Town of Brookline
Advisory Committee Minutes
June 4, 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, 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

Absent: Amy Hummel, Alisa Jonas

Also present: Town Administrator Mel Kleckner, Deputy Town Administrator Melissa Goff, Director of Human Resources Ann Braga, Susan Yee, Pavlos Pissios, Wendy Wang, Ed Mayotte, Mark Grey, Jules Milner-Brage, Kathy Defaut, Stanley Spiegel, Alyanna Church, Valentina Sandoval, Paul Saner, Mark Levy, Alexandra Spingarn, and other members of the public.

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

6:00 Discussion and possible vote on motion to postpone consideration of articles 1, 2, 16, 17, 20-24 and 26-42 on the warrant for the 2020 Annual Town Meeting until a future Town Meeting

A MOTION was made and seconded to postpone consideration of Articles 1, 2, 16, 17, 20-24 and 26-42 on the warrant for the 2020 Annual Town Meeting until a future Town Meeting

Is there any concern that this will not pass Town Meeting? No.

An AMENDMENT made and seconded to add back in Oak Street (Article 16) to consideration – a YES vote would remove Article 16 from the list above and have it be considered at the June Town Meeting. By a roll call VOTE 25-0-0 of the Advisory Committee, the motion carries.

Janice explained that the sole purpose for which the townhouses were bought isn’t relevant anymore, therefore we can remove the properties from our financial obligations, pay back the borrowed amount, sell the properties and return them to the tax rolls as new growth. How much lead time needed to sell? Spoke to Chief Procurement Officer – 6 weeks from advertising to getting buyers. Associate Town Counsel 2-4 weeks for P&S and another 4 weeks to close. Three to four months to sell each townhouse. Market conditions – seller’s market now so need for housing on the market. Better to give authority to Select Board now, can exercise it whenever and will be their prerogative.

Not sure we’d have to issue long term bonds if we waited until November.

In FY 21 there is a line item $400K if we still owned the town houses.

Q: We postponed these things to the fall is so we don’t have a too full virtual Town Meeting. Will High School be moved in June? A: Any Town Meeting member could but the School Committee voted to defer to November.
Can we include the High School article in the omnibus motion?

A **MOTION** was made to **AMEND THE AMENDMENT** and add Article 7 into the original motion. By a roll call **VOTE** of 24-1-0 of the Advisory Committee, the motion carries.

A **MOTION** was made and seconded to postpone consideration of Articles 1, 2, 7, 16, 17, 20-24 and 26-42 on the warrant for the 2020 Annual Town Meeting until a future Town Meeting. By a roll call **VOTE** of 25-0-0 of the Advisory Committee, the motion carries.

**6:15 Update on FY 21 School Department operating budget**

Cliff Brown, Chair of the Schools Subcommittee gave a brief overview of the Subcommittee hearing:

Most interest in layoffs and cuts – while 300 reduction notices were sent out to cover all potential outcomes, the labor force may not be reduced by any more than 30 FTEs. Have to remember that this includes positions that don’t even exist. The cut is a reduction from the proposed budget and not what actually exists. The reductions are spread evenly between central administration, elementary, and the high school. The acting superintendent took pains to assuage fears that beloved programs would be gutted. There has been lots of misinformation out there and messaging could have been done better.

During public comment, questions were asked about Reserves and use of Reserves and time was taken to explain that. The subcommittee asked questions and the answers were less than satisfactory. The School Department was unable or unwilling to answer questions.

There is a slide looking things that can be done to close the gap other than dip into Reserves, the acting Superintendent talked about what other districts are looking at – single or multiple day furloughs, 1% across the board salary reduction for all staff – there are some opportunities to help close the $4.4M difference.

Let’s say we came up with additional $1M from whatever source – how would you prioritize where that money would go? They had no answer. Because of the lack of information and thoughtfulness about requests for more money, the subcommittee did not make a motion. Need questions answered and gave them a list and hopefully will get answers that they can bring to the full Advisory Committee for deliberation. Meeting on Monday and all are welcome.

The hearing was recorded and is two hours long and available on YouTube. You will hear a lot of good information. A link to the YouTube recording is included at the end of these minutes.

Mike noted that there were 143 participants at the height of the hearing.

