

# Town of Brookline

## Massachusetts

### HOUSING ADVISORY BOARD

Virtual Public Meeting

April 19, 2023

5:30 – 7:30 pm

**Attendees:** Jenny Raitt, Jonathan Klein, Bernard Greene, Steve Heikin, Roger Blood, Shawn O’Neal, Michael Jacobs, and Pam Goodman

**Staff:** Emily DeHoog, Kara Brewton, and Joe Viola

#### AGENDA

##### 1. Approval of minutes from March 15, 2023 HAB meeting

Minutes will be available at a later date.

##### 2. Continued discussion of draft Housing Production Plan and possible HAB vote to recommend adoption by the Planning Board and Select Board

- Joe told HAB that staff is hopeful that the HAB will approve the HPP. He recapped community engagement during the HPP process. Joe talked about the process for refining the HPP draft.
- Roger talked about working with Judi to figure out how the input of the public hearings will be incorporated in the draft. He said that other boards will see the original draft that HAB saw. Roger said the HAB could either vote “yes” and approve the original draft or HAB could send their edits along with the original draft.
- Steve discussed scheduling the Planning Board meeting for the HPP. Steve said it would be useful to have a compiled list of the comments the HAB made and whether any action was taken on them. Roger said that the “V2 HPP Draft” has comments from the Housing Production Plan Steering Committee but not from HAB.

- Bernard agreed that there would be value in the Planning Board seeing HAB's comments. He said that this would also be beneficial to the Select Board's discussion on the HPP.
- Jenny said the HPP process was very extensive, unique, in-depth, and included a site suitability analysis. She said she was also impressed with the community engagement. She said the HPP is overall positive and puts us in a strong position to move forward. She talked about how powerful the six word stories were from the HPP engagement process. She said she hopes the Town can move forward with the plan keeping in mind that the zoning and regulatory strategies are simply recommendations that need further study, analysis, and input. She noted that many ideas from the last plan did not become a reality because of zoning and regulatory challenges. She said she supports this plan, and will recommend it to the next steps in the process
- Jonathan said that the comments should be reviewed and incorporated, but he is anxious to keep the HPP moving.
- Rita said that in the HPP document it lists all the needs. She said on p. 79 of the draft she is concerned about the seniors. She talked about how the Health Department can work with the Mental Health Division and partner with Brookline organizations. She said there is not going to be enough senior housing.
- Roger said we should work to address both senior and family affordable housing needs.
- Bernard discussed his comments and edits on the HPP draft.
- Jenny said the CPA plan and the CPA committee has a few comments as well on the draft. She said that this wouldn't hold up the movement of the HPP draft.

*Roger moved to approve/positive recommendation for the HPP draft to move to the Planning Board and include the comments that HAB members made on the draft. Jonathan seconded.*

*Steve said that HAB comments, working group, and public comments on the draft should be included.*

*Bernard said he has to abstain because he has to take it to the Select Board.*

***Voted Yes to move the draft forward to the Planning Board and attach HAB's comments:***  
*Steve, Mike, Jonathan, Rita, Pam, Shawn, and Roger.*

***Abstained:*** *Bernard Greene*

### **3. Public Hearings on the Following Warrant Articles for May 2023 Annual Town Meeting:**

**6:00 p.m. - Public Hearing on Warrant Article 13 (Wu TMM7, Card)**

**Establish a new Office of Housing Stability in the Town's Health Department or within another department at the discretion of the Town Administrator**

