

**Town of Brookline  
Advisory Committee Minutes**

**July 30, 2019**

---

**Present:** Carla Benka, Ben Birnbaum, Harry Bohrs, Clifford Brown, John Doggett, Dennis Doughty, Harry Friedman, Janet Gelbart, David-Marc Goldstein, Neil Gordon, Susan Granoff, Amy Hummel, Alisa Jonas, Janice Kahn, Steve Kanes, Bobbie Knable, Carol Levin, Donnelle O’Neal, Susan Park, David Pollak, Carlos Ridruejo, Michael Sandman, Lee Selwyn, Kim Smith, Claire Stampfer, Paul Warren, Robert Weintraub, Christine Westphal, Neil Wishinsky

**Absent:** Pam Lodish

**Also Attending:** Sharon Abramowitz, Carol Caro, Mark Izeman, Jenny Doggett, Hadassah Margolis, David Lescohier, Paul Saner, Mark Gray, Jr.

The meeting was called to order at 7:30 PM.

**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.

**7:30 pm            Update on School Department plans for the 2020-2021 School Year**

Cliff Brown offered a status report on the Reserve Fund Transfer and reopening of School – the Schools do not need to use the money that had been reserved from the fund and the Town forced them to take the money anyway – returned \$110K to the general fund. Not yet formalized. Meeting Monday of School Committee, new superintendent and staff going through various options. The current thinking is there will not be a situation where everyone is attending school or learning remotely but a hybrid model put in place. The discussions now vis a vis hybrid model is just the scheduling – two weeks on, two weeks off, etc. There will likely be a different model for younger grades PreK-2 than for older grades.

Mike Sandman added details about possible use of tents and outdoor space through October. Noted the Building Department has been doing a great job.

Carla Benka concurred that the Building Department has been doing an amazing job. She added that she didn’t hear that any option had been eliminated.

Mike added that the School Committee is not sure they could do the proper distancing to do a fully in person model.

Comments and questions were raised about air quality and whether windows in school rooms open and by how much.

Paul Warren expressed concern for teachers who may be immune-compromised and acknowledged his dual role as a member of the AC and as a parent.

**7:45 pm            General discussion of possible changes to Advisory Committee policies and procedures including but not limited to: roll call votes; instituting a public comment period at committee meetings;**

**reporting and making recommendations on all articles on the warrant; developing criteria for deciding which articles merit a comprehensive report and recommendation; and remote attendance and participation by members of the public at AC hearings after a return in-person meetings.**

Mike explained the genesis of this issue – Committee not perceived as sufficiently diverse, appointments not made in a public or transparent way. Aware that a warrant article might be introduced to make changes as to how the Advisory Committee is put together. He introduced Hadassah Margolis's recommendations and thanked Susan Granoff for compiling the expertise of the existing Advisory Committee.

Mike noted that there is already a very simple application available on the Town Website. It is simple, easy and straightforward. Regarding a database of volunteers or groups to support with recruitment it was noted that Mariah Nobrega has begun a list of community organizations (~120) that may be able to support the recruitment of potential AC members. Regarding screening Sandy is appointing 5 people to do a formal screening and interview and then present him with recommendations. Regarding mentoring, we have just begun doing this – each of the 4 new members that have come onto the committee has been paired with a current member to be a support and resource but of course, they can also speak with anyone on the Committee at any time.

Beginning the process of reviewing structure and purpose – that is what we are doing right now.

Anything here that we shouldn't be doing? Anything we should be doing? Is everyone comfortable or any other comments or recommendations?

Neil Gordon – This has some good ideas but narrowly construed. We have a significant number of Boards, Committees and Commissions and not sure we have this process for all of the other ones. In terms of outreach, the organizations to reach out to but the composition of the AC is limited by bylaws and relatively small number of TMM. Precinct by precinct they know who they are and time commitment narrows it further. Look more broadly at the other committees, commissions, and boards.

Amy Hummel – When I looked at all of this, the question I ask is what problem are we trying to solve? It is always worth looking at what we do and what we can do better and to solve a problem, but perhaps the issue is that one person appoints this group and it doesn't line up with how people vote. What the group has to do is hold public hearings, listen, read material, do the research, vote and report out. Is the goal that AC aligns with TM that is actually a bad outcome for everyone? If we aren't challenging each other with facts, that is bad and no good for democracy and an AC closely aligned with TM invites that. We need the friction as long as it is fair and honest. The Moderator has been open to informed changes.

