

MINUTES
BROOKLINE COMMISSION FOR WOMEN
ANNUAL PLANNING & ORGANIZATIONAL MTG
Thursday July 9th, 7 pm
(Online via Zoom)

Commissioners Present: Meenakshi Garodia, Hadassah Margolis, Nicole McClelland, Felina Silver Robinson, Homa Sarabi, Liz Stillman, Rebecca Stone

Commissioners absent: Gloria Rudisch

Staff Present: Caitlin Starr, Sarah Kaplan (will support BCW when Ms. Starr goes on maternity leave in August)

1. Welcome to New Commissioner Homa Sarabi, an artist with BFA, MFA in photo and film. The commissioners and staff also provided brief introductions. Ms. Stone explained that Ms. Sarabi is a commissioner, but cannot vote until she has been sworn in by the Town Clerk and received information pertaining to the Open Meeting Law.
2. Vote to approve minutes from the meeting of June 4, 2020. On a motion from Ms. Garodia, seconded by Ms. Silver Robinson, passes unanimously.
3. Update on Women Who Inspire Us Video. Ms. Stone explained that after the planned March 25th event was cancelled, the BCW decided to create a video rather than hold an online event to celebrate the student essay contest winners and Woman of the Year (Kim Kushner, founder of Brookline Thrives). The video has been created with help from commissioners, and from videographers Daniella Kaplan and Aynsley Floyd. Ms. Stillman reported that everything is done except the video introduction. Wanted to have that be a collection of our voices, but that may be choppy in practice. All will have a chance to record the intro and our video producers will choose the one they think works

best. Ms. Stone noted that the section devoted to Kim Kushner and Brookline Thrives can stand alone so it is useful to Thrives for their outreach/communications purposes.

4. Review & Discussion of Planning Documents:

Ms. Stone recalled that a year ago, she and Ms. McClelland were both new to the BCW and, with veteran commissioners Jennifer Goldsmith and Grace Young Watson, were the only 4 commissioners. They began working together to rebuild the Commission, in “acting” roles and with a “working” mission statement. She characterized the year as building toward this moment where 8 of 11 seats are appointed and a new BCW can decide who we are and what we want to accomplish.

- a) Preliminary FY21 Calendar (please see draft annotated calendar previously circulated). Confirmed first Wednesday of the month being the regular meeting time (Ms. Garodia may have a conflict later in the year). Ms. Starr informed us that BCW does not usually meet in August; we will revisit whether to do so at the end of this meeting. The calendar includes traditional annual events (Dress for Success Winter Coat Drive and the Women Who Inspire Us event) which we will discuss more later. Ms. Stone asked for approval of the calendar. On a motion by Ms. Stillman, seconded by Ms. Silver Robinson, the calendar was approved by unanimous vote.
- b) BCW Structure & Election of Officers: Ms. Stone explained that the BCW executive committee is Chair, Vice Chair, and Secretary. We need to elect those positions for this year and we need to decide the terms for those offices. Ms. Stone described a need to share leadership and build momentum, and she

proposes/moves that we have a chair, vice chair and secretary that serve for 1-year terms. Ms. Stillman seconds. Discussion as follows on this issue: Ms. McClelland asks for a definition of the roles. See definition of roles in document circulated by Ms. Stone prior to this meeting (Appendix A). Ms. McClelland suggested that the vice chair might be more clearly defined going forward understanding that this year has been out of the ordinary. Ms. Margolis asked what the difference would be if we had two co-chairs rather than a chair and a vice chair, and with Ms. McClelland asks if Ms. Stone would prefer a co-chair. Ms. Stone states that having a vice chair creates a leadership path and that her sense is it's easier logistically for others in town government and the public to have a single point person for the commission. Ms. Stone asks Ms. Starr if other commissions have co-chairs; Ms. Starr does not think so and agrees that it's more straightforward for staff if there's a single chair. Ms. Garodia spoke in favor of a leadership pathway and continuity. Ms. Stone hopes that next year will be less chaotic regardless of leadership format and that we design/have a better division of labor next year. Planning and communicating about the work of the commission needs to be shared across the entire commission regardless of leadership. Discussion on structure having concluded, a vote was taken and the structure of Chair, Vice Chair, and Secretary for 1-year terms approved unanimously.

