

**BFAC Moderator's Committee Meeting July 19, 2021
with School Committee and CTOS Liaisons
Draft Minutes**

A meeting of the Moderator's Committee (MC) pursuant to Article 36 of Brookline's 2021 Annual Town Meeting was held on Thursday, July 19th at 6:30pm via Zoom.

Present (via Zoom): Committee Members: David Pollak (Chair), Ben Franco, Petra Bignami, Janet Gelbart, Michael Toffel. School Committee: David Pearlman (Liaison), Susan Ditzkoff; Committee on Town Organization and Structure (CTO&S): Jean Berg (Chair), Sean Lynn-Jones (Liaison), Harry Bohrs, Abigail Cox. Other Attendees: Kate Poverman (Moderator), Samuel Rippin (Deputy Superintendent of Administration & Finance), Deborah Brown, Betsy DeWitt, Jennifer Goldsmith, Richard Benka

Documents Referenced:

- School Committee response to BFAC template V2
- School Committee minutes of 1/22/2020, 2/6/2020, 2/13/2020, 3/17/2020, 4/1/2020, 12/14/2020
- CTOS response email from Sean Lynn-Jones

SCHOOL COMMITTEE DISCUSSION:

David Pearlman (SC) noted that the SC unanimously supported Article 36 and the creation of the MC. Noted that BFAC recommendations were discussed in Feb. 2020 at SC when together with Cliff Brown, Pearlman presented a slide deck with an overview of the recommendations. That said, SC has not yet voted any action with regards to the BFAC recommendations given: pandemic impacts, interim superintendent and other vacancies/capacity constraints. Prior to COVID there was interest and support from members of the SC to move forward methodically with regards to the BFAC Report.

Discussion moved to Recommendations.

Recommendation 1:

SC not much of a specific update. SC is now using the same budget software, which has been helpful.

Recommendation 2:

SC, SB, and AC have had at least two summits, modelled after the SC partnership and other meetings in Wellesley. SC looks forward to having more. Mary Ellen (former Deputy Superintendent) was present at those summits and reported them to be helpful. PSB was asked to

provide a simple report of what was discussed and any topics covered at the summits, in bullet format, to assist the MC in fulfilling its charge.

Recommendation 6:

David Pearlman noted that the School Department regularly engages in program evaluation. Currently PSB is conducting math program review, and beginning evaluations of enrichment & challenge (ECS) and athletics. School Committee also supports the principles behind Recommendation 6 and hopes that by the MC's next reporting cycle there will be a more substantive update.

There was discussion of an earlier program review of special education that resulted in greater investment in "in district" programs with an associated reduction in out-of-district placements. Noted it was a good example of a programmatic investment/change and then a look back to determine efficacy.

A discussion of zero-based budgeting followed. Mr. Pearlman noted that the new superintendent mentioned zero based budgeting at their first July meeting. Mr. Pearlman also noted that members of the SC recognize that the qualitative nature of education based on the student's need is the guiding principle for both SC and SD, so does not necessarily fit neatly within quantitative metrics or performance evaluation processes.

Discussion and recognition of the fact that staff resources have been strained and other significant headwinds meant that the budget process knocks everyone flat by the end of the budget cycle.

Discussion of School Building Based Budgets followed. Mr. Pearlman noted that there has been some building by building analysis but again SD didn't have the human capital to take the initiative further.

Susan Ditkoff, as prior Finance chair (8 months ago) noted that OpenGov has been somewhat helpful but that SD is still strongly in favor of a separate pdf budget book. Noted that there was some movement with regards to shared budget format, but that it was done in real time (no specific report to share). Ms. Ditkoff noted that Mariah Nobrega (current Finance Subcommittee Chair) was part of some of that work more recently.

A request was made that SC/SD put together a paragraph or two and give a few examples for the purposes of the MC report.

Recommendation 7:

Mr. Pearlman noted that a re-draft of the Fiscal D policy handbook is underway, which is modelled after MASC fiscal policy, similar to Cambridge combining some of the decisions with the municipal side. Mr. Pearlman noted that the goal is to imbed the BFAC policies into the SC Handbook and that SC has recently endorsed articles supporting transparency.

Discussion followed regarding SC trying to simplify certain charts and graphs for sharing with the public in a more digestible format to foster better communication and understanding. Mr. Pearlman noted that presenting both summary and detailed versions of charts and graphs as well as the possibility of revamping the website could help with communication of the complex budget.

School Site Councils were discussed, and Mr. Pearlman confirmed their importance in the process.

Samuel Rippin shared a few thoughts and comparisons to other districts.

Recommendation 8:

School Committee endorsed the Fall, 2020 Warrant Article expanding participation in Town/School Partnership. Ms. Ditkoff also noted that the SC was in favor of pre-work and common analytics so that when the Town/School Partnership meetings take place there is clarity on potential decisions and/or actions to be taken.

Discussion addressed staffing capacity and resource constraints. It was suggested that perhaps resources could be allocated on a temporary basis. Ms. Ditkoff was in agreement, but noted that the overarching concern about how the town intends to operate in relation to the reality of Prop 2.5 should be better understood and affirmed as the very first step.