Janet: The problem the School Committee faces is that they have no idea what School will look like – whether home or in classroom – information is trickling down to them from the State and DC. They may not know until July 1. MaryEllen Norman noted that all Town Meeting gets to so is vote the bottom line and the department will fill in the blanks. Think we have to cut them slack. They have just begun talking with unions about other ways to save jobs vis-a-vis cuts so no clear agreements yet. They can’t decide a path until someone tells them what to do.

**6:45 Further discussion of Town of Brookline FY 21 operating budget and CIP**
Town Administrator Mel Kleckner offered some background and context. Compared to budget submitted February 15 we have settled on Scenario 2 that cuts about $12M out of our revenue stream. Those monies come from local receipts (hotels, restaurants, cannabis) and some State aid. Less than 4% decrease overall especially given the timeframe and see it being potentially worse next year. Reduce capital budget to relieve pressure on the operating budget. We are trying to retain staff because of the need for boots on the ground to come up with creative solutions to the problems we are facing now. Each department did a 10% budget exercise. We reduced FTEs by about 23.

He provided insight into the philosophy informing the decisions.

The chair raised the question of OPEBS - $4.8M for these and discussion in Advisory about reducing this by half. Only place AC and SB have differed.

Mel: Want to hold out until we are faced with a worse situation – either now or in FY 22. It is an easier one and no legal or logistical impediment but don’t think it is timely now. I call this our credit card payment and don’t think we should change it.

If we took money out of OPEBs, is it correct that we wouldn’t be able to redistribute it? Can we access and redistribute it in November? Also is the same situation with the Stabilization Fund?

I think by putting it in the OPEB may have difficulty getting it out unless used for post-employment benefits. Stabilization Fund money can be taken out with 2/3 vote of Town Meeting.

Would it be possible to do a condition of appropriation which would delay it being put into the OPEB fund? A condition of appropriation has to be clear and specific.

Desire for flexibility – rather see Stabilization Fund parked in AC Reserve fund until November. Considering offering a motion of not appropriating stabilization fund money but have it go to AC reserve and this committee would state that the intent is to be able to reevaluate the need in November.

You cannot appropriate the money and then do something with it in November. Ability to access it may be determined by DOR.

If free cash does not get appropriated, it will get recycled into free cash in the next year.

The money needs to be put somewhere or need to have a clear condition of appropriation.

Issue was raised again about the Town and School split and worry expressed that we are missing doing something for the Schools. Believe we should not be putting money in Stabilization, OPEBs is a big mistake, in these times you stretch as much as you can. Regarding pensions – heard that we couldn’t change the amount going into pension funds? Are we not able to stop contributions? Is it absolutely guaranteed? What is stopping us from not making that contribution or lowering the amount?

Mel: Public Employee Retirement Administration Commission (PERAC) – law requires certain things and don’t think FY21 can be touched. I believe there are some legal limitations.

How can we move from "I believe" to “we know for certain?”

We have unfunded liabilities to employees past and present – philosophically opposed to screwing employees to save a few current jobs. It is a matter of whether or not it is appropriate to go to the retirement board and ask
them if we can defer an increase. Defer the increase we were planning for this year but if we do that the money should not go to support operations this year. We have to be careful about taking one-time money and putting it toward operations, because next year could be substantially worse than this year. Keep it in a reserve fund.

Question about free cash, after June 30 is free cash untouchable until the next fiscal year? Traditionally certified by the State at the beginning of November, so theoretically, it could be reappropriated at the Fall Town Meeting, but we don’t know the timeline this year for certification yet because State is still dealing with CARE act –etc.

Taking Town Employee pensions and redirecting money to School employees that those pensions don’t cover. Disagree with that idea.

There are things that the Town can be talking to their unions about and before we do extraordinary and imprudent actions, we should demand some concessions.

Mel: Not going to have discussions about bargaining but of course we are planning talks with our unions and Public Employee Retirement Administration Commission (PERAC).

Director of Human Resources Ann Braga noted that we are looking at all options. Open enrollment finished June 1 so staff worked remotely for GIC. There was lots of activity that had to be processed in a new way both on the Town and on the State side. They hope to have more information on how that looks for 20/21 and definitely open to those discussions.

