

BROOKLINE COMMISSION FOR WOMEN
(ONLINE) MEETING OF JUNE 4, 2020; 7 PM
(DRAFT) MEETING MINUTES

COMMISSIONERS PRESENT: REBECCA STONE, ELIZABETH STILLMAN, MEENAKSHI GARODIA, GLORIA RUDICH, HADASSAH MARGOLIS, NICOLE MCCLELLAND, FELINA SILVER ROBINSON, JEN GOLDSMITH

OTHER ATTENDEES: CAITLIN STARR, RITA MCNALLY (CO-CHAIR DOMESTIC VIOLENCE ROUNDTABLE)

1. Calendar: Reviewed calendar. Confirm date for July annual planning meeting on Zoom (Town is switching from WebEx beginning in July). Possibility of have a virtual dinner to support a local business; maybe outdoors although unlikely for practical purposes. Normally would be July 1st but that is on the heels of Town Meeting. Tentatively set for July 1st, to be revisited as needed. Note Caitlin Starr will be on maternity leave August, Sept. and October. ODICR Director Lloyd Gellineau will be staffing BCW meetings during that time.
2. Motion to approve Minutes from meeting of May 6, 2020 moved by Ms. Stillman, Seconded by Ms. McLelland. Passes unanimously.
3. Public Comment: None. Rita McNally, former member of BCW, will speak at the next available meeting about the Domestic Violence Roundtable. Ms. Silver Robinson is BCW liaison to the DVR.
4. Ms. Stone said that though not on the agenda, she wanted to acknowledge the unique and fraught moment created by the combination of the COVID crisis plus the national reaction to the killing of George Floyd and to give commissioners an opportunity to speak to it. Ms. Garodia would like the commission to have a voice in the school issue regarding the layoffs of teachers. Ms. Silver Robinson said that kids are very upset because it happened before graduation and they had already lost so much; it was very hard on them. Ms. Stone explained that the teacher contract dictates the timing of the layoff notices; it wasn't a choice. There is a contractual "notice by" date to let educators know who will not be renewed (or, in the case of budget cuts, who will receive a RIF notice). No one actually loses their job until August (the beginning of the new contract year). This has happened in the past when there are budget delays – school districts sometimes send out notices to more teachers than will ultimately lose their jobs because they don't have the budget information they need to make final staffing decisions at the time of the "notice by" date. With COVID, the union agreed to push back the notification date from May 15 to the 30th. Ms. Goldsmith voiced concern that there are a lot of opinions, propaganda, and noted some felt manipulated. She feels it would be difficult for the commission to make a statement because there are unknowns and that we should not make a statement until we know more. Ms. Stone agreed it would be difficult to have a constructive voice under these circumstances. We can only state that we hope as many teachers as possible will be rehired. Ms. Margolis pointed out that the affected teachers

are mainly women (because the vast majority of PSB educators are women). Rita McNally said she believes we should make a statement that we are following the school situation closely because it is a women's issue. Ms. Silver Robinson repeated her concern about the timing considering the corona situation and families struggling. It seemed callous to impose another thing to worry about. Ms. Garodia was particularly concerned about BEEP teachers all being given this RIF warning. Ms. Stone believes that they gave notice to a much broader target group than necessary because of the budget uncertainty and the uncertainty around school next year. She noted BEEP cannot be shut down because public school districts are required by law to provide education to children age 3+ with special education needs, and any program for special education must also include children from the general school population as well. It is a terrible situation for school committee, teachers, and families but BCW cannot influence or predict the direction of the negotiation of the teachers' union and the Town as they work through the budget and service issues.

Ms. Stone referred commissioners to the post on Medium by Select Board member Raul Fernandez about race and policing in Brookline. Ms. Stone also attended a meeting with the Boston City Councillors, a majority of whom are now women and women of color. She was struck by one councillor's response to the question: "Is Boston's Covid response a success?" because she said that "there is no success unless policy changes based on what we have learned. We need to learn from the disparate impact on POC, low income workers and women, which was predictable, and change policies to address that impact. Rita McNally said she has been meeting with and encouraging women of color to run for office locally.

