

**Town of Brookline**  
**Advisory Committee Minutes**

April 14, 2020

**Present Remotely:** Vice-Chair Carla Benka, Ben Birnbaum, Harry Bohrs, Clifford Brown, Carol Caro, John Doggett, Dennis Doughty, Harry Friedman, Janet Gelbart, David-Marc Goldstein, Neil Gordon, Susan Granoff, Amy Hummel, Alisa Jonas, Janice Kahn, Steve Kanes, David Lescohier, Carol Levin, Fred Levitan, Pam Lodish, Carlos Ridruejo, Chair Michael Sandman, Lee Selwyn, Kim Smith, Claire Stampfer, Charles Swartz, Paul Warren, Christine Westphal, Neil Wishinsky

**Also present:** Assistant Town Administrator Justin Casanova-Davis, Police Chief Andrew Lipson, Finance Director/Treasurer Jeana Franconi, Acting Chief Assessor Rachid Belhocine, Members of the public John Van Scoyoc and Mark (last name unknown)

**Announcements:** Pursuant to this Board's Authority under 940 CMR 29.10 (8), all Advisory 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.

**AGENDA**

**7:30 pm Further discussion and vote on Reserve Fund Transfer Request for \$60,000 from the Brookline Police Department for a Transport Van**

**Questions & Comments**

**Q:** Crime statistics and current figures on the website? **A:** Crime is up despite initial lull (eerily quiet since COVID-19) mental health calls doubled, domestic violence, shop lifting at open stores has been a problem. Motor vehicle break-ins, about 10 (8 on one night). Particular types of crime. More reported robberies but not on the street. Shoplifters being confronted and then when confronted, they escalate to a robbery charge with threats, particularly of being contagious. Rash of car breaks right now; attributable to one person. More concerning are mental health calls and domestic violence.

**Q:** Police cars stationed at certain places? Why? **A:** Officers near stores that are open to provide a presence in those areas.

**Q:** Are there other items not appearing in the CIP that are aging? **A:** A 1999 van, former transport, turned into a crime scene van may need to be replaced. Motor cycles and animal control vehicles are ok.

We had many questions but already answered via email so satisfied.

**Q:** What is the department policy regarding PPEs? **A:** Officers recommended to wear masks, but now required to wear them on any call. Not while driving in the cruiser, but outside and in all common areas of the station, when we make an arrest, we we put a surgical mask on the suspect during the booking process and officers wear gloves and protective eye gear.

**Q:** How many times a week is current van used? Can Norfolk County give us a van short term? **A:** All one officer cruisers. Split transport officers. Van used 24 hours a day 7 days a week during this incident. 17 arrests plus 3 since last reported. Used around the clock. Reached out to Norfolk County and they were able to find a 2009 van to loan to us on a temporary basis. Old, unmarked and not in great shape and loaned until we find a replacement.

**Q:** How soon if money is voted tonight? **A:** In next two weeks.

A **MOTION** was made and seconded to approve a Reserve Fund Transfer request \$60,000 for transport van. By a unanimous VOTE of 28 in favor, none opposed and no abstentions, the RFT was approved.

**8:00 pm Public Hearing/possible vote on the following warrant articles for the 2020 Annual Town Meeting:**

Article 3: Annual authorization of Compensating Balance Agreements (Treasurer/Collector)

Article 6: Acceptance of legislation to increase property tax exemptions (Assessors)

Dennis Doughty noted that we are required by state law to act on this authorization annually.

A **MOTION** was made and seconded for favorable action on Warrant Article 3. By a unanimous vote of 28 in favor, none opposed and no abstentions, the Advisory Committee recommends favorable action on Warrant Article 3.

Kim Smith provided a brief summary of the legislation to increase property tax exemptions.

**Questions & Comments**

**Q:** What is the definition of “elderly”? **A:** 65 years of age or older. For “surviving spouse” have to be at least 70 years or older.

The funds come out of the Assessor’s overlay account.

A **MOTION** was made and seconded for favorable action on Warrant Article 6 version submitted by Board of Assessors as recommended by the Select Board. By a unanimous VOTE of 28 in favor, none opposed and no abstentions, the Advisory Committee recommends favorable action on Warrant Article 6.

**8:20 pm Discussion of Select Board’s Recommendations for Articles to be considered at the Annual Town meeting, tentatively scheduled for June 23, 2020**

Moderator would like our support in keeping Town Meeting discussion limited given the revised format and current environment.

**Questions & Comments**

David-Marc: One suggestion and one question – add Oak Street property and vote it in June Town Meeting.

