal government better. <https://statescoop.com/list/announcing-the-winners-of-the-2022-localsmart-awards/>

CIO Feng Yang thanked the subcommittee for their report.

Comments, Questions, Discussion

Q: One-time ARPA money, how will the positions be funded in the future? And we have been working on the Town website for user friendliness and if there is more work going on and making information more accessible to the public?

A: The Cyber Security position is funded through FY26 and has been included on a list of things that need to have new funding sources when ARPA runs down. Regarding the website, we have a new web developer and a new website has been launched and continues to be worked on. He has been working on the Intranet portal serving Town Staff.

Comment: Feng does an amazing job in this Town. I hope the MAP Library continues to grow. Also downloaded the BrookOnLine App and issues are routed to the correct department for quick resolution.

Q: Difficulty searching the Town website. Is there a better search engine we could incorporate? Intuitive searches are not showing up. People are overwhelmed when visiting the site. Is there a way to orient people better? A: Thank you. That was raised before the new website redesign. The search engine has been taken into consideration. It is contingent on what content is on the site and whether the pages are up to date. Many factors that contribute but we continue to improve that. We will look at what else we can possibly do to make improvements.

Comment: Second the search engine issues. Tend to use Google to find what I'm looking for.

Q: Don't like the webinar format that some Town boards and commissions use for their meetings. Detracts from the public process. Can't see everyone in the room. Is there a reason why meetings cannot be uniformly one format, Zoom meetings? A: Webinar has better security overall. The Town has asked Zoom to find a way to provide an attendee list so everyone can know who is in the meeting. Waiting to see if they have made this enhancement.

Comment: Agree with statement about webinars. People feel powerless because they don't know how many are attending or if members of their community are attending, etc. For reasons of transparency the webinar should not be used for any public hearing or meeting and look forward to a warrant article that would regulate that if the Town doesn't want to do that on its own.

Melissa Goff suggested that people reach out to Devon to understand the benefits of the webinar.

Comment: Neil Gordon had 3 objections to the webinar format 1) We can't always see the actual panelists only sometimes just the speaker; 2) we don't know who is in the audience; 3) we don't have access to the chat.

The Vice Chair added his support regarding comments against the webinar format, stating that it violated the spirit, if not the letter, of the Open Meeting Law.

A **MOTION** was made and seconded for favorable action on Favorable Action on base budget of \$2,350,179. By a **VOTE** of 20 in favor, none opposed and no abstentions, the Advisory Committee recommends favorable action on the IT FY24 base budget of \$2,350,179.

A **MOTION** was made and seconded for favorable action in the event of an override a budget of \$2,375,179. By a **VOTE** of 19 in favor, none opposed and no abstentions, the Advisory Committee recommends favorable action on an override budget of \$2,375,179.

Harry Bohrs, a member of the Admin and Finance Subcommittee gave the report on Debt and Interest which is linked to these minutes. Brookline is carrying quite a bit of debt, much of that as a result of school building projects. The Town is also carrying the cost of the Alston settlement through bonding, in FY24 ~ \$1.4M. The Town had refinanced some projects at 1.728%, these included the Heath and Runkle schools, as well as part of the golf course (BHS and Driscoll were previously financed at low rates). Rates are expected to be higher for borrowing now, with the Town's most recent borrowing coming in at 2.85%. Bond maturations are guided by the usable life of a project. At a certain point there is required increased maintenance or replacement. Bond maturity is for no more than 25 years. Brookline continues to maintain its AAA bond rating.

The subcommittee recommended Favorable Action by a vote of 4-0-0.

Comments, Questions, Discussion

Q: How long before debt is over? Pierce estimate vs current interest rates? A: The Ridley School is earliest we have for debt exclusions and FY2043. In terms of Pierce we use a financial advisor and the interest rate he had us use is 5.25% so we won't be borrowing on Pierce for another year. The rates we just go were 2.86% and not sure where they will be a year from now.

Q: Are there any guidelines or policies that the Town has that we are exceeding in terms of the debt proposed? Debt per Capita? A: Our total debt per capita should not exceed 6%. We are at 10.7% with the debt exclusions. Policy is non-inclusive (See section 7 of the budget book) of debt exclusions. This is a Select Board policy.

