The Human Services Subcommittee held a public hearing at Town Hall for Article 10. In attendance were Deputy Town Administrator Melissa Goff, Assistant Town Administrator Justin Casanova-Davis, subcommittee members Harry Bohrs and Kim Smith, co-chairs, Bobbie Knable, David-Marc Goldstein, Claire Stampfer (by phone).

**Summary:**

Article 10 would amend the Town’s General By-Laws by deleting Section (G) of Article 4.9. The effect of this would eliminate the Committee on Campaigns. The rest of Article 4.9 would remain unchanged.

**Background:**

Article 4.9 was passed at the Fall Town Meeting in 2006 (Warrant Article 18) upon the recommendation of the Moderator’s Committee on Campaign Finance, which formed in 2003. The Committee on Campaigns has not met in years, although the Committee’s page on the Town website still lists members whose terms expired between 2012 and 2014. It’s mission, according to the webpage, included analyzing information from finance reports filed by candidates for Town Office, recommending ways to improve the process by which candidates are elected, and examining the concept of public financing of campaigns. A report may have been filed and the Committee considered its work complete. There currently are a number of dormant committees, and the Select Board filed this article after the Town Moderator recommended that this inactive committee be removed from the By-Laws.

**Discussion:**

No (former) member of the Committee showed up to the hearing. Discussion by the subcommittee was short. The subcommittee felt there was no need to keep this dormant committee in the By-Laws.

**Recommendation:**

By a 5-0 roll call vote, the subcommittee recommends FAVORABLE ACTION on article 10.
The Human Services Subcommittee held a public hearing at Town Hall for article 8. In attendance were Deputy Town Administrator Melissa Goff, Assistant Town Administrator Justin Casanova-Davis, Fred Russell, Brookline DPW (Water & Sewer), David Lescohier (TMM-11, AC), Ernie Frey (TMM-7), subcommittee members Harry Bohrs and Kim Smith, (co-chairs), Bobbie Knable, David-Marc Goldstein, Claire Stampfer (by phone).

Summary:

Article 8 would authorize the Select Board to file a Home Rule petition to allow the Town to offer additional discounts of the water and sewer fees to eligible seniors (65 and over) who participate in the Tax Deferral program and Senior Tax Work-off Exemption program. If passed by the Legislature, the Select Board would then determine criteria and implement the program.

Background:

Currently, 7 people are taking advantage of the program. It is estimated that the number could increase to 40-50 people. The water bill comprises both usage and a base rate (the base charge helps cover infrastructure costs). The base charge for water and sewer recoups about 15% of the cost. Seniors on the above mentioned programs currently get a 50% discount on the base rate. To be eligible, one must be 65 years old, a MA resident for 10 years, homeowner for 5 years, and income eligible. Income eligibility is based on income and assets, but exclude the house. It is the same criteria as the Tax Deferral and Senior Work-off programs. The Assessor's Office determines who qualifies.

Discussion:

David Lescohier and Ernie Frey expressed concern as to how long a home rule petition would take to wind its way through the State House. They provided language that seemed to indicate that the Town could already do what the article asks the State to authorize under Chapter 41, section 69B. They also provided a helpful study from Northeastern University (see link at end of report). Deputy Town Administrator Melissa Goff had discussed this with the Town Counsel Joslin Murphy, and it was Town Counsel's opinion that we should file the home rule petition. She wrote-

*We have determined that in order to offer the proposed senior water and sewer rate discount, the Town will need to seek special legislation. I note, as you have, that several communities apparently offer this or a similar type of discount to senior ratepayers without such authority, however DOR/DLS has taken the position under Brand v. Water Commissioners of Billerica, 242 Mass. 223 (1922) that such authority is required.*
There are issues with the current program, such as being available only to homeowners, not renters. Raising the number of eligible participants slightly will not raise rates on other ratepayers. Articles 25 and 26 of the 2018 Annual Town Meeting tasked the Town with exploring ways to provide relief to seniors who are financially stressed and risk losing their home. This proposed article would not help the vast majority of seniors who need it, but it’s a first step. The subcommittee felt that the Select Board should also look at Chapter 41 to determine if additional help could be provided now under existing State Law.

**Recommendation:**

The subcommittee voted to amend the article by adding the words “income eligible” in section 1, second line before the “residents aged 65 and over”.

By a 5-0 roll call vote, the subcommittee recommends FAVORABLE ACTION on article 8 as amended.