

BROOKLINE ADVISORY COMMITTEE
Administration and Finance Subcommittee

Report on Article 6: Resolution pertaining to the annual stipends received by members of the Select Board and other committees.

The Administration and Finance Subcommittee held a public hearing on Warrant Article 6 on Tuesday, October 1st, 2019. In attendance were Harry Bohrs, Dennis Doughty, and Neil Gordon for the subcommittee; petitioners Nicole McClelland, Mariah Nobrega, and Neil Wishinsky; Melissa Goff, Deputy Town Administrator; and members of the public Fred Perry, Bobbie Knable, and Regina Frawley.

RECOMMENDATION

By a vote of 3-0-0, the Administration and Finance Subcommittee votes FAVORABLE ACTION on Article 6 as amended below.

BACKGROUND

Warrant Article 6 seeks to expand participation and diversity of the Select Board by increasing the stipends paid to Select Board members, which petitioners believe will attract a larger and more diverse set of applicants.

Compensation has been provided to the Select Board since at least 1895. At that time the annual stipend for the Chair was \$1,200 and the other members were paid \$400. In 1901 this changed to \$1,350 for the Chair and \$750 for the other members. The full history is attached to this report. Adjusting for inflation, the “current value” of the annual stipend for the Chair has ranged from (the current) \$4,500 to \$58,748.

Stipends remained fixed between 1948 and 2010. By the end of this period the purchasing power of the stipends had decreased substantially; and in addition, at the end of this period, the Town stopped providing health insurance to Select Board members.

In the Fall of 2009 Town Meeting passed, by a wide margin, Article 15 (as amended) which called for: *(1) The Town is encouraged gradually over a period of several years to increase the stipend for the Chair of the [Select Board] from \$3,500 to \$7,000 and stipends for other members of the [Select Board] from \$2,500 to \$5,000. (2) Going forward, the Advisory Committee is encouraged at regular intervals to review the stipends for members of the [Select Board] and make recommendations for adjustments that are incorporated in the budget presented to Town Meeting.*

In May 2010, the Annual Budget was amended by \$5,000 to increase the stipends of each member by \$1,000, resulting in the stipends that have remained to this day.

Despite the overwhelming support in 2009 to gradually increase the stipends and for the Advisory Committee to make recommendations for adjustments, no such recommendations have been made in the intervening years.

The stipends paid to the Select Board (\$18,500) currently represent .006% of the budget. This proposal (\$220,000) results in an increase to 0.07%.

A table showing the compensation provided to similar officials in selected cities and towns is attached to this report.

DISCUSSION

The discussion involved three broad themes:

Barriers to participation on the Select Board and other committees.

(In other words, “who are the people who would love to be a Select Board member but can’t quite.”)

Petitioner Neil Wishinsky recounted his experience as the Select Board chair and described the position thusly: “The amount of time I was asked to allocate was really a full-time job. I represented the Town against other heads of government, state reps, and other organizations. Given our geography in many instances I would be the only volunteer in the room. It puts Brookline at a disadvantage when sitting at the table with Boston, Newton, Somerville, with their paid professionals.”

Petitioner Mariah Nobrega recounted conversations she had had with women who expressed interest in running for Select Board but were stymied by the lack of child care. Discussion yielded a “back of the envelope” calculation that child care costs could easily approach \$18,000, annually.

Paraprofessionals and residents who work for non-profits were cited as examples of people who currently combine multiple part-time jobs of which Select Board member (if appropriately compensated) could conceivably be one.

Concerns about the “right price”

A great deal of discussion centered around whether the stipend should simply be general purpose compensation or whether it should be intended to offset the expenses associated with doing the job. It has been asserted over the years that the existing stipends are mostly consumed by job expectations (“the Select Board is hit up for donations all the time”); possibly the Town should introduce a reimbursement system for child care or similar costs.

A low or graduated (phased in) stipend may simply serve as a “bonus” to those who may not really need the money.

Would raising the stipends encourage people to “do it for the money?” This, too, could be mitigated via a reimbursement mechanism. However, such a reimbursement mechanism could be awkward to administer.