Q: Does anyone know what voters are being asked to do in May? A: Ballot question does not contain a dollar amount. We have provided an estimate.

Q: Do you think it is acceptable to ask people to vote on an uncapped amount of debt? A: It is how the State dictates the question.

Q: Restrictions on actual ballot question on how debt exclusion is described with no amount and no term. This year we have this new red book and Town Counsel is also doing description but on last graph of Town Counsel description it fails to say what the anticipated amount of the project is and uses the word "temporary debt exclusion" "temporary tax" – have we not been able to describe the question in less technical language so it is more understandable? A: The description of debt exclusion came from Look at Capital Improvement Plan where amounts for Pierce are included and are included in projected debt so you see anticipated payment and term. There is information out there and I agree it

probably be better presented. With turnover in School administration some of the details were not provided. Updated information. In hindsight we probably could have tried to get it in a better space.

Comment: Support what was said above about transparency and clarity. The fact that the number does not appear anywhere in the Select Board's materials is not fulfilling the role of being transparent with the taxpayers. Average taxpayer cannot dig down and search the website to unearth the information. Very disappointing.

Comment: To say this is "temporary" debt is abusive language. Borrowing for 25 years is not temporary.

Comment: I own two pieces of property in Brookline. Not thrilled with how much I pay in taxes on those properties. But when we talk about the debt load we carry in this Town, it is not unusual for the fact that we live in New England. Other communities that have extended themselves but it is unlikely to be us. When we look at valuations and percentage of valuations we are on the low end of the tax universe. It insane what people will pay for property in Brookline? It costs money to renovate things and maintain things. The Town has made a good estimate.

Comment: We should have accurate information and it shouldn't be written from a pro or con perspective. It is reasonable to expect and get from the Select Board the information we need. People don't have a clue what is going on and they are basing it on random information and not really understanding the implications. Let's find a way going forward that we tell people what the facts are in the red book so there can be informed decisions.

Comment: Regarding cost estimating on capital projects in this Town, we have an amazing group of industry experts and staff that are diligent and put a lot of effort into being accurate and don't have stars in our eyes when it comes to pricing projects. Building Commission doesn't rely solely on the architects estimates.

Q: Debt limits per capita – if we include Pierce, what does the percentage become? A: Pierce in FY25 do it goes up to 13.5%

A **MOTION** was made and seconded for FAVORABLE ACTION on Debt Service appropriation of \$35,939,014. By a **VOTE** of 17 in favor, none opposed and 2 abstentions, the Advisory Committee recommends Favorable Action on a Debt Service appropriation of \$35,939,014.

7:45 pm Reports from the Schools Subcommittee, discussion and possible votes on

- **WA 9 - Amend Article 2.1.13 of the Town's General By-Laws to increase the number of registered voters required for petitioned warrant articles from 10 to 50 (Gordon)**

Schools Subcommittee Chair Cliff Brown gave the subcommittee report on WA 9 which is linked below. The subcommittee recommended Favorable Action by a vote of 5-0-0. In recent years there has been a proliferation of Warrant Articles filed for Annual and Special Town Meetings. This volume of articles places a burden on staff, the Select Board, Advisory Committee, and other Boards, Committees and Commissions involved in vetting, editing, amending, and voting on the Articles. The proposed change seeks to ease those burdens and also to protect the integrity of the Warrant and the review process. The change would apply only to Article submissions for Special Town Meetings because the Town has flexibility there. Due to State statute, the Town has no flexibility with regard to Article submissions for Annual Town Meeting.

Neil Gordon, petitioner added that Town Meeting is not a suggestion box.

As we're well aware, (although for some reason, not for this May) ...

... both the Select Board and the Advisory Committee have been burdened by a two-part trend: ...

... a proliferation of warrant articles, and ...

... articles filed that are less than fully-developed, and less than well-articulated.