Bringing this back to a discussion on the CIP - appreciate maintaining our human resources who do the real work but concerned about cuts to capital budget and giving that money to the Schools. I learned during the presentation last night that the Building Department gives the Schools a budget for repairs and maintenance. Historically it seems the School closes their gap by cutting that budget – strikes me that this is a bigger policy issue: starving School and Town infrastructure to feed the operations of the Schools. Money should come out of the part of the CIP that is used to fund school things such as leases.

Mel: Most of the cuts from the CIP are coming from School capacity and mostly School-related. Frustrating that they do cut from maintenance but hard to say they are not owed capital budget money if we cut it. Provide relief to operating budgets and they are more than half the budget.

What do you think local receipts for November and March April May of the coming year will look like? A: They will look bad. We haven’t done month-by-month projection but longer term. There is a breakdown of some accounts in the presentation previously shared and where we cut it. Some will get better right away because marijuana is being sold again for example, but others like restaurants, meal tax, and hotels may take longer. Projection was for a whole year but don’t think we broke it down or looked at trends. Only one month of data and made some assumptions. Hotel, meals, and marijuana - we will see activity in June so we can determine what does takeout bring to the Town, for example, and build from there.

One of the options I have heard is to ask employees to not take a raise for one year. If that happens would they get a double raise the following year or would they continue to not be receiving a raise? No unilateral changes to wages. We don’t have a proposal. It would depend on the negotiations.

Pensions – by Neil’s logic of not level funding existing or reducing contributions means that we would be taking them off the table for FY 22 – Level funding pension contribution in FY21 and 22 – not meant to screw people – but it is a tiny amount of money overall. We should be open to that possibility. We are dealing with a crisis and need to be more open minded about the School situation.
Not true that School department programs aren’t covered by public pensions – teachers are not, but other staff are.

Davis Path Footbridge – at the Building Commission Hearing talk about putting in temporary replacement bridge – we won’t be able to do it out of the reserve fund and do we need to put it in the CIP?

We wouldn’t be able to put it in FY21 – no bridge account but would need a special town meeting. This is premature and we don’t know what it is going to cost. There could be a state appropriation or grant. Not a permanent bridge but temporary structure.

The chair suggested a theme that has been emerging and have heard that parents would vote for an override. Is it possible to construct one that would be a temporary increase that could revert over a period of time? Something to consider in FY 22.

Where does the cap on spending to Stabilization Fund come from? That is the Select Board policy. What prevents Town Meeting for overturning that? Hopefully, fear on the effect on the Town’s bond rating and cost to taxpayers with shift to lower bond rating.

Regarding Library cuts – Mass Board of Library Commissioners – and loss of certifications? We would not do anything that would jeopardize the certification of our libraries – get a waiver if necessary and if not go to plan B. Taking advantage of the fact that things would not be full service right away. Wait to bring everyone back and have full service as we phase into the new normal.

Clarification sought on parking money in the reserve fund and how that flows if unspent. Assume $1M goes to reserve fund, it is not spent at end of year, it goes to free cash, gets certified and then is a windfall at end of FY 21 – does it in fact work that way? Town Meeting uses it to pay the OPEBs it didn’t get funded. We don’t lose it. It could be a budget adjustment in May.

Regarding pensions the idea of deferring or not adding increase is with the expectation when we go to PERAC we are able to stay on the existing schedule to be fully funded by 2030. Next year sitting down with actuaries and look at these assumptions and working to come up with a schedule that makes sure we meet our obligations. Need to earn 7.2% on our investment. Not as straightforward about putting off the money.

7:30 Other business

Article 5 – Unpaid Bill to Simmons College from School Department
Paying the bill an 80% approval is needed from Town Meeting is required.

A MOTION was made and seconded for favorable action on Article 5. By a unanimous roll-call VOTE 23-0-1 of the Advisory Committee,

VOTED: To authorize the payment of the following unpaid bill of a previous fiscal year from the FY2020 School Department budget: Simmons University - $51,250

A MOTION to adjourn was made, seconded and voted unanimously and the meeting was adjourned at 7:29 pm.

Documents Presented:
- Capital Subcommittee Current Thinking on Classroom Capacity
- CIP Subcommittee Worksheet Compared to Town Administrator Budget
- Public Comments on Teacher Layoffs
- Brookline Advisory School Subcommittee FY21 Budget Hearing – YouTube Video
  https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7HU5PTr01NM

### VOTES

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**Vote Description:**
- Payment of Unpaid Bill - Article 5
- AMENDMENT 1 - Remove WA 16
- AMENDMENT 2 - Add WA 7
- Take 16 out of the motion and puts 7 into the motion.