Is it fair to compare 1918 salaries with 2019 salaries without thinking about how the responsibilities have changed? In 1918 there was no Town Administrator and the staff was quite different. But in 1918 the Town didn’t have 40Bs, marijuana dispensaries, and a host of other time-consuming issues.

The subcommittee expressed some support for a reimbursement strategy but ultimately concluded that a simpler solution would be to raise the stipends and evaluate what happens.

Success criteria

This led directly into the third area of discussion. Presuming stipends are raised, how can we assess their impact? It seemed clear to all in attendance that examining the candidate slate for a single election to determine whether or not the candidates who “would have run anyway” would be difficult. It would only work to examine the makeup of the Select Board after a few years, with emphasis on whether the board changed to include people with school-aged children or part-time jobs.

The largest concern was expressed as follows: “But what would happen if we set the stipends too high, or if there wasn’t any measurable change to the composition of the Board? Once stipends have been raised we can’t put that toothpaste back in the tube.” The subcommittee and petitioners both agree that stipends could not practically be eliminated or reduced overnight but that they could be phased out or scaled down at the end of each term.

The subcommittee believed the experiment is worth running and voted **FAVORABLE ACTION, by a vote of 3-0-0**, on the following amended resolution. (The only change from the petitioner’s motion is to eliminate the mandate to review the compensation status of other committees. This discussion was almost exclusively about the Select Board, and while the subcommittee recognized that other committees — particularly the School Committee — place similar demands on their members, the subcommittee believed that getting feedback on the Select Board is critical to a meaningful review of other committees’ compensation.

WARRANT ARTICLE 6, AMENDED

WHEREAS Select Board members carry heavy, time-demanding responsibilities, particularly the Select Board Chair, and

WHEREAS though the stipend increased in 2011 to \$4500 for the Chair and \$3500 for other members, those amounts do not represent the true effort involved, essentially demanding an average of 20+ hours per week of time, and

WHEREAS many town residents who might otherwise be interested cannot afford to provide their time to this level and therefore the current system is exclusionary and eliminates potentially excellent candidates, and

WHEREAS all Brookline inhabitants and employees will benefit from an inclusive Select Board elected from competitive races.

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED THAT:

1. The Town is encouraged to raise the annual stipends of the Select Board to \$40,000 (members) and \$60,000 (chair) effective for the Fiscal Year beginning July 1, 2020, and
2. Such stipend should increase annually by an amount equal to the general increase granted to Department Heads pending an affirmative action by Town Meeting to ratify that increase.as stated in the budget Conditions of Appropriation.
3. This experience will be used to inform a future review of the compensation status of other committees, with a focus on the School Committee.

Year	Chair Stipend (\$)	Current Value (\$)	Member Stipend (\$)	Current Value (\$)
1895	1,200	36,592	400	12,197
1901	1,350	40,750	750	22,639
1902-1915	1,500	44,676	1,000	29,784
1916-1947	2,500	58,748	1,500	35,249
1948-2010	3,500	37,199	2,500	26,570
2011 - present	4,500		3,500	

(Current value according to the CPI Inflation calculator at <http://www.in2013dollars.com/us/inflation/>)

	Structure	Pop	Compensation				# of members of SB or Council	Exec \$/ person
			Select Board		Mayor/City Council			
			Members	Chair	Councilors	Mayor		
Brookline	Town	59,000	3,500	4,500			5	\$0.37
Boston	City	694,000			103,500	207,000	13	\$2.24
Cambridge	City	119,000			83,600	118,000	9	\$7.31
Quincy	City	94,600			29,700	150,000	9	\$4.41
Newton	City	89,000			9750	125,000	24	\$4.03
Somerville	City	75,800			25,000	145,000	11	\$5.54
Malden	City	61,000			17,500	105,000	11	\$4.88
Medford	City	57,888				142,000	7	\$2.45
Lexington	Town	31,400	0	0			5	\$0.00
Easton	Town	23,100	1,800	1,800			5	\$0.47
Grafton	Town	17,800	1,000	1,000			5	\$0.34
Raynham	Town	13,400	6,200	6,200			3	\$1.85