

**Town of Brookline
Advisory Committee Minutes
Thursday, September 14, 2023**

Meeting Recording:

<https://brooklinema.zoomgov.com/rec/share/-I70dELRYOHtELCiDzHxzG1AAI4Mk6tluHpFdDH3XylrphJNQgDJC4jSS0VDWtY8.EbdtiVMz-lgql8EP?startTime=1694731540000>

Present: Michael Berger, Paul Bernard, Ben Birnbaum, Harry Bohrs, Clifford Brown, Dennis Doughty, Katherine Florio, Harry Friedman, David-Marc Goldstein, Neil Gordon, Susan Granoff, Perry Grossman, Kelly Hardebeck, Amy Hummel, Alisa Jonas, Joslin Murphy, Donelle O’Neal, Linda Olson Pehlke, Markus L. Penzel, Stephen Reeders, Carlos Ridruejo, Lee Selwyn, Alok Somani, Carolyn R. Thall, Christine Westphal

Absent: John Doggett, Carol Levin, Pamela Lodish, David Pollak

Also Attending: Ben Dubin, and John Van Scoyoc.

The meeting was called to order at 7:00 PM.

Announcements: Pursuant to this Board’s Authority under 940 CMR 29.10 (8), all of the committee members will be participating remotely via telephone or video conferencing due to emergency regulations regarding the Corona virus. The Chairman 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.

Public Comment

Seeing no questions from the public, the Chairman closed the Public Comment portion of the agenda.

Remarks from the Chairman

Harry Friedman noted that raised hand emojis will not be recognized. For Zoom meetings, put your name in the Chat to enter the queue.

Chairman Doughty shared some thoughts about Advisory Meetings process, protocols and courtesy.

“Let me start with expectations. First, we have a lighter than feared Warrant and even though there are a few items that will be either controversial, complex, or both, we have ample time to get our work done. As I have already mentioned to the subcommittee chairs, that means there should be no reason we can't have materials prepared, distributed and available in a timely fashion. That means that subcommittee reports and recommendations need to be delivered to Lisa for posting at least THIRTY-SIX hours prior to our meetings; ideally earlier. That also means that we should all strive to be prepared. We've all done it. Every single one of us is a volunteer, with a life, and we have all shown up for one of these meetings expecting to learn about the subject matter in the meeting. And no one is going to judge you for it... unless you take up the rest of the committee's time asking remedial questions that were amply covered in the report you didn't read. We are going to do our best to have the materials available well in advance to give us all time to review them.

A corollary to the timeliness concern is as follows: we assign materials to the subcommittees for two reasons. One is that it provides an opportunity for the public to be heard on a warrant article. Another is that it allows the subcommittee to do a bunch of pre-work in terms of collecting answers to questions and concerns prior to the full committee deliberations. That only works if the subcommittee is truly representing the AC. They're human, they do their best, but they can't always divine what is important to you. So, if there is something in the warrant that you are an expert in and you're not assigned to the subcommittee, you can still go to the hearing. In fact, you are encouraged to. If you have questions or concerns, SEND THEM IN ADVANCE to the subcommittee so that the groundwork can be laid. Nothing is more frustrating to a subcommittee member than to show up at the full AC, deliver a report, and then be asked a question like "did you know that Somerville does it differently? Did you consider that?"

Second, I have received MANY, MANY, complaints, and they all go something like this: you and Harry need to do a better job in reining in people who talk too much or too long. The irony is that some of the people who have made this complaint are people that other members complain about. What does that mean? It means we all do it; we all somehow fail to calibrate. I personally think Zoom makes it worse. In person it's possible to make eye contact and the universal speed-it-up gesture; over Zoom we can only interrupt, which we are all trained from birth not to do. But we are going to try. If you get muted or if we can find a nice Oscar-ceremony music cue, please do not consider it a value judgment about the content of your comments; please assume that we are trying to give everyone a chance to speak and you have either spoken too long or are getting repetitive.