5. Progress/planning on Women Who Inspire Us video: Ms. Stillman and Ms. Stone have been working with local photographer/videographer Aynsley Floyd (who has volunteered her help to create the portion of the video devoted to Kim Kushner/Thrives), as well as Ms. Stillman's daughter Daniella, a college student studying videography. We are in the process of contacting students and compiling photos and video clips; hope to be done by the end of June and that the result will be special for participants as well as the community. Ms. Garodia offered to help.

Awards to Winners: Ms. Stone has award certificates, an award trophy for the Woman of the Year, commemorative blank notebooks for student winners (one was sent to Lixuan "Lisa" Wang, our 3-5 2nd place winner who is back home in China) Those will be hand-delivered to all of winners.

Video intro: Ms. Margolis suggests that we include a statement from the commission about social justice work, maybe acknowledge all the things going on and this is part of the work. Ms. Goldsmith pointed out that our woman of the year has been working hard at the Brookline Food Pantry to meet the COVID-19 demands and is even more deserving; maybe work that into the introduction for her. Ms. Stone asked each commissioner to write 2-3 sentences about anchoring the video in this moment and send to Ms. Stone (by end of week) and we will try to create a statement to use in the video, perhaps with each commissioner reading one line and splice it together for a continuous statement. Dr. Rudich asked if this will be a commission statement, but it was clarified that it is part of the video since we are not having an in-person event.

6. (8:05 pm) Check-In/Updates

- a) Intimate Partner Violence (IPV): Ms. Silver Robinson has been participating in the Domestic Violence Roundtable. There is an upcoming meeting, so there will be more to say at July 1, 2020 meeting (although that is mostly a planning meeting, timing and goal setting).

Ms. Starr said the police update on IPV from (mid-March to Mid-May) was 25 calls, a few about children, 10 DV arrests, and following up on restraining orders. There were a few DCF welfare checks, but no referrals. There has been an increase in arrests over past years for this time period, though there were more verbal rather than physical confrontations reported. Ms. McNally added that 1/3 of cases are actually reported because of online classes: Zoom sessions involving cooking with kids and women thriving Zoom sessions are helping to identify issues. The Safety Net program is responsive to women who are not in an emergency (211). 3 calls regarding children were investigated by DCF and did not come back to the police. DCF does suspect that child abuse has increased but isn't being reported because children are away from school where others (teachers, admin) can flag issues.

- b) Ms. Garodia suggests the BCW put out a statement about the current civil rights crisis, race, and racism. Maybe publicize all elected positions in town and encourage people to make very local changes? We should state that we stand for all people - especially of color. Urge people to vote.

Ms. Silver Robinson shared that she posted a picture of her son in his police uniform for his birthday and got push back from a stranger who would not delete their post; Ms. Silver Robinson was able to remove it. Very upset by the anti-police rhetoric because of her son.

Ms. Stone suggests we create an open google doc and we all contribute something and forge a statement from that. Ms. Margolis suggests that our process in making this decision is indicative of what we might want to say because of the complexities even amongst and within ourselves. Can we connect it to our mission statement, however the statement is in flux. Think of this personally and as a Commissioner in the context of Brookline as well. Ms. Rudich stated we should be looking to reach women in the town and the town administration as well. Should we try to reach different groups in different ways? And how? Ms. Stone suggested that this statement should be trying to reach everybody, be universal.

7. Planning and possible agenda items for July annual meeting. See placeholder below as stated by Ms. Margolis. Ms. Stone asked commissioners to think ahead about how we will get work done; current structure of just 1 mtg. per month makes it difficult; most other commissions have subcommittees that meet separately to focus on different pieces of the agenda. Would that substructure work for BCW to get more done? Ms. Stone and Ms. McClelland will discuss food and other structure of July meeting.

8. New Business: Ms. Margolis talked about the process of appointing people to the Advisory Committee which is neither transparent nor fair. Appointments and structure are pursuant to Brookline by-law. Putting on radar for future discussion about a possible role for the BCW in opening up the process. Ms. Margolis stated there is a lot of timely criticism around this and she thinks we should have a part in redrafting the by-law around the process of making AC appointments.

The meeting was adjourned at 9:01 p.m.