- Chi Chi shared a PowerPoint presentation on Article 13. She said that the rental crisis has gotten worse since the pandemic. She pointed out that over 40% of renters in Brookline are cost burdened and 24% are severely cost-burdened. She showed that similar communities have offices of Housing Stability. She said the Warrant Article was written to be flexible with details to be decided by the Town Administrator.
- Pam asked how well this concept has helped in other communities. She said that she feels that this type of proposal should be regional. Chi Chi asked if people knew that there is a state office for assistance. Chi Chi said that the idea is that this is a clearinghouse and it has been effective in other communities.
- Rita asked if they have thought about going to the court on landlord-tenant issues. Rita said that Newton has a Consumer Protection office that could be used. She said that she doesn't think the Health Department is an appropriate place for this. Chi Chi said that once it goes to the courts, the situation is dire and we need to help them before that. Chi Chi said she knows the person in the Consumer Protection office in Newton and housing stability is not their target. Staff at the Consumer Protection office said that the need is very great for this.
- Bernard said that putting this in a bylaw is restrictive to finding the most efficient and effective way to address these needs. Bernard said that it could be a person in the Health Department and send people out to address needs to other organizations who have existing programs. Chi Chi said she is concerned that if it is not in the bylaw, it will not happen at all. She said that the current language of the bylaw makes it flexible to figure out the best way to do it.
- Steve said he's worried about the cost. He said that Somerville has 9 staff and he's unsure if a local organization could fill this need. He said that the Health Dept may not be the first place that people would turn to for these issues. Chi Chi said that there is no expectation that we will have a 9 person office like Somerville. She said it makes sense in the Health Department because it's also human services. She said someone who knows all the resources and can coordinate would be helpful.
- Michael said we shouldn't turn it down just because we don't know where it would go. Michael said there needs to be more study on this to be comfortable to vote yes on this.
- Rita asked if Chi Chi knows about the mediation center that teaches how to mediate situation. Chi Chi said no. Chi Chi said that having new information emphasizes that we need someone that has all of this information to share.
- Shawn said that she's learned a lot about this by being a tenant in Brookline over 40 years. She said that her neighbors don't have all of this information. She said going through eviction is not the best way to learn all of this information.

*Roger opened the hearing to the public at 6:45 pm*

- Jenny left the written comment in Zoom chat: “I am very supportive of establishing this office or having a staff person devoted to addressing housing stability in Brookline. Our HPP makes it clear that people are suffering burdens and at risk of displacement and need help with search, placement, and other concerns that relate to a stable community. Thank you! I'm sorry I need to leave and can't speak on the record. Thank you, Chi Chi and others for filing this article.”
- Jonathan said that he agrees that this is an urgent need and he is supportive of this idea. He is against a study committee because this needs to happen now. He is unsure if an unfunded office makes sense for this. He said he would support a resolution for the town administrator to come up with a solution on how to fund this office or position. He said he would like this to happen quickly.
- Steve said that his feelings are consistent with Jonathan. He asked if Town Staff is able to handle people’s calls concerning these issues. Joe said that staff does what they can but they are not trained to handle complex situations.
- Bernard said that the new Town Administrator has more of a focus on human services. Bernard said he supports having this resource within the Town.
- Rita said that Boston College has a legal clinic through the law school and we could look into working with them to utilize those services for a housing clinic in Brookline. Bernard said that the Housing Stabilization staff member could set up that relationship.
- Roger said the bullet points of responsibilities seemed to be two separate issues. Roger said that he doesn’t think Town employees should be involved in landlord-tenant disputes but he supports the other aspects of the bylaw. He said we don’t have to go to the budget to fund this. He said he’s intrigued with contracting out these services. He said we could work toward an RFP in this regard.
- Chi Chi said the bullets are potential services. She said this WA was reviewed by Town Council and she said this WA was not an issue legally. She said that the Town did vote for mediation for the Diversity and Inclusion Commission. Chi Chi talked about different committees and boards, and staff she’s met with. Roger asked who she consulted with to develop this WA. She said Town Council, legal department, and Town administrator.

*Roger closed the public hearing at 7:06.*

- Pam said she thinks that there is a very serious problem with affordability. She said to think that having one person who will make an impact given the complex need is not realistic. She said the

issues are much bigger than just needing a place to live. She said that we need to utilize the state resources through MetroHousing Boston on this.

- Roger said this is not ready to be enacted as it is written. He said he also doesn't think it's ready for a study committee. He said that it needs to be changed to:

“We acknowledge that there is a great need for a navigator and case worker. We recommend that we recommend to have an RFP using CPA funding. He said that respondents to the RFP will give us insight on what we would be able to do with our funding. We move to acknowledge the great need and we recommend an RFP to be developed with guidance of the petitioners.”