Town Meeting, the Select Board, the Advisory Committee, and other boards, committees and commissions involved in the process of reviewing, vetting, editing, amending, recommending, and voting on Warrant Articles, deserve better. This straightforward warrant article proposes increasing the number of signatures required to file a warrant article for a special town meeting to fifty, from ten. No change is proposed for our Annual Town Meeting, which is set at ten by state law, and would require a Home Rule Petition to change. Why fifty signatures? The law allows us to require any number from the current ten to as many as one hundred. I chose fifty, the number of signatures required for a candidate for town-wide office. Fifty signatures is no great burden if done with the modest luxury of time... and few petitioned warrant articles are so critical that they can't wait until the next Town Meeting, whether annual or special. For those that are truly important, rallying allies to quickly gather signatures is a viable option. For a true crisis, the Select Board can be petitioned directly. We can't know in advance whether this proposal will reduce our collective burden.

We can't know in advance whether increasing the number of petition signatures only for special town meetings, will cause a shifting of petitions from November to May. But I've been a Town Meeting Member since 2009, and an Advisory Committee Member since 2015. Most of you have similar experience. I believe the proposed change, if adopted, is likely to achieve, at least in meaningful part, the intended result. It's time to ease the burden and preserve the integrity of the warrant, and our review and vetting process. It's time also to ease the burden on Town Meeting Members, and preserve the integrity of Town Meeting, as a serious, deliberative body.

I ask the Advisory Committee for a recommendation of Favorable Action on Article 9.

Comments, Questions, Discussion

Comment: Share desired to improve quality of warrant articles but I don't this Article will have those results and may have one negative consequence. Rather petitioners pay more attention drafting their articles then running around getting more signatures.

Comment: The petitioner has excellent intentions. As an AC subcommittee Chair, I like all of us here definitely want to see better researched, higher quality warrant articles that are fully fleshed out (and not just good ideas not ready for prime time). But I don't think this article will accomplish what its goals are and it will have at least one very negative unintended consequence.

1. There is no clear correlation between requiring 5x the number of current signatures (20% of all TMMs) and getting better quality, better researched warrant articles.
2. Maybe it will result in fewer articles, but even that isn't a given. It may simply result in fewer articles being submitted to special Town Meetings (which is the only kind of TM that this article applies to) but all of these articles shifted to the Annual Town Meeting.
3. What this article will do is to create an inequity between petitioners It will advantage those Petitioners who are well-connected and mobile over those who are not – those who can easily get signatures over those who can't – totally unrelated to the quality of their articles.

It will favor Petitioners who belong to large organizations and know lots of people in Town; Petitioners who are part of political or special-interest coalitions who are likely to sign whatever one of their own ask them to; or simply Petitioners who own a car and can easily drive all over Brookline getting signatures from people they know.

In contrast, it will disadvantage petitioners who have a harder time getting signatures because they don't own cars or who have physical disabilities or other limitations that make it difficult to bring their petitions around for people to sign; or petitioners who are not part of larger interest groups or who do not know many registered voters in Town, or who do not have much free time. Irrespective of the quality of the articles, it is likely to create a second-class category.

Comment: 12 days after we missed the deadline we had 315 signatures. Not an impossible bar. Am concerned about going from 10 to 50 and very concerned it will shift many articles to annual Town Meeting. Propose a middle ground to test the waters, and move 25 signatures. Still a bar to reach but lets us test whether it would have desired effect.

Q: What data do you have that backs up your proposal of 50 signatures? Do we know how many signatures on average are submitted per Warrant Article? A: I haven't done the count, but I have been a petitioner of many. I get what I need plus a cushion and then I stop. Not sure that the actual number is indicative of the difficulty of getting a higher number.

There was further questioning about how many articles were shifted from one town meeting to another.

Comment: Opposed to this article largely because it will limit people to bringing issues to Town Meeting that are important to them. Not everyone has ready accessibility to people who could sign. Did you research legislative history and if you know why the requirement was changed from 100 to 10 signatures? What do other communities do? Not convinced we didn't experience a bubble that maybe things are trending down. There might be a middle ground.

There was continued discussion about the pros and cons of increasing signature requirements. Concern about difficulty getting more signatures for some to the added stress on staff fielding so many articles, etc.