**Q:** If SB votes to remove Debt Exclusion question from the June ballot, will that affect Newbury Articles at all? **A:** No, the intent is to postpone the debt exclusion to September 1. I and others felt that doing a debt exclusion in the midst of a people losing their jobs and unable to pay bills would not be appropriate. Welltower has stated to us to that they are still in the game, moving forward, long term view and well capitalized. The east side is still on track and if Town Meeting and voters want us to buy the west side, as of now that will be an option.

Oak Street Article authorizes the Select Board to sell, but is not a mandate.

Cliff: This is a bad idea – we should be doing all we can to minimize the number of articles that we are going to ask people to talk about. If we add one, then more will follow. Also specific to this situation, cost of carrying these properties right now is not a lot of money and will not impact what needs to be done on debt exclusion. It

will not make a difference. Debt will amortize in another year and then economics will become more significant. Authorizing SB to do something right now runs the risk of these properties being put on the market at probably the worst time in 12 years. Short sighted perspective.

Carol L: Hate idea of making a financial decision in a silo. Lots of decisions ahead of us, understand the impulse to sell will offset cost of Newbury, we should do a more holistic analysis of this since I think things are going to bad for a while.

Amy: I want to agree with Cliff's point about reducing then number of articles and this one in particular will be contentious. There was resistance last time and so it will be contentious; this is not the Town Meeting to deal with it.

Carlos: I think there is a perceived political view or economic reality that the Town has purchased some property that they don't know what to do with, but that they should decide before we purchasing another property (Newbury); these two are more connected than we realize. The two properties are linked. We purchased a house in Brookline during an economic downturn and Brookline didn't have a downturn compared to other communities so it may be a bad time to sell the Oak Street properties or it may be ok. We have to consider perceived view.

Janet: Agreeing with Cliff and Amy. Not postponing forever, another Town Meeting before November. This property was purchased for a specific reason that didn't get approved, whereas discussion around Newbury looks at a host of potential uses.

Recall the question on the table is, "Do we want this to be considered at the June Town Meeting or wait?"

Janice: I get Cliff's point about not wanting a contentious meeting, but now I'm sure that this Town Meeting will be contentious. We are in a different place with budget and school's needs.

Cliff: Last fall in favor of selling properties, giving SB authority just not right now in the context of this Town Meeting which should be limited, and to defer as much as we can to the fall when we will have a better idea of what the Town will be dealing with.

Alisa: Given the precariousness of our financial situation, why wouldn't we want to maximize the Town's flexibility and decrease our debt? I don't think giving the SB the authority means we are telling them to sell – I would like to understand why we wouldn't want to give that flexibility.

Carol L: One of the issues is that the Town doesn't have an executive who is making financial decisions for us with an overarching view of the situation so I would ask why are we even doing Newbury right now. So to give SB authority to do something they may or may not do may be giving them discretion that they haven't shown expertise in. Believe this is a very bad time to be putting things on the market. No time to be bringing Newbury debt exclusion and should be asking Welltower for 6 month extension.

Neil G: I would like the SB to have the authority now to sell those properties, but the issue is whether we recommend including it now or later. Town Meeting is being delayed until the fall; the one we are having in June is the emergency version.

Lee: The Oak Street was supposed to come up before the Driscoll article at Town Meeting and I'm convinced that the former failed because of the mistake in order. There will be opposition to Newbury at June Town Meeting. Authorizing sale of Oak Street will enhance the success of Newbury. I would propose an amendment to

the article that while we would encourage the sale as soon as practicable, add something about proper market conditions, to do it smart.

A straw poll was taken on whether to accept the recommendations of the Select Board with the addition of Oak Street to June 23 Town Meeting. 13 were in favor of the addition, 15 were opposed.

**Q:** Do we have any idea how the value of the Newbury property has changed? **A:** If people think we are overpaying for the Newbury property, they should vote NO for the debt exclusion.

Welltower is not letting the current market flux affect them. They are in business for the long term. We are a municipality in business for the long term.

**Q:** If market was down, would it make sense to take the Newbury property by eminent domain? **A:** We cannot take a property by eminent domain to then sell it. If taken, it must be used by the Town for Town purposes.

A **MOTION** to adjourn was made, seconded and voted unanimously and the meeting was adjourned at 8:45 pm.