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Greetings -

The have been a number of questions about the Brookline’s unassigned funds – the $26.6 million on the Town’s balance sheet at the of the last fiscal year (on June 1, 2019). I promised to provide an explanation of that number.

The short answer: Unfortunately, while that $26.6 million number is correct from an accounting perspective, it does not represent ready-to-spend cash.

The detailed answer:

Here’s a breakdown of that number:

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<th>Fund</th>
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<td>Stabilization Fund</td>
<td>$6,772,869</td>
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<td>Free Cash</td>
<td>$14,392,26</td>
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<td>Receivables</td>
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<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>$26,644,817</strong></td>
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Receivables are money the Town is owed. Ultimately we will collect some, but not all of it. It’s not cash, and it can’t be spent any more than someone could spend the IOU they might have from a deadbeat brother-in-law.

The Stabilization Fund is Brookline’s “rainy day fund”. It takes a 2/3rds majority of Town Meeting to take money out of the fund. There are restrictions on use of the funds. No more than $1 million can be spend in any one year. The Stabilization Fund has $2 million less in it than the bond rating agencies recommend for Brookline. Withdrawing funds puts our favorable bond rating at risk, which would mean higher interest costs for the school construction projects that are in the pipeline.

The February version of the Town budget included a $2 million payment into the fund. The revised budget reduces that by $1 million. The Advisory Committee has suggested approving that amount but not actually appropriating the money until November Town Meeting, when the impact of Covid-19 will be clearer. If the funds are needed elsewhere, they could be diverted by Town Meeting without passing through the Stabilization Fund.

Free Cash is the often hardest concept to wrap one’s head around. We have a $325 million-plus budget, and at the end of a typical year, some of that money will remain unspent. For example, if a staff position becomes vacant and it’s not filled, the unused funds set aside for that person’s salary end up in free cash at the end of the year.

The unexpended balance is recycled to fund part of the next year’s budget, so while it’s free on the last day of the fiscal year (June 30), most of it is allocated for the fiscal year that starts the next day.
A substantial portion is used to fund the following year’s capital projects – parks, pedestrian and bike improvements, etc.

A portion is used to bring the Affordable Housing Trust Fund up to its target level. Another slice goes into the reserve fund that the Advisory Committee uses when there are extraordinary and unanticipated expenses during the year. The $500,000 for removing the Davis Path Footbridge over the D Line is an example; snow removal costs beyond what was budgeted are another example.

A portion is held back to start of the next year’s free cash account, because the amount of cash left over from operations at the end of each fiscal year varies from year to year, so a base amount is retained in the free cash account. As of this writing, the FY21 budget holds back $2.6 million in free cash.

Free cash is “one-time” money, rather like a year-end bonus. Depending on the year, bonuses vary significantly, so using that remaining $2.6 million in “one-time” money for operating expenses is a mistake. It would be like relying on one’s highly variable bonus to pay the mortgage or the rent, rather than living within one’s base income. And we’re headed into a difficult period; we expect free cash at the end of the coming year to be far below the $14.4 million that was available for allocation at the start of FY20.

Benjamin Disraeli said, “There are three kinds of falsehoods – lies, damned lies, and statistics.” Sometimes accounting data is the fourth falsehood. The $26.6 million on the books as of a year ago does not mean we have (or ever had) $26.6 million in a piggy bank. The number is technically correct as an accounting of our assets on that day, but it far exceeds the actual reserves available for the FY21 budget.

And using the reserve funds that do exist to cover this year’s operating expenses means that they will be depleted at the end of FY21, a year in which we expect to generate far less in free cash. That will put us in a second, possibly worse budget crunch for the fiscal year that starts on July 1, 2021.