Comment: Agree that we will be increasing the burden and ensuring better quality of articles.

Comment: Will support this article because it does seem that many people will bring forth articles personally important but not an issue that is widely felt throughout the Town. Having the requirement will force petitioners to engage with more of the public to get a sense of the real community need or interest.

Comment: Believe it will result in a better article and have more balance in the spring.

Q: Average number of signatures typically on warrant article petitions? A: Depends on the content of the Article.

Comment: Sympathetic to arguments about difficulties some may have with disabilities.

One member shared an anecdote about their first experience submitting a warrant article.

Comment: One data point - Needham as few as 40 articles to as many as 137 with an average falling in between. 100 signatures required for special Town Meeting. Again, encourage putting up a trial balloon.

Q: Any additional time for Town Clerk's office vetting additional signatures? A: It depends on when the article was submitted. Defer to the Town Clerk on any impact on his staff with the passage of this article.

Comment: Expected outcome of improved articles that are better thought out and constructed by increasing the signature requirement but we don't have any data that shows that. Folks that are inside a group part of a constituency will not review it thoroughly Not a lot of critical thinking about the warrant article. Not sure the linkage can be made between the number of signatures and better-quality warrant articles.

Neil Gordon added a closing comment.

A **MOTION** was made and seconded for favorable action on Warrant Article 9: Increase the Required Number of Signatures for Petition Articles in Special Town Meetings from 10 to 50.

An **AMENDMENT** was made and seconded for changing the required number from 10 to 25. By a **VOTE** of 12 in favor, 6 opposed and 4 abstentions, the **AMENDMENT** passes.

A **MOTION** was made and seconded for Favorable Action on Warrant Article 9 as **AMENDED**: Increase the Required Number of Signatures for Petition Articles in Special Town Meetings from 10 to 25. By a **VOTE** of 19 in favor, 1 opposed and 2 abstentions the Motion carries.

- **WA 10 - Amend Article 2.1.13 of the Town's General By-Laws to define and require lead petitioners for warrant articles (Gordon)**

Cliff Brown once again gave an overview of the Subcommittee discussion on WA 10. The report is linked to these minutes. The petitioner, Neil Gordon, noted a "cultural change going on in Town Meeting" with a growing number of Warrant Articles being filed by multiple petitioners. At last Town meeting, five articles had five petitioners and one had eleven. This practice of listing co-petitioners without a designated lead places a burden on Boards, Committees and Commissions, and Town staff with respect to scheduling and conducting hearings and meetings. When there are multiple petitioners it is often unclear who has authority, which creates confusion and adds to scheduling complexities and delays. These delays can push the reports of Advisory and relevant bodies into the supplemental reports, reducing the time TMMs have to review relevant material and potentially compromising their ability to prepare for Town Meeting. The public may be equally confused. WA 10 proposes the identification of a single point of contact to simplify the ministerial processes described above and to ease the burden on staff. It does not prevent collaboration or identification of co-sponsors or co-petitioners.

The Subcommittee approved an amended version that was ruled out of scope by the Moderator. The Subcommittee has not, as of this writing, held another meeting to further discuss the article.

Another thing that has proliferated at Town Meeting in the last several years is the instance of multiple petitioners on warrant articles, and while it is a fine thing to get more people involved, it has led to difficulty for staff, for Advisory Committee, for other committees and commissions to identify who it is in that group they should be contacting, and who can speak for the group. The idea behind this warrant article is to require the identification of a lead petitioner for voter-petitioned articles, and that's simple idea behind it. The existing language in 2.1.3 is actually very short. So there is inserted here some definitions about what a voter initiated petition is, and a definition of a lead petitioner.

The entire subcommittee and one member of the public who did attend were all supportive, but we did think that the idea of having to have a registered voter could be loosened. We looked at language where the lead petitioner would be any resident of the town of legal voting age, identified as such on a voter initiative petition as opposed to making it have to be a registered voter of the Town.

The Moderator ruled that out of scope and so that is not on the table here tonight.

