

BROOKLINE COMMISSION FOR WOMEN
WEDNESDAY MAY 5TH, 2021 AT 7:30 PM
(ONLINE VIA ZOOM)
DRAFT MINUTES

COMMISSIONERS IN ATTENDANCE: REBECCA STONE, LIZ STILLMAN, HADASSAH MARGOLIS, MEENAKSHI GARODIA, AILEEN LEE, LUCY CHIE, CAITLIN STARR, CAROL CARO, FELINA SILVER ROBINSON, NICOLE MCCLELLAND, GLORIA RUDISCH

OTHERS IN ATTENDANCE: MS. WEI, MEMBER OF THE PUBLIC

1. Administrative details:

- i. Review of the Calendar: Ms. Stone also noted that the CDICR would be holding a meeting with the executive director of BECMA to talk about procurement and DBEs on 5/12 at 6:30 p.m. Ms. Sarabi is the liaison, and Ms. Stone also plans to attend, noting that the BCW will be continuing its conversation about this issue with Town Admin Mel Kleckner in June (we hope). Ms. Stone also noted we are now aligned with Town fiscal year so terms are 7/1 to 6/30. Ms. Stone, Dr. Rudisch, and Ms. Silver Robinson have terms expiring. Ms. Stone will speak with Dr. Rudisch about becoming the BCW's first emeritus member, leaving one seat to fill if both she and Ms. Silver Robinson are re-appointed. Our July meeting (first of the new fiscal year) will be a planning and organizational meeting: we will elect a chair, vice-chair and secretary and try to outline the calendar for the year. No meeting is scheduled for August; Ms. Stone would like to see if there is a possibility to have an in-person social "retreat." Ms. Silver Robinson said she'd been contacted by Jule Youdovin about coming to a meeting to discuss/present about domestic violence. Ms. Stone suggests the executive team discuss scheduling this. Dr. Chie asked about the MACSW newsletter and Ms. Stone said that she had requested that we all be added to their email list.
- ii. Vote to approve minutes from meeting of April 7, 2021: moved by Ms. Garodia second by Ms. Caro. Approved unanimously.
- iii. Vote to approve minutes from special meeting of March 23, 2021: moved by Ms. Stone, seconded by Ms. Caro. Approved unanimously.

2. Public Comment

Ms. Wei is a new Brookline resident having just moved from London. She is curious about what the BCW does. Ms. Stone explains that we are an appointed commission, 11 members and told her our mission statement re: equity and justice for all women and girls, including all who identify as female. She explained that, like other commissions, we are unpaid volunteers in this position. Ms. Garodia added that last week we held our annual event for Women of the Year. Ms. Wei would like to be included in future updates and provided her email.

3. Review of May 4th election townwide and ballot question outcomes: No discussion as commissioners were aware of the outcomes.
4. Reflections on Women of the Year event, lessons for next year: Ms. Stone says she heard from numerous sources that the event really touched people. It was an incredibly positive evening and a reminder of how good it feels to be positive. Thanks to all on commission who made it happen. It was more than we anticipated. Ms. Caro suggested we send the recording to BIG for more PR. Ms. Stillman said she will look into how to do that. Ms. Stone said a piece had been posted online by the Tab. Ms. McClelland specifically thanked Ms. Garodia who said it was a great group effort.
5. Subcommittee Reports
 - i. Legislation & Advocacy (Nicole McClelland): Nothing to report. Next meeting is next week at 7:00 p.m.
 - ii. Community Supports (Hadassah Margolis): The subcommittee met two days ago, Monday. Most of the discussion was about the direction of the subcommittee as we move forward. Big conclusion was to create a central directory (on Google Sheets) for the BCW to keep track of anyone we connect with outside of the Commission who provides a service or connection for women in Brookline. Idea is for the database to have name, organization or department, contact info, and who on the BCW made or knows the contact, a central document to keep track of who we work with and who should know about us. Hope we can all add to it on an ongoing basis. The list has begun with BHA, ACLU, SHARP Warriors, Women Thriving etc. Ms. Margolis will share the sheet with the Commission so we can all start adding to it. Ms. Stone said that she loves this idea, but does not want to create a list/document that will require updating and not get updated. Ms. Margolis suggests that we make this a yearly reviewed document and that Commissioners can have ownership of keeping track of particular people. Ms. Caro pointed out that having the conversations with people to add to the list is also a way of speaking to others about the Commission. Ms. Lee suggested that we can use this list rather than create relationships ad hoc.
6. Discussion re: BCW community presence & role, purpose of visibility, meaning of “community supports,” charges to subcommittees: Ms. Stone said the subcommittee discussion led perfectly into this ongoing discussion of defining our role, outreach to the community, how to do the work we want to do, etc. She noted that BCW is not alone in struggling with this question: she received a call from the co-chair of Somerville Women’s Commission who was preparing to meet with the Mayor there to talk about staffing and budget support. Their by-law calls for an executive director, which they do not have. They were trying to figure out how to do real work without staff or budget, much the same as the BCW.
7. Ms. Stone reported there are 12 towns and cities with Commissions for Women, but the Mass. Commission for Women does not see itself as an umbrella organization for them; they have regional CSWs instead. Brookline belongs to the eastern regional CSW, but it does not have a member on its board at present. She learned from the Somerville chair