**VOTES:**

	<b>Attendance</b>	<b>Vote 1</b>	<b>Vote 2</b>	<b>Vote 3</b>	<b>Vote 4</b>
<b># Votes Yes</b>	29	28	28	28	13
<b># Votes No</b>		0	0	0	15
<b># Votes Abstain</b>		0	0	0	0
<b>Vote Description:</b>		<b>RFT for Transport Van</b>	<b>Article 3</b>	<b>Article 6</b>	<b>Add Oak Street to June Town Meeting Straw Poll</b>
	<i>Enter P for Present</i>	<i>Enter Y, N or A</i>	<i>Enter Y, N or A</i>	<i>Enter Y, N or A</i>	<i>Enter Y, N or A</i>
Carla Benka	P	Y	Y	Y	N
Ben Birnbaum	P	Y	Y	Y	N
Harry Bohrs	P	Y	Y	Y	N
Cliff Brown	P	Y	Y	Y	N
Carol Caro	P	Y	Y	Y	N
John Doggett	P	Y	Y	Y	Y
Dennis Doughty	P	Y	Y	Y	N
Harry Friedman	P	Y	Y	Y	Y
Janet Gelbart	P	Y	Y	Y	N
David-Marc Goldstein	P	Y	Y	Y	Y
Neil Gordon	P	Y	Y	Y	N
Susan Granoff	P	Y	Y	Y	Y
Amy Hummel	P	Y	Y	Y	N
Alisa Jonas	P	Y	Y	Y	Y
Janice Kahn	P	Y	Y	Y	Y
Steve Kanes	P	Y	Y	Y	Y
David Lescohier	P	Y	Y	Y	N
Carol Levin	P	Y	Y	Y	N
Fred Levitan	P	Y	Y	Y	N
Pam Lodish	P	Y	Y	Y	N
Carlos Ridruejo	P	Y	Y	Y	Y
Lee Selwyn	P	Y	Y	Y	Y
Kim Smith	P	Y	Y	Y	N
Claire Stampfer	P	Y	Y	Y	N
Charles Swartz	P	Y	Y	Y	Y
Paul Warren	P	Y	Y	Y	Y
Christine Westphal	P	Y	Y	Y	Y
Neil Wishinsky	P	Y	Y	Y	Y
Mike Sandman	P				

**Documents Presented:**

- Board of Assessor's Warrant Article 6 description
- Chief Lipson responses to questions regarding RFT for prisoner transport van

## Lisa Portscher

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**From:** Carla Benka <rcvben@earthlink.net>  
**Sent:** Thursday, April 9, 2020 3:38 PM  
**To:** Stev Kane; Alisa Jonas; Amy hummel; John Doggett; Janice Kahn; Michael Sandman (msandman1943@gmail.com); Harry Friedman; janetgelb@comcast.net; Neil Gordon; Fred Levitan; Cliff Brown; Lee Selwyn; Pam Lodish; ksmith1450@aol.com; david@lescohier.com; DM Goldstein; Carla Benka; Carol Caro; Ben Birnbaum; Chuck Swartz (chswartz@rcn.com); Dennis Doughty (dennis@doughty.org); Christine Westphal; Carol Levin; Susan Granoff; Claire Stampfer; Carlos Ridruejo; Neil Wishinsky; Harry Bohrs; Paul Warren  
**Cc:** Lisa Portscher  
**Subject:** Fwd: Advisory meeting and prisoner transport van

FYI

I forwarded questions raised by AC members to Chief Lipson in anticipation of our meeting next Tuesday. The questions and his responses are below.

If you have additional questions relative to the purchase of the van, please send them to me by next Monday so that I can pass them along to the Chief before the AC meeting.

Best,  
Carla

Begin forwarded message:

**From:** Police Chief Andrew Lipson <[alipson@brooklinema.gov](mailto:alipson@brooklinema.gov)>  
**Subject: Advisory meeting and prisoner transport van**  
**Date:** April 9, 2020 at 10:59:34 AM EDT  
**To:** Carla Benka <[rcvben@earthlink.net](mailto:rcvben@earthlink.net)>  
**Cc:** Justin Casanova-Davis <[jcasanovadavis@brooklinema.gov](mailto:jcasanovadavis@brooklinema.gov)>, Mike Sandman <[msandman@brooklinema.gov](mailto:msandman@brooklinema.gov)>, Lisa Portscher <[lportscher@brooklinema.gov](mailto:lportscher@brooklinema.gov)>

Carla,

I hope all is well. Things at the Police Department are extremely busy. I will make myself available at 7:30 pm on the 14<sup>th</sup> for this important request. Below are some answers to the questions ahead of time and photos of the current wagon and sample photos of the proposed vehicle. Thank you for your consideration of this transfer. This piece of equipment is very important to the men and women of the Police Department during this dangerous and challenging time.