Petitioner for WA 10 Neil Gordon thanked Cliff and the subcommittee and added the following comments: I think we recognize that we've seen a proliferation. Nothing in my warrant article, in the proposed bylaw changes the notion of co-petitioners or co-sponsors, they can be listed. This is an administrative change only that says if you are Town staff or chair of a subcommittee, or any other body that needs to contact a petitioner in order to schedule a meeting or a hearing two that that name and contact information is right there in front of you. It's identified in the warrant. Interestingly enough, when you turn in a warrant article on the 6th floor, they ask you to put down your email address and your phone number and people do then, lo and behold, the warrant doesn't include that at all.

He shared an anecdote to demonstrate his point and the administrative nightmare of being unable to identify and contact petitioners in a straight forward and timely fashion.

We just need to know who to contact, that's all and let the lead petitioner arrange all of the other co-sponsors, and petitioners so that our committee chairs, or whoever else is assigned, or the sixth floor Staff doesn't have to do it. No more complicated than that. Thank you.

QUESTIONS, COMMENTS, DISCUSSION

There was general discussion about whether there was a penalty if someone refused to identify a lead petitioner (no), if the 6th floor could simply request that a lead petitioner be identified when they accept the petition in their office (possibly).

Q: If the Town Clerk is collecting this information, has anybody from Advisory or the Select Board ever requested it? We typically get the warrant, and I, like other subcommittee chairs, have no contact information on petitioners, and, like David Pollock, I had a student petitioner last time around and it was a little difficult to get in touch with them, and so I guess I'm curious about the process more than a bylaw?

A: If anybody's approached the Town Clerk about changing it it's not the Town Clerk's issue. It's a 6th floor issue. The Town Clerk checks signatures on petitions, but warrant articles are submitted to the Select Board office. They receive them, stamp them, take them down to the Clerk. The Clerk checks the signatures and sends them back up.

Comment: The way this works is that petitioners bring their signed petitioned articles to the Select Board's office, and a very nice member of that office receives the article and stamps it and hands back to them. The face page along with the stamp, which is proof that it has been submitted on a timely basis. At this point in the conversation the staff person stamping the petition could simply ask the petitioner to identify the lead petitioner and inform them that that person will receive further notification.

A **MOTION** was made and seconded for favorable action on Warrant Article 10: Identification of a Lead Petitioner in Voter Initiated Petitions at Annual and Special Town Meetings. By a **VOTE** of 19 in favor, 1 opposed and no abstentions, the Advisory Committee recommends favorable action on WA 10.

8:15 PM Report from the Human Services Subcommittee, discussion and possible vote on WA 13 - Create a new Article 3.12A of the Town's General By-Laws to establish an Office of Housing Stability (Wu, Card)

David-Marc Goldstein, a member of the subcommittee, gave the report on deliberations on WA 13. The Human Services Subcommittee recommends favorable action on the Subcommittee's motion to refer WA 13 to a Select Board Committee for further study and to report back to the Fall 2023 Town Meeting by a vote of 2-0-2. A vote recommending favorable action on the petitioners' article failed by a vote of 1-3-0.

This Article asks Town Meeting to create a new Office of Housing Stability in the Health Department or within some other town department at the discretion of the Town Administrator.

While the subcommittee was in favor of the concept, there were a number of issues raised by subcommittee members, including a lack of knowledge in regards to what is already being done by the Town, what holes there are in meeting those needs, how many full-time positions would be needed, where the funding for them would come from, in which department the Office should be placed, and does the Town Administrator (named in the By-Law) or the Select Board have the authority to decide where this Office would be placed.

The subcommittee believes it is better to first figure out how much is already being done, where are the gaps, the best way to bring all the Town's resources together to the extent possible, and coordinate a comprehensive approach.

Petitioner Chi Chi Wu addressed the scope of the problem and addressed some of the concerns discussed at the subcommittee hearing. Crisis of rental housing across the country worsened by the pandemic.

Renters across the country and the Commonwealth have faced tremendous challenges in recent years, such as shortages of affordable, decent housing and spiking rent increases. Even before the COVID-19 pandemic, tens of millions of renters struggled with high housing costs, paying over 30 percent of their income for rent, which is considered "cost burdened." The COVID-19 crisis only exacerbated this housing affordability crisis, with soaring rent hikes and millions of households behind in rent- a peak of 15 million people or 1 in 5 adult renters in arrears in January 2021.