Third, I think we are going to embrace different debate standards for our mostly-in-person hybrid meetings vs. our Zoom-only meetings. When we are in person, we will endeavor to go around the room the way we used to and use the 2-finger convention for a back-and-forth debate. When we are Zoom-only we will try to exclusively use the queue and 2-finger interruptions should be reserved for clarifications and extremely short remarks. And yes, we will probably have to tweak all of this as the season progresses.

Finally, because (at least in theory) we have more time available to us, we are going to expand on the off-cycle budget review process that was tested out in the spring. Later in this meeting, time permitting, I'll let Amy talk about that."

Review of Draft Meeting Schedule and Assignment of Warrant Articles to Subcommittees

The Chairman reviewed the STM Review Schedule and subcommittee assignments of Articles with brief explanations as to why that particular subcommittee was selected. There was a suggestion that some articles can be heard by the full Advisory Committee in lieu of a subcommittee hearing.

Regarding Article 6 and 7 –Since these will be heard before the full AC, there was a recommendation to change the full AC meeting date to accommodate a member's schedule who has relevant information/experience regarding them, but cannot be here for the date on the schedule.

Stephen Reeders raised a question raised about process and opining on things that we don't necessarily have expertise.

Harry Friedman responded that subcommittees can and often do invite people from the community and surrounding communities, businesses, colleges and universities to share their expertise to further inform the discussion.

Amy Hummel added that the amount of time we have already spent discussing the PFAS article that this should be a signal to David-Marc, Chair of the Public Safety Subcommittee, that a hearing would be warranted. She added our role is also to help clean up articles and improve them which is best done at the subcommittee level.

Alisa Jonas believes this article needs more discussion. Recommended folks review the report in Combined Reports related to PFAS.

Michael Berger agreed that it is important to talk about PFAS because there is a great deal of information on it and it affects a lot of people. What was the outcome of getting printed copies of the warrants? Copies of warrants are being mailed to anyone who requested a copy from the Town Clerk.

Neil Gordon suggested we don't overthink this. Sometimes something simple is way more involved than we thought. Issues come up when you have a hearing at the subcommittee level, and our subcommittee reports are essential to inform the full body. I don't think now is the time to triage our process especially since many things are light lifting.

Stephen Reeders suggested that many articles are brought that aren't relevant to a Town because they are regional or national or global. Has much consideration been given to say about certain warrant articles that we can't entertain them.

Harry Friedman once again explained that people have differing definitions of what is relevant. Just because it doesn't seem relevant to the Town, when we have in the past who came up with such a list, there were still many who even though it was outside the scope of the Town, people still wanted to take it up. Whether Advisory has to do so, that is a good question and an ongoing discussion about whether we offer an opinion but we still have to hold hearings.

Linda Olson Pehlke commented specifically about WA 6. It is a nuanced subject and needs to have a certain level of expertise review it. Chairman Doughty noted that is why it is assigned to Land Use.

Michael Berger asked a question about scheduling of subcommittee and what the policy is? Chairman Doughty explained that is up to each subcommittee. Many are moving toward a hybrid model with a space in Town Hall and over Zoom. Typically, subcommittees are held early in the morning before work or after sometimes beginning as early as 4 pm. It also depends on availability of petitioners and Town staff.

Harry Friedman noted that evening meetings are encouraged to allow people who work to attend.

Susan Granoff asked to receive a current version of the Petitioner Questionnaire and a copy was emailed to the full AC.

Amy Hummel explained that it is a tool that is useful to us, not a cudgel but also helpful to petitioners to focus their thoughts. Even if they don't complete it, it is still the subcommittee's responsibility to help them answer those questions to improve the article.

Linda Olson Pehlke asked about the survey about meeting about hybrid or in person. The Chairman noted that the schedule we came up with was influenced by that questionnaire.

Amy Hummel talked about the work of her Budget Review subcommittee and asked others to identify themes to bring back to them for discussion.

Upon a **MOTION** made and seconded to adjourn, and voted unanimously, the meeting was adjourned at 8:05 p.m.

Documents Presented <https://www.brooklinema.gov/DocumentCenter/Index/4595>

- Draft AC Meeting Schedule
- List of AC Members
- Index of Articles

- [Articles as Filed](#)
- [STM Review Schedule](#)