Dennis Doughty – Point 8 – Structure and Purpose of the AC – how do we improve the way we do the work itself, not limited only to doing a better job of how we spend our time on the deep dive but how we structure our processes so people can read materials ahead of the meeting taking into account that people have day jobs, as well. What is the process by which we can ensure that the hearings provide reasonable questions and decisions and the committee has the opportunity to review them?

Harry Bohrs – We are really an advisory committee and that is what we do. That is our role and we don't have the force of law behind us. Generalized concern is that no matter what we do, we don't in the process end up politicizing the AC. Even though we are advocates, we need to be trustees, have informed conversations, hearings where people can be heard and discuss things, and the product that comes out is much better whether the AC gets credit or not. Observation is what we received from Hadassah and thematically it is an attempt to democratize and broaden. The other bit is from BFAC, which is less democratization and require people to be more specialized and there are merits in both. They need to be married. We are a community and need to act as such. We are planting trees now to provide shade for those yet to come. We need to bring these two things together without politicizing this. The AC is drawn from TMM and is it essential for an AC from each precinct to be a TMM or does it suffice to have a member be a resident of that precinct?

Carol Levin – Commenting on the BFAC piece: Who is responsible for identifying fact, what are the true costs, tradeoffs before Town Meeting? Before an informed policy decision you need to understand all the facts and ramifications. For AC to fulfill that role is what was behind the BFAC recommendations – people with specific skills (vocationalization). It is difficult to analyze and discuss an issue and separate our biases to understand objectively how the proposal impacts other Town concerns and policies. We need to understand the impact of our choices.

Mike noted that Sandy does this consciously without a formal guideline.

Christine Westphal – The push toward the AC suggests we need more diversity – currently, we are white, older and most of us are financially secure. That is a function of the time commitment and tedium. Could we benefit from having younger people on the committee? Can they afford to take time off from their families? We are probably one of the most time intensive committees in the Town. We have a range of political view on this committee and while all of these suggestions are more sensible, it will make the committee more politicized. The other question is “plays well with others” so it is more homogeneous and Sandy limits membership based on his perception of collegiality. Amy’s comment about what problem we are solving is good one. I would welcome more members who have a greater commitment to economic diversity. We don’t take care of folks without money as much as I’d like to see, but that is a personal perspective.

Mike Sandman – what problem are we trying to solve here? Legitimate concerns that have been expressed that we are a relatively homogenous group and there are external reasons for that being the case. But we want to respond ahead of the curve instead of discovering a WA that will force a change that is to the detriment of the committee and some not so good ideas and a battle in front of Town Meeting.

Cliff Brown – what will the AC focus on vs how do you find the people who populate the AC? These are being conflated and they need to be separated. Second Carol’s point about what BFAC was trying to suggest was said in relation to overall Town governance and should not be looked at in a vacuum. I think this is a political committee and BFAC was saying it should be depoliticized – every Town Meeting member feels pressure from constituents that may color ones’ perspective if you weren’t a TMM. The process of getting people on here is great and Sandy could use a lot of help. I don’t know how to do that best. It is inappropriate for us to make these decisions because we cannot be independent thinkers about what to do; BFAC recommended that it be the CTO and S (Committee on Town Organization and Structure or some other to be formed committee. This should be done by people who don’t currently have a seat at this table.

Donelle O’Neal – Appreciate this committee and its openness to listening and including difference voices in conversation. If someone is an active part of the community, they should be considered for positions here. It comes down to Sandy and don’t want this to be an attack on him. is there a way we can write into the bylaw that an AC Subcommittee should support the process with interviews, and Town Moderator should take the recommendation of the subcommittee into consideration? This is the most important committee in the Town next to the Select Board. Put some of the power Sandy has into the AC’s hands. Agree with Mike that we should get ahead of this especially regarding number 6 recommendation.

Ben Birnbaum – Susan’s list has been critiqued or deemed not pertinent but I think it is important that we see the entire spectrum of everyone on this committee and points to a question we need to address: What strategically do we want the Advisory Committee to do? Hadassah points to democratization and BFAC points to professionalism. Will one proposal politicize but will the other bureaucratize? Anyone who thinks being on the Advisory Committee is fun hasn’t been on or near the committee. It is not. Not an easy ride and I hope that whatever conclusions we come to that this will be taken into account as they make their choices. Number 8 is the most important – of what purpose is the Advisory Committee?

Janet Gelbart – much of what I have thought has already been expressed. As the non-Town meeting member I embarked on my own outreach. When I read things on the TM listserv – to make us diverse each precinct has to represent some level of diversity. Susan’s efforts were to show skill sets cumulatively and not about us individually. I

thought we would be discussing how we worked and what we would choose to take on. We need to understand skills and then decide how to comprise the committee.