Here in the Greater Boston region, we have some of the highest rents in the nation - the second highest, behind New York City, with no signs of prices hikes slowing down. About 45% of residents, and over half of Black and Latino residents, in Greater Boston are cost burdened.

As an integral part of the Greater Boston region, Brookline faces these challenges as much as our neighbors. Over 50% of our households are renters. And while our median household income is over \$120,000 per year, about 10 percent of our population is in poverty. Moreover, 45% of our renter households are cost burdened. When rents become unaffordable to our residents, the result can be displacement, which jeopardizes individual households and disrupts stable communities. A number of communities in Greater Boston region have responded to the affordability crisis facing renters by establishing an Office of Housing Stability or similar municipal department. The City of Boston created its office in 2016, which provides assistance to tenants in housing crisis due to fire, natural disaster, eviction, or condemnation.

Boston is not alone in having an Office of Housing Stability, as several municipalities that are comparable or only slightly larger than Brookline have also created similar offices:

- The City of Somerville (population 79,815; budget \$307.7 million) created an office in 2018 which is staffed by nine people.
- The City of Malden (population 65,932; budget \$188 million) created an office just this past year.
- The City of Revere (population 53,864; budget \$241 million) opened its office in 2020. Brookline should have an Office of Housing Stability similar to our peer communities of Malden, Somerville and Revere. This article establishes such an office in the Town By-Laws.

Comments, Questions, Discussion

Q: Support the intent of this Article, there used to be a staff person who provided housing assistance to people. What happened to that position and that function? A: No one had a reply and this speaks to why this should be a bylaw and not an informal function.

Carolyn Thall: I want to thank Chi Chi for bringing this. I'm a Town Meeting member in precinct 16

There are weeks when my part time nearly fulltime job is trying to help residents who reside in Hancock Village, which is by the way, a fairly upscale place, and still there are so many needs.

We do need a clearing house. It can be displacement. We have people who are being displaced, or there were attempts to displace them recently, including the Baker School, PTO president. I have permission to identify her. People don't know their rights. People don't know the law. There are issues with liaising with Town Staff and officials over code enforcement, safety, health, sanitation. Your average resident, especially someone who's a renter because they may not have deep roots or have been in town for very long don't have any sense of where to go, what to do, who to call for help on things that really matter in their lives, all kinds of things.

How much is being done right now, was asked rhetorically in the report - nothing's being done. This type of position somebody who is a property manager in her professional life, testified at the Select Board and said this helps the Town. Neil Gordon was talking about how much work it is for the 6th floor just to track down a lead petitioner on a warrant article. I know from personal experience, and I think Sigalle Reese is familiar with this, too, because we've interacted on Hancock Village issues, it is tremendously time consuming when I have to, or someone else has to try to get attention from the Town to get answers, to get action. It's not just if you're not paying rent and that goes back, to the knowing your rights issue. Sometimes people are not evicted, but non-renewed. Sometimes those non-renewals are illegal, and people don't know it.

We have two ballot questions coming up that will instantly if passed up the cost of living even further. There was a long post today on the Town Meeting Neighborhood Association list serv from Eric Hyatt, describing his fear and concern about that, and stating that every time there's an override his rent goes up.

This is a town that likes to believe itself to be inclusive, welcoming to all kinds of people and we can't be that if people aren't supported. I think this is a values question. I support this wholeheartedly.

Q: Topic of affordable housing is one that needs a solution and accessing and navigating resources available local, state and federal level is a need. Are there already existing not-for-profits that might be providing these services and is there a way to help our residents access them? Is this an office that one we could potentially share with communities around us? A: As the subcommittee noted there are services available in Brookline but they are scattered and serve different constituencies. One of the roles of this office would be to serve as a clearing house and refer folks. A place also where renters can also learn about their rights. In terms of sharing resources, not sure it is allowed. Many communities around us have these offices already – Boston, Somerville, and Malden have something in place. Each community has its own resources and property management company connections, etc.

