

*To: Economic Development Advisory Board Members*

*From: Al Raine and Paul Saner*

*CC: Jonathan Davis*

*Date: September 10, 2021*

*RE: Article 14 - Amend Article 3.12 of the Town's General By-Law to require EDAB members to disclose affiliations with organized non-government groups when voting*

We are writing to urge you to vote No Action on [Article 14](#), which inappropriately singles out one Town board (EDAB) and one advocacy group. The involvement of Town board and committee members in outside advocacy groups is common. While the basic idea behind the Article—for meeting minutes of board votes to record outside affiliations of members—may have some merit, targeting one board (EDAB) and one advocacy group is an obvious double standard. (Furthermore, this article cannot be amended within scope to apply to all public bodies, or to add provisions for how a list of outside affiliations would be developed and how this requirement would be enforced.)

The Petitioner's article explanation states *that "an advocacy group identified two of its leading members as also being members of EDAB."*

The group referenced is [Building a Better Brookline](#) (BaBB), a coalition of advocates across six constituencies. Two of its 13 Planning Committee members are members of EDAB, two are from the Housing Advisory Board (HAB), and there is one each from the Advisory Council on Public Health, the Commission on Diversity, Inclusion, and Community Relations, and the Transportation Board. BaBB Planning Committee members serve in their individual capacities; affiliations with Town boards are listed for transparency.

There is nothing unusual about members of Town boards and committees also serving on various advocacy groups. To cite an obvious and current example, of the seven Steering Committee Members of [Brookline by Design](#), five serve on the Advisory Committee; four of them are on the eight-member Land Use, Zoning, and Sustainability Subcommittee.

The Petitioner states that BaBB “*adopted a slogan EDAB has been using for years.*”

The name “Building a Better Brookline” was recommended by a member of BaBB’s Planning Committee who serves on the HAB; no one involved in that decision was aware that EDAB’s letterhead included these words. The one member of EDAB who was part of the BaBB naming discussion was unaware of this, because it appeared on EDAB’s letterhead as a graphic, not as text accessible to a screen reader for the blind. The other EDAB member involved in BaBB was not part of the naming discussion and was also unaware that those words appeared in the EDAB letterhead. After the BaBB name began being used, the Economic Development Director pointed out the issue, and the words in question will no longer appear in EDAB’s letterhead.

The Petitioner asserts “*The publicizing traded on the reputation of EDAB.*”

To suggest that there was any public association of this slogan with EDAB when members themselves were unaware of it is unfounded. Communications on EDAB letterhead have consisted primarily of semi-annual advisory memos to the Select Board with recommendations about warrant articles, and, to our knowledge, the slogan did not appear on EDAB’s meeting notices or numerous email communications.

The Petitioner also asserts “*The publicizing implies that the group has influence within EDAB.*”

The petitioner suggests inappropriate influence and a lack of transparency. This is unfounded and unwarranted. On several occasions the two EDAB members involved in BaBB have informed the twelve-person EDAB board of their BaBB activity. BaBB, unlike Brookline by Design and some other advocacy groups, does not raise funds or make candidate endorsements. The one public endorsement BaBB made prior to the petitioner filing this article was for the voters to approve the Community Preservation Act, a matter that EDAB did not discuss. Should there arise a situation where BaBB takes a position on a matter that comes before EDAB, the members in question would, as a matter of course, remind the entire EDAB board of their involvement.

We note the presence of an alternative approach in the form of [Article 13](#), which would continue to require nearly all public bodies to record roll call votes once the present COVID emergency order expires. This is a sound “good government” proposal, which efficiently applies principles of transparency and accountability uniformly among Town boards and committees.