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For more on the recommended uses of free cash, click on this link to the Commonwealth of Mass. Department of Local Services:

Mike Sandman
TMM3 & Advisory Committee chair
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Capital Subcommittee
June 4, 2020

Subcommittee’s Thinking To Date: - Working Document

Classroom Capacity funds are used to meet the space needs of PSB’s students and staff. For the first few years of the account, funds supported “Expand in Place” efforts, including the lease-purchase of modular classrooms. More recently the funds have been used to lease space at 62 Harvard Street for Pierce School classrooms, 20 Webster Place for administrative offices, Temple Ohabei Shalom and Temple Emeth for BEEP classrooms, and most recently to lease the K-2 Maimonides School building at 2 Clark Road. The current lease covers 16 classrooms, parking, play areas, and other educational spaces.

As of April 1, 2020, plans for FY 21 (Year 3 of the 2 Clark Road lease), call for the facility to be used for at least six BEEP classes as well as a number of School Department offices.

The pre-COVID 19 FY 21 Classroom Capacity request totals $6,573,751. That amount includes lease payments for 2 Clark Road (1,085,000) Temple Ohabei Shalom ($227,903) and Temple Emeth ($338,046) for FY 21 rents, some office rental expenses, and a prefunding of a large portion of the out years of the classroom leases.¹

The pre-COVID-19 figure of $6,573,751 was developed last fall. Office and other space needs have since changed and are expected to continue to change. In the fall of 2019, prefunding a portion of the leases for future years was seen as a way to use an unusually large amount of Free Cash in the FY 21 CIP and to take pressure off the CIP going forward, particularly in FY 22, when the amount of Free Cash

¹ The operating expenses of 2 Clark Road ($200,00), which include utilities, repair and maintenance, technology and snow removal, are charged to the operating budgets of DPW, IT and the Building Department, all of which are therefore increased to cover these services
(even before the pandemic) is expected to be significantly smaller.

Because of all the unknowns due to the pandemic and its impact on Town and School programs and budgets, the Capital Subcommittee, at its most recent meeting, concluded that funding any leases beyond FY 22 would not make financial sense. However, the Subcommittee also recognized that any funds appropriated by Town Meeting for years unanticipated purpose.

On the other hand, if those funds are not appropriated for future years’ rents, a portion could be used now for different purposes, as appropriated by this Town Meeting. Any remaining portion not appropriated would become part of Free Cash at the end of June. These funds would then become available after certification of Free Cash by the State, which has historically happened at the beginning of November. (They therefore could be appropriated by a Town Meeting with more information later this year for FY 21 needs or, if not appropriated for FY21, used in FY 22 to meet the continuing impacts of the recession.)

Without coming to any conclusions, the Subcommittee considered applying $2 million towards FY 21 and FY 22, a number that anticipates some degree of flexibility on the part of the lessors that acknowledges the Town’s financial predicament.

Funding for just the three leases for FY 21 totals $1,650,949.

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Heli and Rain,

Thank you so very much for your support!

This letter brought a big smile to my face during this hard time.

Greatly appreciated and with love,

Emily

On Jun 1, 2020, at 5:23 PM, Heli Tuomi Carlile <helitca@gmail.com> wrote:

Dear Brookline Select Board, School Board and Advisory Committee -

I just saw the list of teachers who are losing their jobs at Heath. Six of my teachers this year are losing their jobs.

I like my classroom teacher Ms. Macneil, and I use the Learning Center at Heath several times a week and I like working with Mr. Ikonne.

I was shocked that these people would not be at my school anymore.

I wish these teachers wouldn’t be fired.

Sincerely,

Rain Carlile
5th Grade, Heath School
Advisory Committee Members:

As co-chairs of the BEEP PTO, we wanted to be sure you saw the attached letter of support for the BEEP program, signed by 352 members of the Brookline community that was sent to the School Committee and Select Board earlier today. We very much appreciate the work that you are doing to address the fiscal crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic but hope that you will continue to prioritize the BEEP program and the town’s youngest learners.

We look forward to working with you as the process moves forward.