- c) Nominations for Executive Committee: Ms. Garodia nominates Ms. Stone to be chair, seconded by Ms. Stillman and Ms. Silver Robinson. The vote is unanimous except for Ms. Stone's abstention. Ms. Stillman nominated Felina Silver Robinson to be Vice Chair, seconded by Ms. McClelland. Ms. Silver Robinson

accepted the nomination. The vote is unanimous except for Ms. Silver Robinson's abstention. Ms. Stone nominated Ms. Stillman to be Secretary, seconded by Ms. Margolis and others. Ms. Stillman accepted the nomination. The vote is unanimous except for Ms. Stillman's abstention. The newly elected Executive committee, with a term until the first meeting in July, 2021 is as follows: Chair: Ms. Stone, Vice Chair: Ms. Silver Robinson, Secretary: Ms. Stillman.

- d) Question of Term limits for Chair: Ms. Stone described the School Committee's policy of limiting any Chair to two consecutive terms and supported the idea of adopting a similar policy for the BCW. Ms. McClelland agreed. Ms. Stillman raised whether the past year when executive committee members were in "acting" roles would count towards this term limitation. To general agreement, Ms. Silver Robinson suggested that it should not count toward the term limit, and that the clock should start with this year. Ms. Stone pointed out that the term limit is not a mandate to serve for two consecutive years, just a restriction on anyone holding the seat in perpetuity. Ms. McClelland moved to have a 2-year (consecutive) limit for Chair only, effective with Fiscal Year '21. Discussion of including Vice Chair in the limitation. Ms. Stone asked if Ms. McClelland would consider a friendly amendment and Ms. McClelland agreed to amend her motion for a 2-year (consecutive) term limit for Chair and Vice Chair effective FY21. Seconded by Ms. Margolis, the motion passed unanimously.

5. Other structural items for future discussion

- a) Liaisons. Ms. Stone suggests that we have formal liaisons to some other commissions in town. For example, Ms. Silver Robinson is our liaison to the Domestic Violence

Roundtable. Liaisons would attend relevant meetings of their assigned committees/boards/commissions and report at BCW meetings. Ms. Starr suggested that we have a liaison to the Commission on Diversity, Inclusion, and Community Relations (CDICR). Ms. McClelland agrees that we should be coordinating with this commission since our agendas overlap. Ms. Garodia suggests that all commissioners have a liaison role. Ms. Garodia volunteered to work with the Diversity and Inclusion Commission. Ms. Stone suggested that each commissioner check the list of boards/commissions on the Town website and think about where we add value to the conversation and bring that research to the next meeting in terms of where we want to have liaisons. Ms. Sarabi suggested that we should look into committees/commissions where gender is not easily tied to their mission. Ms. Stone emphasized that being a liaison involves work that we want to be meaningful. We also need to coordinate with the chair of the other groups as well to be sure a liaison is welcome. For the August meeting, Ms. Stone will work with Ms. Silver Robinson and Ms. Stillman to generate a list of commissions and/or committees.

- b) Subcommittees: For further/future discussion, Ms. Stone suggested that subcommittees are common on other boards/commissions and that they provide a way to share the work of the BCW and offer leadership roles to more commissioners. Sub-committees would have to follow open meeting law constraints. Ms. Stone would ideally like to bring proposals on this to the August 5th meeting.
- c) New member mentors: Citing Ms. McClelland's recent work to bring mentoring into Town Meeting, Ms. Stone suggested that mentors are helpful for onboarding new

members of the Commission and providing support. She would like to introduce it as a practice, understanding that current commissioners are all relatively new.

6. Mission, Core Values, and Work of the BCW: Ms. Stone stated that since the commission is essentially beginning a new phase with an almost entirely new membership, we have been using a temporary “working” mission statement and description of our work, all of which has been used this year for recruiting. (see Appendix B for document re: mission and work of the commission). Ms. Stone asked for comments on a proposal for formal adoption of a new mission and working statement. Ms. McClelland said she thinks the proposed language is great. Ms. Sarabi agreed but wondered if the mission is sufficiently gender inclusive. Ms. Garodia pointed out that the first core value listed addresses the issue. Ms. Sarabi suggested that we consider using “female identifying” rather than “women and girls” in the mission statement. Ms. Margolis and Ms. Stillman agreed that identifying as female is broader than identifying as a woman or girl. Ms. Stone is concerned that we cannot be completely inclusive without having a clunky, list-like mission statement, but that everyone should see themselves in the mission statement as much as possible. That’s the challenge. Ms. Margolis and Ms. Sarabi offered to speak to colleagues who have grappled with the same issues in their use of language to reflect back on the proposed statements and get a sense of what works. We will hold off voting on that until we have more information.

Statement on “what we do:” Ms. Stillman suggests that the “what we do” language needs to mirror the new mission statement language. Ms. Margolis suggests we change order of “we do” to advocacy first, then support, then celebrate. For the next meeting (and vote to approve) we will have feedback on inclusivity and an updated proposal to change women and girls language.