Q: How do we propose to make this visible to the community? A: An Office of Housing Stability would be centralized place. People would know to go to that office much like if you have a disability complaint you go to see Sarah Kaplan. And the staffer would be a housing specialist.

Comment: Agree that this is a really important thing. I do want to add that how a municipality spends its money is very telling and I think we should be spending more money to help our citizens. But the other communities spend their

money differently than Brookline. We have less money to support other different needs. Don't know how to make everyone whole and even opportunities in this Town when these are the choices we have made already in setting our budgets. Important need but don't know how to make this happen.

Comment and Questions: We are an affluent community. I have gotten calls from people within and outside of our town with questions about finding housing. A one stop shop is needed. Who did you speak with in the Town about this, anyone at the HAB? What information did you glean from them to inform the bylaw? You offer a number of bullets and you say the office "may" and deal with case management and advocacy with landlords suggesting mediation role – have you spoken to Town Counsel about that and liability? Somerville and Malden, I think are using ARPA funds and what they are contemplating after ARPA ends? Cost burden, the numbers of people burdened in Town and do the numbers include students?

A: We have spoken with Town Administrator, Public Health Director, Advisory Council of Public Health that voted favorable action on this article; scheduled to talk with HAB next week. Spoke to Town Counsel and the only thing we can't do is provide direct financial assistance. Mediation and not adjudication. 3rd party coming in to resolve issues. Regarding funds – Boston funds it's office through a registration fee imposed on landlords. Others get support from contracts and grants. Different funding sources – possibly the Housing Trust Fund. Regarding students – don't know the details. There are definitely graduate students in our Town who do struggle financially.

Comment: Spending \$85K seems excessive and so instead of creating another Town position here, why not set up a section of the Town website on what resources are available to help, here in Brookline and in other communities. Rents in Brookline are astronomical and it might be more sensible to refer people to other communities where rents are half the costs. Nothing wrong with living elsewhere.

Comment: Thank you for putting this forward and I will support it. For those who don't realize how important this is, there is no place like home. It isn't easy for folks who lived here their whole life to move somewhere else. There should be resources here in Town available. The safety net and the help we get for rental assistance now through different organizations is not very much. Important to have someone who can actually help with legal services plus use the website as a resource as well.

Sigalle Reiss just here for questions. Expanding Human Services is a priority.

Q: CPA Funds when are they available for allocation? They could be used for this position? A: Accepting applications in Fall 2023 with funding beginning Spring of 2024.

- Community Housing: CPA funds can be used to acquire, create, preserve, and support community housing for households with incomes at or below 100% of the area median income.
- Historic Preservation: CPA funds can be used to acquire, preserve, rehabilitate, and restore historic resources listed on the State Register or determined to be locally significant by the Preservation Commission.
- Open Space: CPA funds can be used to acquire, create, and preserve open space and natural resources.
- Outdoor Recreation: CPA funds can acquire, create, preserve, rehabilitate, or restore land for outdoor recreational use.

Planning Department Assistant Director for Community Development Joe Viola added as a department that deals with walk-ins they have been talking about needing to have a clearing house a main point for people to get the resources

they need. We in the Planning Department are not trained in housing search but there is definitely a need based on walk-ins we see. No case management, no follow up. A centralized position to be a resource and track people coming into the system and assuring good outcomes would be important. We do have information on the website and we do refer people there but it isn't exhaustive.

Susan Granoff gave some context for the subcommittee's decision for referral to a Select Board Committee.

A **MOTION** was made that the subject matter of Article 13 be referred to a Select Board Committee which will coordinate with different town departments and find out what they're already doing, what more needs to be done, explore ways to get it all into one centralized location, if possible, along with finding a funding mechanism, and to report back to the Fall 2023 Town Meeting. By a **VOTE** of 14 in favor, 3 opposed and 1 abstention, the Advisory Committee recommends favorable action on referral.

8:45 PM Other business

Upon a **MOTION** made and seconded to adjourn, and voted unanimously, the meeting was adjourned at 10:28 p.m.