- Bernard said he would like to urge the Town Administrator to begin pulling together a structure to address social service needs, including housing. He said the ideas in this warrant article could be part of that.
- Roger said the Malden approach is intriguing to him.
- Jonathan asked if we could hold off on coming up with a resolution to this until the next meeting with a resolution circulated in advance.
- Steve said it would be useful to see the Malden RFP.

#### **6:45 p.m. - Public Hearing on Warrant Article 24 (Gordon, et al.)**

##### **Resolution seeking to provide Town Meeting Options for Complying with the MBTA Communities Act**

- Roger asked if anyone wants to present on Article 24. Roger said the petitioners are no longer seeking favorable action on Article 24.
- Bernard talked about a new committee being formed to come up with an alternative to the Harvard St MBTA that conforms to the MBTA requirements.

*Roger opened the public hearing at 7:15.*

There were no comments from the public. There was only one public attendee left in the meeting.

*Roger closed the public hearing at 7:17.*

- Kara talked about upcoming meetings for the Select Board's new MBTA Communities committee.
- Roger said the HAB has decided that there is no need to take a position or vote.

**4. Close Public Hearings. HAB discussion of Warrant Articles heard, possible HAB votes.**

**5. Updates as needed**

*Roger motioned to adjourn at 7:34. The HAB was unanimously in favor.*

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## Attachment

### Bernard's comments on the HPP as discussed during the 4-19-23 meeting

**Pages 1-2** – First bullet, put the organizations in a footnote:

- Support for affordable housing is widespread in Brookline and there are numerous organizations and groups that are advocates and supporters. [FN]

[FN] A few of the organizations and groups that support affordable housing include the Brookline Housing Authority, Brookline Community Development Corporation (BCDC, formerly Brookline Improvement Corporation), Brookline for Everyone, Building a Better Brookline, Brookline by Design, representatives of the Greater Boston Interfaith Council, and others, many of whom contributed their perspectives to the development of this housing plan.

**P. 17** – Using a Six-Word Stories Project on page 17 as a highlighted introduction to a section is misleading. I don't think "'Refugees welcome', but only if wealthy" is more than an outlier opinion. Better to list in the appendix the variety of stories so the reader can determine for themselves whether a sentiment is a trend or an outlier.

**P. 63** – update the MBTA Communities Act response of Brookline.

**P. 76** – Newbury site will be subject to a process to determine what it will be used for following its use as Pierce school swing space. Housing is just one option, and the huge multi-unit block housing design should not be considered a likely option. Also, it would be misleading to say that the Newbury Design Concept was generally supported by the public.

**P. 79** – I suggest the following edits to the bullet on the comprehensive plan: "Ensure that the upcoming Comprehensive Plan process includes input from diverse stakeholders, including affordable housing leadership from Brookline's affordable housing advocacy organizations, and representation from Brookline Housing Authority tenants, homeowners of affordable units in comprehensive permit or inclusionary zoning developments, and people with disabilities."

The comprehensive plan is about more than housing. It is intended to plan for the context within which housing can be built without overloading and undermining the infrastructure of the community in which housing will be built. The emphasis on "housing leadership" from advocacy organizations takes the focus away from the purposes of comprehensive planning.

**P. 79-80** – "Strengthen local government and the general public's understanding of the community benefits provided by affordable housing and multifamily development. Brookline's existing fiscal impact and buildout model attempts to estimate the tax revenue outcomes of multifamily housing development. While housing is often fiscally beneficial in Brookline and many other cities and towns, [what is this trying to say with the phrase "often fiscally beneficial"?] developments that are deeply subsidized or designed for affordability for very-low-income residents may not generate excess revenue – yet that is the type of housing most needed in Brookline. The conversation about housing needs and

housing development policy should be refocused on fair housing, inclusion, and basic social fairness.

[This is a moral argument, which is important, but it should not be used to try to hide the costs associated with housing density and the need to plan ahead to address those costs. The first sentence is sufficient for this paragraph]

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