Claire Stampfer- thanks to HM to bring these ideas before us. Highlight ways to make our committee more diverse and we have discussed challenges for having representation from all precincts and also being more diverse. The application would provide Sandy with a group of people who are interested. I share concerns about a formal committee that would work with him and he already consults with other people he doesn't just pick someone without any discussion. Roles and responsibilities or job description of an AC member – what did HM think was missing from the list?

Lee Selwyn – I am trying to understand if this is a solution in search of a problem? Is there dissatisfaction with how Sandy is appointing people? There is a distinction between the role of AC and the role of TM. We tend to dissect Warrant Articles that relate to zoning and make material changes in at least half of what we receive that come from the Planning Department. We have held 5 hearings on a single WA to get it straightened out and doing the work of the petitioner in many cases. Then the AC makes modifications and when things get to Town Meeting no time for them to make further modifications. We act as an expert agency. And we have a broad range of expertise and all have been brought to bear on how we analyze and decide on what has been brought before us. The amount of time commitment and effort that each member has to make is self-selecting and don't know how to solve that problem. Why recruit people who are unable to make that commitment. Need better understanding of what the problem is? Are there examples or evidence of people who have wanted to be on the AC who have been excluded? Is this a systemic issue?

Mike - There has been criticism that Sandy is not interested in creating diversity when he has simply had difficulty finding people to say yes regardless to race, age, gender or profession.

Amy - The issue is what makes the committee good and how we do we do our work fairly and have an impact? I don't think that anyone who wants to be on the Committee should be on the Committee.

Susan Granoff – what we do – 1) we provide the Town with thorough distillation and explanation of warrant articles that no one else is doing. We educate new Town meeting members. 2) We are the financial watchdogs of the community and we need to be aware of how all diverse warrant articles and other RFT decisions interplay and their overall impact on the wellbeing of the Town; 3) we help to create better warrant articles. When we have public hearings we sit with the petitioners and we work to improve those articles; and 4) the other role we have is to provide a level of expertise, focus and thoroughness that other committees don't have the time to provide so we are critical to the success of anything that goes on in the town.

The concern is that there is opaqueness to what we do; it is not clear what we do specifically to anyone who has never introduced a warrant article. As far as committee make up, wrong to change diversity by focusing on only skill sets – we all have a desire to get things done, be facilitators – focus narrowly on technical or business background we would lose some of the best and finest AC members if those were the rules we were to adhere to. We should be careful not to create AC into a group of technocrats – everyone on the committee does not need to have the same skills and we benefit from this diversity and it can be in economic backgrounds and other emphasis. Like idea of not restricting membership for each precinct primarily to Town meeting members. Don't want to become glorified auditors. Also there are not many openings each year for this Committee. I would hate to see so much effort recruiting people and then having folks being disappointed. Expand the process so folks could end up on other committees.

Carla Benka – I have done research on other municipalities alphabetically (24 so far); most communities call it a Finance Committee, one Appropriation. Most cases it is the Moderator, a few Select Board and in a few others a combination of Chairs from each of these groups who make appointments. Most committees are a lot smaller than Brookline's. In some communities, the recommendation is merely three lines – very unlike Brookline's traditional approach as illustrated by the AC's contributions to the Combined Reports. Brookline's Advisory Committee has a

tradition of doing thorough and informative reports with perhaps too much information. We can look at the list to frame thinking, we can divide it into things the AC can do – some of these things can be left with others – demystifying the AC is something we could do – instituting a public comment portion of our meetings, allowing folks to come in remotely; update our fact sheet and pare it down, and provide contact information to answer questions. One finance committee has precinct caucuses and the AC is available to discuss recommendations – so it provides more opportunity for Q&As and meeting the public before Town Meetings. Advantages to get rid of TMM requirement but we can't set that up. One town has all interviews – screenings, interviews, and appointment for members being public. However, the less we put in a bylaw the better because to change a by-law is a very time-consuming process.

Janice Kahn – Thanks to Hadassah for creating the framework for this discussion. Stuck at #1 – we have a different concept of the function of the AC than Town Meeting members do. I see us as a research committee, we provide a resource to Town Meeting and perhaps not understanding or appreciating the role we have or the information we provide. I don't know what Town Meeting expects us to be and so I think I want a dual conversation. It might be helpful for TM to understand how we see our role but also for us to understand what TM expects us to be and that is where my concerns are. Are we supposed to be a validation of the sentiment of Town Meeting whatever that is at the time? We work better when we are not political. Have an independent perspective based on deep discussion of ideas. Agree that CTOS is the appropriate place for structural changes.