Documents Presented

<https://www.brooklinema.gov/DocumentCenter/Index/4055>

- 2023 03 22 Admin and Finance Subcommittee Report on FY24 IT budget
- 2023 03 24 Admin and Finance Subcommittee Report on FY24 Debt and Interest
- Admin and Finance questions on FY24 IT Budget
- ITDFY24BudgetPresentation V AC 03222023
- 2023 03 27 Human Services Subcommittee Report on 2023 ATM Article 13
- 2023 03 29 Schools Subcommittee Report WA 9 2023 Annual TM Final
- 2023 03 29 Schools Subcommittee Report WA 10 2023 Annual TM Final
- 2023 03 27 Human Services Subcommittee Report on FY24 Library Dept Budget
- WA 13 Petitioner Questionnaire - Spring 2023

	Vote 1	Vote 2	Vote 3	Vote 4	Vote 5	Vote 6	Vote 7	Vote 8	Vote 9	Vote 10
# Votes Yes	19	20	19	17	0	12	19	19	0	14
# Votes No	0	0	0	0	0	6	1	1	0	3
# Votes Abstain	1	0	0	2	0	4	2	0	0	1
Vote Description:	MAIN MOTION: FAVORABLE ACTION on FY24 Library budget of \$4,480,000	MAIN MOTION Favorable Action on base budget of \$2,350,179	In the event Favorable Action override budget of \$2,375,179	FAVORABLE ACTION on Debt Service appropriation of \$35,939,014	Favorable ACTION on Warrant Article 9 Increase the Required Number of Signatures for Petition Articles in Special Town Meetings from 10 to 50	Amend to Increase the Required Number of Signatures for Petition Articles in Special Town Meetings from 10 to 25 signatures	Favorable Action on Warrant Article 9 as AMENDED: Increase the Required Number of Signatures for Petition Articles in Special Town Meetings from 10 to 25	FAVORABLE ACTION on Warrant Article 10: Identification of a Lead Petitioner in Voter Initiated Petitions at Annual and Special Town Meetings	FAVORABLE ACTION on Warrant Article 13: Create a new Article 3.12A of the Town's General By-Laws to establish an Office of Housing Stability	FAVORABLE ACTION Human Services Subcommittee recommends favorable action on the Subcommittee's motion to refer WA 13 to a Select Board Committee for further study and to report back to the Fall 2023 Town Meeting
Ben Birnbaum	Y	Y	Y	Y		N	Y	Y		Y
Harry Bohrs	Y	Y	Y	Y		Y	Y	Y		A
Cliff Brown	Y	Y	Y	Y		N	Y	Y		
Patty Correa	Y									
John Doggett	Y	Y		A		N	Y	Y		Y
Katherine Florio	A	Y	Y	Y		Y	A			
Harry Friedman										
David-Marc Goldstein	Y	Y	Y	Y		A	Y	Y		Y
Neil Gordon	Y	Y	Y	Y		A	Y	Y		Y
Susan Granoff	Y	Y	Y	Y		N	N	Y		Y
Kelly Hardebeck	Y	Y	Y	,Y		Y	Y	Y		Y
Amy Hummel										

Anita Johnson				A		Y	Y	Y		Y
Alisa Jonas										
Janice Kahn	Y	Y	Y	Y		Y	Y	Y		Y
Carol Levin										
Pam Lodish	Y	Y	Y	Y		Y	Y	Y		Y
Joslin Murphy	Y	Y	Y	Y		Y	Y	N		Y
Donelle O'Neal, Sr.		Y	Y			Y	Y	Y		N
Linda Olson Pehlke	Y	Y	Y	Y		A	Y	Y		Y
Markus Penzel										
David Pollak	Y	Y	Y	Y		A	Y	Y		N
Stephen Reeders	y	Y	Y	Y		Y	Y	Y		Y
Carlos Ridruejo	y	Y	Y	Y		Y	Y	Y		Y
Lee Selwyn	y	Y	Y	Y		Y	Y	Y		
Alok Somani	y	Y	Y	Y		N	Y	Y		Y
Carolyn Thall						Y	Y	Y		N
Christine Westphal	y	Y	Y	Y		N	A			
Dennis Doughty										

DRAFT