Lisa Sears & Leigh Youmans
Co-Chairs, BEEP PTO

---------- Forwarded message ----------
From: Leigh Simons Youmans <leigh.youmans@gmail.com>
Date: Mon, Jun 1, 2020 at 1:52 PM
Subject: Letter from the BEEP Community
To: Julie Schreiner Oldham <julie_schreiner_oldham@psbma.org>, Suzanne Federspiel <suzanne_federspiel@psbma.org>, Sharon Abramowitz <sharon_abramowitz@psbma.org>, Helen Charlupski <helen_charlupski@psbma.org>, Susan Ditkoff <susan_ditkoff@psbma.org>, Michael Glover <michael_glover@psbma.org>, Jennifer Monopoli <jennifer_monopoli@psbma.org>, David Pearlman <david_pearlman@psbma.org>, Barbara Scotto <barbara_scotto@psbma.org>, Julie Youmans <juliyoumans@psbma.org>, Susan Ditkoff <susan_ditkoff@psbma.org>, Michael Glover <michael_glover@psbma.org>, David Pearlman <david_pearlman@psbma.org>, Lisa Sears <sears.l@gmail.com>, Watts, Regina <regina_watts@psbma.org>, Lisa Sears <sears.l@gmail.com>, Ben Lummis <ben_lummis@psbma.org>, Watts, Regina <regina_watts@psbma.org>, Lisa Sears <sears.l@gmail.com>
Cc: Ben Lummis <ben_lummis@psbma.org>, Watts, Regina <regina_watts@psbma.org>, Lisa Sears <sears.l@gmail.com>

Dear Chair Schreiner-Oldham and Chair Greene and members of the School Committee and Select Board,

As co-chairs of the BEEP PTO, we write to submit the attached letter of support for the BEEP program, signed by 352 members of the Brookline community. We very much appreciate the work that the School Committee and Select Board are doing to address the fiscal crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic but hope that you will continue to prioritize the BEEP program and the town's youngest learners.

We look forward to working with you as the process moves forward.

Lisa Sears & Leigh Youmans

From: Phoebe Liang [mailto:liangfamily40@gmail.com]
Hello Town Advisory,

As a parent of 3 PSBMA students and a resident of nine years, I beg you to use the town reserves to pay teacher salaries, as well as vocally support ballot measures to raise property taxes and finally gain appropriate, ongoing funding for our schools. (Taxes should be progressive, and target developers who subdivide large properties into more and more family-friendly condos.) The constant BEU vs School Committee squabbles are a chronic embarrassment to us all and at this point, a dangerous tragedy. If ever there was a time to keep the quality of schools high, thereby protecting property values and the rest of the precarious dominoes about to fall, that time is now. Brookline’s schools, along with our green spaces, are the bedrock of Brookline’s identity, Brookline’s politics, and Brookline’s reputation as one of the best places to live in the world. Our schools have been limping along without adequate funds for years. Morale was low before COVID. Allow the schools to be profoundly undermined right now and our community as we know it will soon dissolve.

Thank you for your service.

Sincerely,

Phoebe Hyde
My son has an IEP and we’re losing 75% of Special Ed staff? How will that work?

I can’t imagine what school would look like in the fall if we were to return. No Library, Art, Music, World Language? Reduced IEP support? Overworked educators, alienated students?

This is completely unacceptable for a town that cares deeply about effectively educating our children.

We realize there are ‘challenges’ facing us as a town, but gutting our education system seems shortsighted, even dangerous.

Once Brookline loses its reputation as a “good schools town”, the trickle effect could be devastating… so please reconsider the long tail of what you’re doing and reverse the layoffs.

There must be alternative solutions.

..
Heli Carlile,
Parent to 5 & 7 Graders
@ Heath School

From: Natasha Goldman [mailto:natashagoldmanhomann@gmail.com]
Sent: Tuesday, June 2, 2020 9:38 AM
To: Lisa Portscher; cbrownAC@comcast.net
Subject: Comments for tomorrow's 8:30 am meeting

To the Schools Subcommittee:

Please accept these comments for tomorrow's 8:30 am meeting. I'd like to ask you to fund our full faculty and staff for three reasons: flexibility means retaining faculty; teachers in the last three months have generated a wealth of knowledge; and the property tax in Brookline is relatively low.

As a former academic who has been teaching in some way, shape, or form since 1997, I know that flexibility for brick-and-mortar, virtual, or hybrid teaching means having all of our faculty to call upon. Online teaching is huge learning curve. I took three weeks of intense training and didn't feel that I "nailed it" for years. Teaching online requires just as much (if not more) time for prep and follow-up with students. To retain flexibility, we need to retain our faculty.