Paul Warren – Echoed Donelle about how appreciative he is to this group has been in mentoring, guiding and supporting new members. It is difficult to serve on the AC if you have young children. If we haven't been doing this remotely, I probably wouldn't have been able to participate effectively. If we do return to physical meetings, still allow members to participate remotely. A group like this cannot be organized by itself. Being new it is about transparency of the appointment process and appreciates Sandy's efforts to consider a committee to support with interviews. Anything we can do to educate Town Meeting and the broader community about what we do would be helpful. I think Town Meeting does not understand what we do, how much we do. We do the voters of the Town no service if we cease to question and challenge ideas, and stretch everyone's thinking.

Steve Kane – Many of my points have been covered and so in the interest of time he will pass but thanks to Hadassah for bringing this up.

Bob Weintraub – Daunting time commitment is scaring me about how much time it takes to do this important work. If it continues to feel that the AC is daunting maybe we can talk about how to make it less so to make it more attractive.

Harry Friedman – We make nothing but recommendations and no one has to follow them; other committees and boards are so much less transparent. BFAC recommended that the Town Administrator's office hire more numbers (analytics) people and they should be part of the Advisory – it would be useful to us and would eliminate the need for everyone on the committee to be a numbers person because it would diminish the committee. Opposed to continuing ZOOM meetings when we no longer have to, nothing that beats meeting in person, see expressions and this is a sorry second to that. 90 % of success in life is showing up and I think that means showing up in person.

Susan Park – Thank you for the warm welcome and since I'm a new TMM but also new to the AC, I have been observing. Regarding the 10 steps (and thank you Hadassah) and regarding #2 there is in fact an application on the Town website. The AC's role is to watch numbers – I didn't know what the AC was until I was a co-petitioner for an article. Now I do understand that the role is to do a careful investigation, being gatekeepers for the Town. Not sure I have an opinion on recruitment, selection or membership. My hope was that the people on the Committee thought fairly and deeply, to think about things that were missed and not just the popular choice. Integrity is a word that comes to mind.

Hadassah Margolis thanked the committee for allowing her to join and listen tonight and also to Mike and Carla for their support. Difficult to hear from an outsider but she is sharing what she sees. AC has an identity issue –

gatekeeper, fiscal watchdog, researcher, etc. So what is your story? Then once you have identified your story how do you share it, which comes down to transparency? What was said here may be transparent to folks in this meeting but what about to the community at large? Also, people are unfamiliar with the process and who the moderator is and what power is held. Admire anyone who wants to be on the AC and devote free time to such difficult work. I am not here with these 10 ideas to make you better people or better AC but rather to make it more effective and to make your roles easier too. What would be a more effective use of your time? What is it that the AC needs as a group to fulfill your mission (what is your mission and then the roles and skills will fall into play). The key is to make it public so people do know what you do and we can translate that into other commissions and committees operate. The opportunity before you – coming in as an outsider has to say about how an organization is created, it is crucial for the people in it to say this is what works well, where we could improve, see some changes and that would be a good starting point rather than have outsiders demand that things need to change. Thinking of this as a starting point, what else would you like to discuss and perhaps work with people about a by-law change? Thank you for your consideration and thoughtful comments and hope this results with some collaboration outside of the AC and also publicize that you are looking at this. Be transparent from right now in this process.

Mike suggested that members share their thoughts and comments with him and Carla via email or phone and we will reconvene in September.

**9:00 pm          Other business**

---

Upon a **MOTION** made and seconded to adjourn, and voted unanimously, the meeting was adjourned at 9:40 pm.

**Documents Presented:**

- Path to a More Inclusive and Transparent Brookline Advisory Committee Draft Proposal | Hadassah Margolis | June 12, 2020 Advisory Committee Membership List, FY 21
- Advisory Committee Fact Sheet
- Advisory Committee By-Law
- Brookline Fiscal Advisory Committee (BFAC) Report (sections that pertain to the Advisory Committee only)
- Links to state statutes relative to Advisory/Finance Committees (<https://malegislature.gov/laws/generallaws/partI/titleVII/chapter39/section16>) and to meetings of a public body (<https://malegislature.gov/Laws/GeneralLaws/PartI/TitleIII/Chapter30A/Section20>). Subsection (g) of Chapter 30A, Section 20 pertains to public comment.
- Advisory Committee Areas of Expertise (Draft)