that the Cambridge Commission has an annual budget of \$300,000 for staffing/benefits of which \$20,000 is for programming. They are able, therefore, to hire people to do web work, communications, and outreach -- what we do as volunteers. Ms Stone believes that without a staff or budget in Brookline, the BCW cannot provide services directly or produce original reports, but said we can organize, collaborate, or convene meetings in order to mobilize efforts or draw attention to an issues.

Ms. Caro asked about the role of Carolina San Miguel (the new community outreach specialist at ODICR) and Ms. Stone said her understanding was that Carolina's role is still evolving within ODICR. With so many groups and commissions wanting to do better with community outreach and engagement, the expectations of the job are probably beyond one person's capabilities.

Ms. Stone referred back to the subcommittee discussion and the database and said it was the right direction: If people come to us with an issue we will know who we can go to and help mobilize resources. In that way the BCW is not the service provider, we are the connective tissue so when an issue is within our jurisdiction, we can put together some action. Ms. Garodia added that what we are doing on a number of issues is also what we should be doing -- trying to make an impact in the town. Ms. Stone agreed but cautioned that we need to be careful about overextended commissioners or the Commission itself. We need to clear about our capacity.

Further discussion of how to get resources for our work. Ms. Caro asked about becoming more involved with the regional commission. Ms. Stone said she was interested in the MACSW having information on their website about all the CSWs so that each CSW could easily see what others are doing. Ms. Caro suggests we ask Norfolk County for support since Brookline is under-served by the county overall. Ms. Stone noted that the chair in Somerville is seeking budget relief from their Mayor and will report back to us about what her results are.

Ms. Stone also noted that where the BCW fits in the framework of social justice commissions in Brookline isn't clear. The Commission for Women has been around a long time and now shares a space with the Office and the Commission on Diversity, Inclusion and Community Relations, the Roundtable on Domestic Violence, the Commission on Disability, and several new non-profit and civic groups in town, including Women Thriving. The BCW itself has been reinvented a few times since it was created. The previous iteration was mainly women who worked for the Town of Brookline. They could sometimes draw on resources of their offices to do the work. We are a very different Commission with no Brookline employees and more of a justice and equity agenda. Dr. Rudisch stated that the child care report was a very unifying project but others were less so and it became far more amorphous without a staff to organize it. She suggested we would not need a full time staff member, and asked how can we build this into a job that already exists? Ms. Stone agreed that it is exciting to reinvent, but we need to be realistic and it is unlikely that we will have a budget or staffing any time soon. Ms. Stone suggests we talk with Lloyd Gellineau about what the staff capacity might be under the Office of Diversity, Inclusion, and Community Relations.

Ms. Caro suggests that the Town needs an override for Town expenses other than schools or maybe apply to the Brookline Community Foundation to have some staff. Ms. Stone said that the foundation couldn't fund a staff member in perpetuity, but one of the things we should be doing is having more robust communication with the Community Foundation because they have done a number of great studies already and they could, for example, do a gender and equity report as a collaboration with BCW. This could be a groundbreaking report for Brookline (like the one on poverty was). We can look at Brookline with a gender and equity lens. Ms. Caro suggested we invite a member of the Community Foundation to come to our meeting as a brainstorming session about what is possible. Wei (member of the public) asked if we can ask for a volunteer and Ms. Stone said yes, that is how we get a lot done in Brookline! But this is a big ask for a volunteer and that it's important to have a list of discrete tasks before we ask for help.

Ms. Stone brought the conversation to a close saying this was an ongoing discussion and very grateful for all the engagement with it. We will continue to revisit these issues.

8. Liaisons and Other Updates:

Ms. Starr, Ms. Stone and Ms. McClelland spoke with Ann Braga, the HR director for the town and talked about gender review of salaries in town that are not in a collective bargaining unit. Ms. Braga said this would be straightforward and Ms. Stone hopes it is in the works. They also discussed the new Family Leave law at the state level, asking how well does Brookline do for its employees relative to the state's mandate for private employers-and the answer is that it is really complicated. Because there are so many collective bargaining agreements, each contract has something different. In schools there is a sick-leave bank which is how the schools handle long term disability. Not all CB agreements have this and some have different ones. Ms. Braga said she will do the review and put together a chart that will allow us to look at the different pieces of how family leave looks in Brookline. Her view is that there are things we could do that would be beneficial for employees. Dr. Chie pointed out that these policies are opaque and employees often struggle to know their rights. It is good to ask and get more information for town employees.

9. New & Old Business: None.

The Meeting was adjourned at 8:56 p.m.