By teaching online in the past months, we have engaged in one of the biggest social experiments of our time. Instead of learning from our teachers about challenges and successes, we are letting those teachers slip through our fingers. We need to harness their knowledge and let them continue to refine their methodology. We need to be prepared for all teaching configurations. This means retaining those who have learned how to teach online. I think it goes without saying that the youngest faculty are probably the most adept at teaching in an online environment.
I recently moved from a small town in Maine and was surprised that the property taxes are so low in Brookline. I pay just about the same taxes for my modest cape in Brunswick, Maine as I do for my modest condo in Brookline. The quality of education is Brookline, however, is off the charts compared to Brunswick. I have been so grateful for the expertise of our teachers. In Maine I always had to advocate for my kids, which was stressful. In Brookline my children are consistently challenged. I am impressed with the teachers and their continued improvement of online teaching during Covid. My family does not have a high monthly income. Until I expanded by business this past January, we could hardly make ends meet. But the financial strain, in our minds, was worth the decision to have access to the Brookline public schools. And I would be willing to pay more in taxes in order to keep our faculty.

I hope that we can fund these positions through a combination of unassigned funds in budget, tax override, and re-allocation of other budget items.

Brookline has been a beacon of public school success -- let's work together to keep it that way. If I can be of help in any way, please let me know.

Thank you for your service and for considering my request.
Sincerely,

Natasha Goldman

Natasha Goldman Homann
51 Stetson St.
Brookline, MA 02446
315.825.5894

From: Chi Chi Wu [mailto:chichiwu@hotmail.com]
Sent: Tuesday, June 2, 2020 10:50 AM
To: Lisa Portscher; cbrownAC@comcast.net
Subject: Fw: Supporting our schools

Dear Ms. Portscher and Mr. Brown - I wanted to submit the following email that I sent to the Select Board as written comments, to be circulated to members of the subcommittee, for tomorrow morning's 8:30 AM meeting of the Schools Subcommittee of the Advisory Committee.

Thank you for your attention and thank you for you service during these difficult times.

Chi Chi Wu
14 Marion Terrace

From: Chi Chi Wu
Sent: Monday, June 1, 2020 3:08 PM
To: Bernard Greene <bgreene@brooklinema.gov>; Heather A. Hamilton <hhamilton@brooklinema.gov>; Nancy Heller <nheller@brooklinema.gov>; Raul Fernandez <rfernandez@brooklinema.gov>; bfranco@brooklinema.gov
Subject: Supporting our schools

Dear Bernard, Heather, Nancy, Raul & Ben:

I wanted to add my voice to those residents asking you to do whatever is in your power to prevent the layoffs of any teachers in the Public Schools of Brookline. I urge you to think creatively, to be aggressive and push boundaries, and to protect the schools at all costs. The schools are the crown jewels of the Town of Brookline. They are why myself and so many Brookline residents moved to this Town. And even if I no longer have a child in PSB, I feel compelled to pay it forward to the next generation.

I have worked with almost all of you, and know that you are good, caring, thoughtful people. As a taxpayer and active community member, I would certainly support an override and urge you to hold a special election for one as soon as possible. But I think there are other measures the Town should consider in addition to an override ballot question.

1. Using funding from the Mass. Coronavirus Relief Fund allocation to Brookline
According to a May 14 memo from the Mass. Secretary of Administration and Finance, Brookline is eligible to receive $5.2 million to pay for costs incurred in responding to the COVID-19 outbreak from the state. The money is restricted to paying for necessary expenses incurred due to the COVID-19 public health emergency. However, note that some of the permissible uses includes “[s]chool distance learning, to the extent not funded from other sources.” There are three listed uses (planning & development & IT; special education; food for eligible families), but because the sentence uses the word “including”, it appears that distance learning expenses are not limited to those three listed uses.

To the extent that some of the instruction in the Fall will consist of distance learning, or there were additional costs incurred from distance learning in the Spring, I urge you to allocate funds from the Brookline’s share of the Mass. Coronavirus Relief Fund to pay for that instruction. To the extent a teacher was slated to be laid off for the Fall 2020, and thus “not funded from other sources” that teacher could be hired back to conduct distance learning in the Fall.

2. Shifting funding from the “Town side”
I would urge you to shift funds from any non-critical projects or functions from other Town Departments in order to preserve teaching positions. For example, we are informed that the City of Newton is delaying street and sidewalk repairs to save $2.5 million, and the effect is to reduce the impact on adequate funding for the schools. Newton had prioritized public education over road repair, we should invest similarly in our town’s future.

