

ARTICLE 6

SIXTH ARTICLE

Submitted by: Board of Assessors

To see if the Town will elect to establish an additional property tax exemption for fiscal year 2024 which shall be uniform for all exemptions, in accordance with Section 4 of Chapter 73 of the Acts of 1986, as amended by Chapter 126 of the Acts of 1988, and accept said Section 4, as amended, or act on anything relative thereto.

PETITIONER’S ARTICLE DESCRIPTION

This article provides for an increase in the property tax exemptions for certain classes of individuals, including surviving spouses, low-income elderly, the blind and disabled veterans. The proposed increases, which require annual reauthorizations, have been approved by Town Meeting continually since FY1989.

SELECT BOARD’S RECOMMENDATION

This article provides for an increase in the property tax exemption amounts for certain classes of individuals, including surviving spouses, the elderly, the blind and disabled veterans. The proposed increases, which require annual reauthorizations, have been approved annually since FY1989. The estimated cost for FY2024 is approximately \$41,025 and is funded from the tax abatement overlay reserve account. The law allows the Town to increase the exemptions by up to 100% as indicated on the following schedule, which are recommended by the Board of Assessors:

Description	Ch.59, Sec.5 Clause	FY2023 #Granted	Basic Amount Exempted	Proposed Amount Exempted
Surviving Spouse	17D	3	\$175	\$350
Veteran (10% Disability)	22	40	\$400	\$800
Veteran (loss of one hand, foot or eye)	22A	0	\$750	\$1,500
Veteran (loss of two hands, feet or eyes)	22B	0	\$1,250	\$2,500
Veteran (special housing)	22C	0	\$1,500	\$3,000
Veteran (certain widows of soldiers)	22D	0	\$250	\$500
Veteran (100% disability, cannot work)	22E	6	\$1,000	\$2,000
Blind	37A	29	\$500	\$1,000
Elderly	41C	8	\$500	\$1,000

A unanimous Select Board voted FAVORABLE ACTION on the following motion:

VOTED: That the Town elect to establish an additional property tax exemption for fiscal year 2024 which shall be uniform for all exemptions, in accordance with Section 4 of Chapter 73 of the Acts of 1986, as amended by Chapter 126 of the Acts of 1988, and accept said Section 4, as amended.

ROLL CALL VOTE:

Aye:

- Greene
- Aschkenasy
- VanScoyoc
- Sandman

ADVISORY COMMITTEE'S RECOMMENDATION

Recommendation: FAVORABLE ACTION on Warrant Article 6 by a vote of 22-0-1.

Executive Summary	Article 6 is an annual warrant article to double the base amount of state-mandated local property tax exemptions for certain classes of qualifying individuals (including disabled veterans, blind persons, surviving spouses with low assets, and elderly taxpayers with both low income and low assets).
Voting Yes will...	Permit the Town to grant some additional property tax relief to approximately 90 qualifying taxpayers.
Voting No will...	For the first time since 1989, increase the tax burden on those qualifying individuals.
Financial impact	The estimated cost for FY24 of increasing these exemptions is \$42,600 and would be paid out of the Town's tax abatement overlay reserve account.
Legal impact	None.

Background

This article would allow the Town in FY24 to continue its current practice of doubling the base amount of certain state-mandated property tax exemptions for several classes of

qualifying taxpayers, including disabled veterans, blind persons, surviving spouses with low assets, and elderly taxpayers with both low income and low assets. The Town is required by state law to give these taxpayers, if eligible, a base property tax exemption in the amount specified in Chapter 59, Section 5, of the Massachusetts General Laws and for which the Town is reimbursed by the state (fully for the elderly exemption and partially for the others). State law provides for a local, optional, annual increase in the mandated exemption classes and is paid out of the Town's tax abatement overlay reserve account. The proposed increases, which require annual re-authorizations, are recommended by the Board of Assessors and have been approved each year by Town Meeting since FY1989.

Discussion

The table below shows, for each category: the number of Brookline taxpayers who received an exemption in FY23, the base dollar amount exempted under state law for each category, the additional exemption amount proposed in this Warrant Article (which, in all categories, doubles the original amount), and the total cost to the Town.

Description	Ch. 59, §5 Clause	FY23 # Granted	Base Amount Exempted (\$)	Additional Amount Exempted (\$)	Total Cost to Town (\$)
Surviving spouses	17D	4	175	175	700
Veterans (10% disability)	22	41	400	400	16,400
Veterans (100% disability)	22E	6	1,000	1,000	6,000
Blind persons	37A	30	500	500	15,000
Elderly	41C	9	500	500	4,500
TOTAL		90			42,600

During the past nine years, veterans have constituted an average of 54% of the recipients of these exemptions, blind persons 32%, the elderly 10%, and surviving spouses 3%. These percentages do not reflect the proportional distribution of these demographic groups among Brookline's population (for example, seniors comprise over 20% of Brookline's total population, veterans and blind residents considerably less). One reason for these disparities is that the exemptions for veterans and blind taxpayers do not have any income or asset cap requirements, unlike those for the elderly and surviving spouses.

The actual annual cost to the Town of these doubled exemptions has been steadily decreasing during the past decade, dropping from \$62,000 in FY15, when there were 126 Brookline exemption recipients, to about \$55,000 in FY19, when the number of recipients was 110. In FY23, there are 90 recipients and the cost to the Town is \$42,600. Since 2019, the number of exemption recipients has decreased by 18%, and the total cost to the Town by 23%. This trend is likely to continue, and so the FY24 cost to the Town of doubling the base amount of these exemptions is unlikely to exceed \$42,600.

The Town plans to increase efforts to inform potential recipients about these exemptions. Currently, the burden is on the taxpayer to find out about available tax assistance programs and to apply for them each year before the April 1 deadline.

Recommendation

By a vote of 22-0 with 1 abstention, the Advisory Committee recommends FAVORABLE ACTION on Warrant Article 6.

ARTICLE 6 ADVISORY COMMITTEE VOTES

Article Description	Property Tax Exemptions
AC recommendation (Favorable Action unless indicated)	22-0-1
Ben Birnbaum	Y
Harry Bohrs	Y
Cliff Brown	Y
Patty Correa	Y
John Doggett	Y
Katherine Florio	Y
Harry Friedman	Y
David-Marc Goldstein	Y
Neil Gordon	
Susan Granoff	Y
Kelly Hardebeck	Y
Amy Hummel	Y
Anita Johnson	
Alisa Jonas	A
Janice Kahn	
Pam Lodish	Y
Joslin Murphy	Y
Donelle O’Neal, Sr.	Y
Linda Olson Pehlke	Y
Markus Penzel	Y
David Pollak	Y
Stephen Reeders	Y
Carlos Ridruejo	Y
Lee Selwyn	
Alok Somani	Y
Carolyn Thall	Y
Christine Westphal	Y
Dennis Doughty *	
* Chairperson does not vote except to break a tie	