7. Ongoing and New Issues/Projects for FY21 (See Appendix C for document circulated)

- a) Recruiting and Outreach is every commissioner's job, but will be coordinated by the Executive team. Ms. Stone reported that we have three open seats (eight current members).
- b) Childcare for meetings at town hall: Ms. McClelland said that the COVID crisis has obviously changed this as no one is meeting at Town Hall, and that now we have a different childcare crisis. How do we tackle this? Has virtual meeting made it less of a need? Ms. Sarabi suggested that there have been situations where employers have penalized workers for having children in the room with them while working at home. Ms. Margolis discussed 'parenting out loud' that so many of us are doing while having meetings on Zoom from home. Colleagues and employers see that workers are more than just employees. We will keep the issue of child care for women's participation on the agenda.
- c) Women's voices in town meeting: Ms. Stone explained the "counting the minutes" project. She said that while 51% of town meeting members are women, there is a sense that women's voices are not heard as often or as consequentially as men's. To test this, we want to go back over past Town Meetings where there were important debates/votes and count (with a stopwatch) things like the number of women at microphones, for how long and who spoke before a vote. Ms. Stone says this is a big undertaking that requires a lot of volunteers. Ms. Stone would like this to be a project of the commission-to find volunteers and organize them to do this work. Ms. Garodia suggested that this could be done by BHS students. Ms. Sarabi suggested that we combine a few projects like this and

bundle them in a way to get more volunteers. She added that the data could be presented in a number of visual ways. Ms. Stone said that as presentations like that require funds, she was hoping that once we have some data, the Community Foundation might be interested in producing a report such as they did with Understanding Poverty in Brookline.

- d) Support for Women-Owned Small Businesses: We are continuing to work on issues involving support of BIPOC- and women-owned small businesses in Brookline during/after COVID-19.
- e) Prioritizing BIPOC- and Women-owned businesses for local Procurements: Ms. Stone reported that she has been in touch with Kara Brewton, Planning Director, and Town Administrator Mel Kleckner about supporting an effort to collect data on our procurement practices and explore the possibility of making it a formal priority. There is likely to be a Warrant Article at November Town Meeting on this issue.
- f) By-law requiring menstrual products in town buildings has an implementation date of 7/1/2021 although it has started in Town Hall and the schools already. BCW will continue to monitor implementation.
- g) Gender neutral language in town by-laws: Ms. Margolis's Warrant Article on this subject was put off until the November Town Meeting. The article calls for the pronouns in town by-laws be changed to they/them/theirs. There is a new co-petitioner who is a BHS student, and they are exploring if they can speak if Town Meeting is on Zoom in November.
- h) Funding and services available for victims of intimate partner violence (DV Taskforce): Ms. Starr reported that there has been no new data since the last meeting in June. The

next meeting of the DV Taskforce will be in September. Sarah Kaplan will also be taking over staffing that taskforce during Ms. Starr's maternity leave.

- i) Annual Events: We deferred discussion of the essay contest and Woman of the Year to the August 5th meeting.
- j) New Proposal to support BHS #MeToo student initiative: Ms. Margolis explained that during the past month or so, there was a post on Facebook in the Brookline Public Schools page from a parent who stated that there was a culture of sexual harassment and at Brookline High School and that there had been little to no consequence even for perpetrators of alleged sexual misconduct. Two rising seniors at BHS (hereafter: Alex and Meg) created a google form for people to post experiences involving sexual harassment that generated at least 73 reports mainly from current BHS students. Alex and Meg have also stated that BHS has a culture of disrespecting women and has a toxic atmosphere. They told Ms. Margolis that this atmosphere starts in the elementary schools where sex education has been inadequate and lacked any curriculum on consent, respect for women, etc. Alex and Meg further say that boys who are accused and reported to the BHS administration are not punished: they do sports, graduate, and go to college without consequences for sexually inappropriate behavior. These students are asking for more resources, Title IX information, more accountability and consequences for perpetrators, and a culture involving restorative justice. Ms. Stone said that the curriculum in the past had been troubling because it contained big gaps. Many commissioners suggested that Alex and Meg should be invited to a meeting so we can discuss this with them. Ms. McClelland suggested we ask them to attend our August meeting prior to the beginning of the next school year. Ms. Stone suggests that we draft questions we have for them in

advance of the meeting. Ms. Margolis requests that all questions for these students should be forwarded to her by the end of this week. Ms. Stone, Ms. McClelland and Ms. Stillman offer to help with this initiative as does Ms. Garodia since the curricular aspects of this align with her prior proposal to work on a feminist curriculum for the schools.