*What is the age of the current van and what is its mileage?*

The current Patrol Wagon is a 2008 Ford F350 and it has 99,805 miles on it. From approximately 2008-2011 it was used 24/7 as the primary transport vehicle. Since 2011 it has been held in reserve as a transport option for special situations and events. Most recently it has been used as a presence at large events, a blocking vehicle for special events where vehicle ramming is a threat and to transport various items such as barricades and other large sized Police equipment. It is no longer serviceable as you will see below.

*When is the current van scheduled to be replaced?*

For our small number of special vehicles that are not “regular” cruisers (Animal Control Truck, Crime Scene van which was a prior transport van, parking meter collection van, motorcycles for example) they are not on a regular replacement schedule and are replaced on an as needed case by case basis, budget permitting.

*What has caused the current van to break down multiple times and approximately how many days has it been out of service?*

The report from the Town’s fleet manager is that the Patrol Wagon has a leaky head gasket requiring extensive repair, a faulty cab door (photo) and a faulty electrical system. For several years the electrical system has had problems draining the battery while parked and the town’s fleet maintenance installed a “boat switch” (see photo) to prevent the battery from draining when the vehicle is not in use.

Early in March we transitioned to all single Officer cruiser assignments as a result of COVID-19. Prior to the pandemic we had some two-Officer cruisers which were used to transport prisoners. We attempted to use the Patrol Wagon 24/7 on patrol and it repeatedly needed to be jump started and would stall out in traffic. It is currently sitting in the Police lot and is not in use.

*How often do you expect to transport prisoners in the coming months?*

Since the start of our COVID-19 response in early March and with the adoption new protocols we have made 17 arrests. These arrests are now for the most serious offenses as we are attempting to minimize custodies and exposure. Please keep in mind that when we have prisoners it is not just the transport from the scene of the arrest to the Police station. Because all criminal justice system protocols have changed in the last four weeks we have had to adapt. The courts are closed and the protocols of the Norfolk County Sheriff’s Office have changed. This has resulted in housing our most serious offenders for longer periods of time. This in turn has resulted in more hospital visits of prisoners under our guard to the hospital. When they are discharged we have to transport them back to the Police station. During this crisis we have also had to transport more prisoners to the Dedham House of Correction. Prior to COVID-19 the Sheriffs picked prisoners up from the court house, but now with the courts closed to prisoners all arrests in the County are housed at local Police departments while court proceedings occur via video conference. This has greatly stressed the Sheriffs resources and pick up procedures resulting in local Police departments carrying more of the burden.

At times we also need to transport vulnerable members of society in non-arrest situations such as homeless people to shelters etc.. The new transport van would allow us to provide these services while reducing exposure to the public sand the Officers. The prisoner transport van would also be much easier to disinfect then a regular cruiser and is designed to be easily washed out.

*Why is the current van not suitable for transporting prisoners during the COVID-19 pandemic and are there accommodations that could make it suitable?*

The current patrol wagon has a prisoner compartment that is separated from the driver which is is good when it comes to COVID-19 protection. However new legal requirements require HVAC, seatbelts, proper lighting and live camera monitoring of prisoners that are in a separate compartments not visible to transport Officers. The current patrol wagon does not have HVAC, seatbelts, proper lighting or camera monitoring of the prisoners. To retrofit such an old vehicle with these requirements would not make sense.

Our Officers now have to transport prisoners in regular cruisers, which in normal circumstances works safely in all but the most extreme situations. With the emergence of COVID-19 it subjects our Officers to riding in the same passenger compartment as possible or confirmed COVID-19 case. We are also facing longer transport times due to the strain on the system and subjecting out Officers to higher risk of exposure by having them in the same passenger compartment. This could result not only in illness for the Officers but required quarantining of Officers due to prolonged exposure.

*What makes the new van suitable for this purpose?*

The new van would provide 3 separate compartments for prisoner transport that are all equipped with HVAC, proper lighting, seatbelts and camera monitoring. The new van would keep the Officers from experiencing a high or even medium risk environment while transporting prisoners or COVID-19 positive people. The Officers would be able to transport prisoners in a much safer way. The proposed prisoner transport van would also be much easier to disinfect than a regular cruiser and is designed to be easily washed out.