MC members who had served on BFAC noted that they had struggled and it had taken many meetings to understand the financial workings of the TSP. There is a need for both tactical (shorter term) and strategic (longer term) planning with regards to budget and finance, and SC, SB, and the Advisory Committee should ideally have a better working framework and better tools for evaluating both short- and long-term investment.

Recommendation 9:

In response to a question about whether there is a systematic approach to campus maintenance, Mr. Pearlman noted there are lists by building and playground. SC has discussed the life-cycle costs of maintenance, but more so for newer updates rather than existing buildings. Ms. Ditkoff noted that with regards to brick and mortar, Brookline is doing better than peer communities, but could do still be more proactive in building maintenance and costs.

Recommendation 10:

SC has been doing program reviews (those cited earlier, math, enrichment etc.) but there has not been intentional prioritization, and a more systematic approach would be better. Mr. Pearlman stated that for SC the primary charge is not to deliver education through a financial lens: the SC's central compass should still be teaching and learning.

Discussion moved to other possible ways to support financial costs of school buildings. There were some prior discussions with regards to building use in evenings and weekends, e.g. renting out garages on weekends at FRR. There is not a systematic framework in place to evaluate these ideas. Samuel Rippin pointed out that with respect to the use of school property- it should be noted that the community has already paid to have these buildings so members should not be overcharged for use. Yet gathering nominal cost coverage from evening and weekend usage could help diffuse maintenance and revolving costs for upgrades etc.

Recommendation 11:

Prior to Covid there was appetite for this on the SC, but since we have had a year with interim positions in leadership there has not been much movement. Mr. Pearlman noted there is likely interest in this both on SC and SD side.

Recommendation 16:

Mr. Pearlman noted an appetite for this recommendation as well. Ms. Ditkoff noted that there are some fixed costs and some that are lumpy (e.g. benefits) so while you may not need to re-evaluate every year, there are likely some longer term assumptions that can be made in modelling. Noted that a bit more 'de-threading' could be done, but not to go too far because we are not doing activity-based cost modelling.

Wrap Up Discussion

Chair Pollak reiterated the request that SC/SD provide additional narrative paragraphs for the purposes of the MC report.

SC Discussion ended at 8:35pm.

CTOS DISCUSSION:

Recommendation 4:

Sean Lynn-Jones presented on behalf of the Committee on Town Organization and Structure (CTOS). He stated that officially the CTOS has not considered this recommendation for 3 reasons:

- 1) Recent revisions of AC workings.
- 2) New Moderator could be making additional changes to AC.

3) AC is considering new ideas about function and structure of the AC.

However, the recommendation influenced Article 29 of the November 2020 Town Meeting. In particular, Article 29 as initially proposed would have eliminated the requirement that at least some Advisory Committee members be Town Meeting members. Consistent with BFAC recommendation 4, that Article also proposed giving the Advisory Committee more flexibility in what it considers and whether it makes recommendations to Town Meeting on all Warrant Articles. After much discussion, including extensive review by CTOS, the November 2020 Town Meeting voted for an Article 29 motion that continues to require that at least some Advisory Committee members be Town Meeting members. Article 29, as voted by Town Meeting, also assigns the Advisory Committee the duty of considering “any or all” (instead of “any and all”) municipal questions and the option to make “reports *or* recommendations” (emphasis added) instead of “reports and recommendations” on the questions it considers. That change to the town bylaws is consistent with BFAC recommendation 4.

Mr. Lynn-Jones noted that CTOS will wait for the Advisory Committee to complete its discussion of possible changes to its structure and role. CTOS members are aware that the Advisory Committee began that discussion at its July 6 organizational meeting. CTOS will review the Advisory Committee’s proposed changes after the Advisory Committee has concluded its internal discussion.

Harry Bohrs also noted that it is premature to speculate given AC is looking at structure and how best to function. He noted that there has been a marked change in both the amount of work and disposition of Town Meeting and that while AC’s primary focus is finances, that is not its sole function. He also noted that it is not always easy to determine if a Warrant Article has financial implications. AC serves as a resources to Town Meeting and the broader community. While it is meant to be representative of Town Meeting it is not meant to mirror. All recognized the significant load that AC carries.

Richard Benka highlighted that the concept that AC is purely a financial body was squarely rejected by Town Meeting in Article 29 in Nov. 2020.

Group discussion followed with regards to evaluation of articles that have both short term and long term financial and operational (and legal) implications. Reference to Appendix M & L in the report.

Discussion that some articles are centered in policy changes and require a lot of extra leg work. Further discussion and commentary regarding how little is necessary to bring an article forward and that could lead to a very busy slate. Discussion of equity as an equally important lens

through which to evaluate articles and the risk of oversimplifying questions without looking at adverse effects on others and the potential for creating artificial barriers.

Discussion of the AC's role in overseeing articles and all the work, drafting and analysis that goes into them. Comment on how the most important article with regards to budget gets less air time given other competing priorities. The need for more resources was brought up, in order to do a deep dive on certain aspects of the budget, perhaps with additional AC expertise and change in make-up.

Discussion of the evolution of the AC and its purpose changing over time, many view the AC as a subcommittee of TM to give more time and consideration to articles and guide others.

Commentary on the need for more guidance from Select Board as well as the work being too much, need for more human capital.

Meeting Ended 9:40pm