8. New Business: none.

Meeting adjourned at 9:38 p.m. until August 5, 2020.

Appendix A:

BCW Structure & Organization for Planning/Org Meeting July 2020

Current Status:

11 seats (8 filled), appointed for staggered 3-year terms, with an executive/leadership team of

(Acting) Chair – Rebecca Stone

(Acting) Vice Chair – Nicole McClelland

(Acting) Secretary – *Jennifer Goldsmith (retired from Commission)*

Meetings 1x per month.

Need for July 9, 2020:

Elect...

Chair

The Chair is responsible for planning the agenda and running meetings of the Commission, serves as the point person for communicating with ODICR staff, town departments, and other chairs of commissions/committees chairs on behalf of the BCW, and keeps the BCW accountable to its calendar and annual goals.

Vice Chair

The Vice-Chair works with the Chair on all of the above, serving in those capacities when/if the Chair is unable.

Secretary

The Secretary takes minutes at meetings and also collaborates with Chair/Vice Chair on planning.

Decide...

Terms of the Chair, Vice Chair, Secretary are currently not set.

Proposal: Election each year at July planning/organizational meeting for all three positions.

Consider: Term limits for Chair? No more than two consecutive years? (similar to Sch. Cmte).

The assumption generally is that the Vice Chair is ready/willing to become Chair after 2 years.

For Future Decision...

- 1) **Liaison Roles** (currently to Domestic Violence Roundtable, Felina Robinson; other groups we should consider for official role?)
- 2) **Subcommittees** (currently none; could build leadership bench, create more functional structure for projects, advance work in between monthly meetings)
- 3) **New Member Mentors** (currently none; big boost to onboarding new members, builds community)

Appendix B: Mission, Values & Work of the Commission

Current BCW “Working” Mission (voted July 2019)

The BCW promotes fair, just, and equal treatment of women and girls in Brookline; advances inclusion and representation of women in all aspects of Town life; and works to achieve cultural, economic, educational, health, legal, political, racial, and social equity for women everywhere.

For comparison:

National Association of Commissions for Women:

Commissions for women... “promote equality and justice for all women and girls.”

MA Commission on the Status of Women:

The purpose of the Commission is to advance women and girls toward full equity in all areas of life and to promote rights and opportunities for all women and girls. The mission of the Commission is to provide a permanent, effective voice for women and girls across Massachusetts. The Commission stands for fundamental freedoms, basic human rights and the full enjoyment of life for all women and girls throughout their lives.

The Commission represents and recognizes all women, regardless of their age, race, color, creed, abilities, socio-economic status, immigration status, sexual orientation, or gender identity at birth.

Proposal July 2020.

Mission: The mission of the Brookline Commission for Women is to promote equality and justice for all women and girls.

Our Core Values:

- **Inclusion:** When we talk about all women and girls, all means *all* those who identify as female, regardless of gender assigned at birth.
- **Intersectionality:** We recognize that race, ethnicity, class/income, and gender intersect to compound discrimination against BIPOC women and girls.
- **Collaboration:** We seek to work with other individuals, committees, and groups in Brookline to address issues of gender inequity.
- **Transparency:** We act with and in front of the public as an essential part of our work.
- **Determination:** We know change will happen only if we consistently name, document, and stand up to inequality, discrimination, and aggression against women and girls.

What we do:

We *celebrate* the strength, contributions, and diversity of all women and girls;
We *support* all women and girls who are struggling and who strive for a better life;
We *advocate* on behalf of all women and girls to ensure safe & equal treatment, voice, and participation in Brookline.

Appendix C: BCW Projects for FY21

BCW Ongoing Projects FY2021

- Outreach & Recruitment to BCW
- Child Care during significant meetings in Town Hall
- Women's voices in Town Meeting: counting microphone minutes
- Support for Women-owned Small Businesses during/after COVID-19 (Town Small Business Subcommittee)
- Brookline procurements going to Women- and BIPOC-owned businesses (Planning & Economic Development; warrant article for November Town Meeting)
- Implementation of by-law requiring Menstrual products in town and schools buildings
- Gender-neutral terminology in Town documents
- Funding and services available for victims of intimate partner violence (DV Taskforce)
- Task Force on Policing/Reimagining Police focus on women of color, sexual assault by police, # of women employed on force (outside parking enforcement)

Annual Events:

Dress for Success Coat Drive

Women Who Inspire Us & Woman of the Year

New Proposed:

BHS Sexual Assault & Harassment student initiative

→ could include Meenakshi's effort to look at curriculum language and content re: girls/respect/equity