3. Rainy day fund
I am sure you have received emails and calls about this. I don’t have much more to add except to support the idea of using rainy day funds to cover any shortfall in the schools. It’s not just raining, it’s a deluge of biblical proportions. We are dealing with a global crisis that happens
once in a century, what we choose to do will determine the future of Brookline for the next century.

I know you all are in a difficult situation, and sympathize to the greatest degree. It must be gut wrenching to make these decisions. But I urge you to protect the most important asset this Town has – its schools and its children.

Happy as always to talk, email, or otherwise communicate. Wishing you wisdom and hoping for a bit of luck in these coming months.

Chi Chi
Dear Members of the Advisory Board:

I have a 6th and 9th grade at Pierce and BHS and was devastated to learn about the teacher layoffs. The message that this action sent is that Brookline does not value education or educators. I hope you will work as hard as possible to restore as much funding to the school operating budget as soon as possible.

Some suggestions funding include: through short-term reductions in capital spending and deferral of unfunded pension benefits. In addition, I have long felt that K-8 Spanish language learning is a luxury that we cannot afford. In addition, the Spanish language teaching has been far (FAR) below the standards we enjoy from all the other teachers/subject areas in our schools. I would be fine with the elimination of Spanish for K-6.

Thank you

Toby Raybould

Hi, school committee, select board, advisory committee, and BEU,

We just received the email about the teacher cuts. What a tragedy!

All the teachers in Pierce School devote all their hearts and enthusiasm to the school and the students, especially Ms. Goodman. They are the soul, the pillar, and the treasure of the school. How can they be layoff?
Though our family is just staying here for temporary, we were always touched by the teachers. We love the school, love the teachers.
Could you please identify as much funding as possible to return to the operating budget, specifically through short-term reduction of capital spending and deferral of unfunded pension benefits, as well as other measures they identify. Could you please also plan toward a townwide (not just schools) operating override for COVID-related expenses that will not otherwise be covered by the limited federal funding thus far received?
This isn't business as normal and we all need to work together to reach an agreement that protects all our students and educators, as best we can. The union has the power to make concessions that will bridge the gap that remains between what the union would typically ask for (and we would normally want to give them) and what the town can do by the beginning of this fiscal year given the revenue declines and future economic uncertainties.
Best Regards,

Yan

From: Ana Otero [mailto:oteroan@emmanuel.edu]
Sent: Thursday, June 4, 2020 7:57 AM
To: Lisa Portscher
Subject: concerns about the Brookline Public School system teachers

Good morning,
Could you please forward this e-mail to the Advisory Board?
Thanks

Dear Advisory Board Members,

I hope you and your families are doing well during these difficult times.

As a parent of a child in Pierce School that is about to enter BHS, I am deeply concerned about the teachers that have lost their jobs.
I ask you to:
1. Identify as much funding as possible to return to the operating budget, specifically through short-term reduction of capital spending and deferral of unfunded pension benefits, as well as other measures that you can identify.
2. Plan toward a townwide (not just schools) operating override for COVID-related expenses that will not otherwise be covered by the limited federal funding thus far received.
3. It is time for a property tax reform in Brookline. There are residents that own multi-million dollar homes. We need a progressive property tax system that distributes the contribution fairly so those that can pay more do.
Thanks for your consideration.

Ana Otero
12 White Place

From: Garth Clingingsmith [mailto:clingingsmith@gmail.com]
Sent: Tuesday, June 2, 2020 7:19 PM
To: Lisa Portscher
Subject: Teacher/Staff Layoffs

I am a Heath parent with two kids. We live in Brookline because of the schools. Frankly, we live well beyond our means, in Brookline, because of the schools. Those schools have done nothing but expose our boys to incredible opportunities and wonderful people.
I understand the difficulties this pandemic is putting us all through. I understand something has to give, budget-wise. I am sending this as a plea to make an effort to sacrifice other town services at the benefit of our schools and the current staffs associated with them.
Again, we live here because of the well funded schools and the folks, like you, who’ve made that a top priority.
With nothing but respect,
Garth Clingingsmith
39 Eliot Crescent #2
Chestnut Hill, MA 02467
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Garth Clingingsmith