*Would any of the accommodations necessary to reduce the risk of contagion limit the use of the new van when COVID-19 is no longer a threat?*

The van will be serviceable for years to come after COVID-19. The plan would be to have this vehicle on the street 24/7 while COVID-19 is still a very active threat and when things are back to a “new normal” re-evaluate and hopefully use the transport van in special circumstances.

We are lucky to have found a van as well as many of the needed components ready for installation actually on the lot of a municipal outfitter. The turnaround on a van like this usually takes 6 – 8 months. We can start immediately drastically reducing the risk to our Officers in a matter of weeks coinciding with the expected surge of COVID-19 cases. There are other Police departments that have inquired about this one van that is on the lot and the outfitter is holding it for us. We should not delay.

Best regards

Chief Andy Lipson

Andrew Lipson  
Chief of Police  
Brookline Police Department  
617-730-2249  
[alipson@brooklinema.gov](mailto:alipson@brooklinema.gov)













**This image is displayed to represent a general viewpoint of Havis' Van Prisoner Transport Inserts and is not intended to exactly replicate the Havis Van Insert you're viewing**





## BOARD OF ASSESSORS



The Board of Assessors voted at their regular meeting held on March 4, 2020 to recommend to the 2020 Annual Town Meeting to continue to grant additional property tax exemption amounts allowed by law as follows:

### PROPOSED ARTICLE FOR 2020 ANNUAL TOWN MEETING

To see if the Town will elect to establish an additional property tax exemption for fiscal year 2021 which shall be uniform for all exemptions, in accordance with Section 4 of Chapter 73 of the Acts of 1986, as amended by Chapter 126 of the Acts of 1988, and accept said Section 4, as amended, or act on anything relative thereto.

### PETITIONER'S EXPLANATION

This article provides for an increase in the property tax exemptions for certain classes of individuals, including surviving spouses, low-income elderly, the blind and disabled veterans. The proposed increases, which require annual reauthorizations, have been approved by Town Meeting continually since FY1989.

### PETITIONER'S RECOMMENDATION

This article provides for an increase in the property tax exemption amounts for certain classes of individuals, including surviving spouses, the elderly, the blind and disabled veterans. The proposed increases, which require annual reauthorizations, have been approved annually since FY1989. The estimated cost for FY2021 is approximately \$55,325 and is funded from the tax abatement overlay reserve account. The law allows the Town to increase the exemptions by up to 100% as indicated on the following schedule, which are recommended by the Board of Assessors:

Description	Ch.59, Sec.5 Clause	FY2019 #Granted	Basic Amount Exempted	Proposed Amount Exempted
Surviving Spouse	17D	3	\$175	\$350
Veteran (10% Disability)	22	47	\$400	\$800
Veteran (loss of one hand, foot or eye)	22A	0	\$750	\$1,500
Veteran (loss of two hands, feet or eyes)	22B	0	\$1,250	\$2,500
Veteran (special housing)	22C	0	\$1,500	\$3,000
Veteran (certain widows of soldiers)	22D	0	\$250	\$500
Veteran (100% disability, cannot work)	22E	12	\$1,000	\$2,000
Blind	37A	35	\$500	\$1,000
Elderly	41C	13	\$500	\$1,000

TO BE VOTED BY ROLL CALL OF THE SELECT BOARD:

That the Town elect to establish an additional property tax exemption for fiscal year 2021 which shall be uniform for all exemptions, in accordance with Section 4 of Chapter 73 of the Acts of 1986, as amended by Chapter 126 of the Acts of 1988, and accept said Section 4, as amended.

ADVISORY COMMITTEE'S CONSIDERATIONS

BACKGROUND

This Article would allow the Town to continue its current practice of increasing state-mandated property tax exemptions for several classes of qualifying taxpayers, including veterans with a 10% or greater disability, surviving spouses, blind taxpayers, and low-income elderly taxpayers. The town is required to give these taxpayers, if eligible, a basic exemption whose amount is specified in Chapter 59, Section 5 of the Massachusetts General Laws and which is partially reimbursed by the state. The Town also has the option to increase these exemptions by any amount up to 100%. The increase must be uniform across all the exemptions, and the increased exemption amount, per taxpayer, may be limited by the change in the taxpayer's bill over their previous fiscal year's tax liability.

DISCUSSION

The proposed increases require annual authorization and have been approved by Town Meeting each year since FY1989. It is hard to imagine the Town denying, for instance, disabled veterans and fixed-income elderly the additional exemptions allowed under state law. The Assessors estimate that the cost for FY2021 will be approximately \$55,325 and has already built a reserve for this purpose in the tax abatement overlay reserve account.