

BROOKLINE COMMUNITY AGING NETWORK  
Livable Community Advocacy Committee LCAC  
December 7, 2020  
Notes

Attending: Matt Weiss (ZOOM host), Paula Friedman, Ruthann Dobek, Susan Granoff, John Harris, Charlie Silverman, Melissa Trevvett, Lydia Kaufman, Susan Cohen, Henry Winkelman, Marion Freedman-Gurspan, David Trevvett, Nancy White, Roger Blood, Diana Spiegel, Mary Lou Crimmins, Carol Seibert

1. Paula Friedman offered to chair this meeting and Carol Seibert to take notes. It was suggested that we all mute ourselves unless speaking to minimize distractions.
  
2. Guest Ruthann Dobek, Co-Chair of BrooklineCAN with Frank Caro, opened our discussion on how to move forward in LCAC following the death of our valued friend, Frank. Ruthann began with a brief history of the LCAC with its early and ongoing emphasis on the large problems of affordable housing and transportation needs of Brookline's seniors. Some of the smaller more focused projects LCAC has taken on include pedestrian lighting, snow removal from sidewalks, benches, and the age-friendly business campaign. Our pre-election Candidate Forums are always well-attended. These are the kinds of efforts that we will likely want to continue. What new initiatives will we want to tackle? The BrooklineCAN Steering Committee is considering a remote winter Retreat to plan our umbrella organization's future. We'll hear more on this later. Ruthann then welcomed comment. Many of those present expressed their feelings of loss and appreciation for the leadership Frank Caro provided. Several noted that he had a special understanding of how our town works, how to get things done, whom to address on what issue. He had a broad vision, brought us speakers on issues we care about, and was known and respected all over town. Frank's quiet persistence paid off with real results. He gave members of the LCAC an introduction to Brookline government and offered engagement as well as education and advocacy. Moving to a discussion of our goals going forward, Susan Granoff brought up a possible new area for expanding our advocacy: financial insecurity among our seniors. She has been working on senior property tax relief. What more can we do now specifically for seniors, especially during the near future as COVID has only exacerbated the problems which are invisible to many? Inviting some of the Town's new hires to our meetings would allow us to educate them about our needs. Marion sees a public education role for us, for example, informing about how to create and shepherd a Warrant Article to

passage. One idea would be a one-off Zoom public educational event which could also serve as a recruitment tool to expand LCAC membership. Charlie Silverman suggested that a mission statement would be a good place to start our future planning.

*\*\* N.B. After the meeting, Ruthann provided this currently available description:*

***The Livable Community Advocacy Committee** calls attention to Brookline's outstanding qualities and advocates for changes that will make Brookline a better community. The committee collaborates with other organizations as they seek community improvements. The committee holds open meetings on a regular basis and invites all community residents to attend meetings and join the committee. \*\**

3. Paula Friedman: What should our LCAC voice be and how to amplify it. Given that there are a number of strong advocacy groups in Brookline (for example the school, racial justice, and green lobbies) and given that senior interests are often misunderstood or invisible, should we consider acting as a Gray Caucus? The goal would be to raise the profile of older adults and their priorities. It might be useful to formalize our input at Town Meeting, or even to form a sort of Political Action Group called the Senior Action Caucus. Susan Granoff recently shepherded a senior property tax relief article through the Town Meeting and noticed the need for a more overtly political, activist, and vocal senior advocacy group. She does not see this to be the role of LCAC, but of a separate organization that would focus on electing candidates who are supportive of senior issues, getting legislation passed that was helpful to seniors, and giving current officials letter grades based on their voting track record and public statements and actions on key senior issues. Marion suggests that every Town committee should have representation from every age cohort. Any LCAC members who are interested in working on this (in a group separate from LCAC) are asked to contact Susan Granoff and Paula Friedman.
4. Susan Granoff: Some results of the Fall Brookline Town Meeting: This was a 6 night meeting with more than 40 Warrant Articles to consider. A) Among the decisions taken was the passage of a senior citizen property tax exemption home rule petition by a 5:1 vote. (This exemption is subject to MA legislative approval. The new legislative session begins in January. Public hearings will be held where LCAC could have a voice. LCAC can also advocate by writing letters to committee chairs. This process is likely to take up to two years.) Of note is that four out of five of our Select Board were not in favor of this article and they are the ones who would have to implement it. This reinforces the point made by many that there is a lack of understanding and empathy on the part of our town

leaders who demonstrate that they do not grasp the concept that a property owner may have a substantial home value, but not have adequate income. B) Town Meeting voted that the Town Clerk should be an appointed position rather than an elected one due to the fact that this increasingly technical position requires specific capabilities. C) An article that would adopt the Community Preservation Act with a 1% property tax surcharge passed. D) Raising the stipend of the members of the Brookline Select Board and new stipends for the members of the School Committee were rejected. E) Thirty- three million dollars for high school renovation and expansion was approved. F) Purchase of the Newbury West parcel for \$ 15 million was approved subject to voter approval of the necessary increase in the property tax. G) Articles on Ranked Choice Voting and new programs for affordable housing were referred to committee.

5. John Harris and Charlie Silverman: Masks and social distancing signs in apartment lobbies, elevators, and stairwells: As a result of advocacy at the precinct level, the Town has designed some excellent signage pointing out that by order of the Brookline Department of Public Health face coverings are mandatory in all common areas of residential buildings. Dr. Swannie Jett, Director of Public Health is the named authority. There was discussion about the many ways members of the LCAC might work to bring the new signage to attention. David Trevvett mentioned that BrooklineCAN has a list of town residential buildings with elevators which he will get out to us. Roger Blood notes that the Brookline Building Department has a list of elevators that require regular inspection. BrooklineCAN newsletter goes out to about 1000 people in town and could be a good way to publicize this with pictures of the two signs. The Brookline TAB is another way to spread the word. Dr. Jett is emphasizing that even after the vaccine roll-out begins there will be a months-long need to continue masks and social distancing. A public meeting of the Brookline Advisory Committee on Public Health is coming up and is on the town website calendar. John Harris is willing to take the lead on this and plans to be in touch with Carol Caro on the BCAN Communications Committee and others.

The next meeting of LCAC will be on Monday, January 4, 2021 at 3:00 - 4:30 pm. Matt Weiss volunteered to host the ZOOM event again. Susan Granoff offered to chair that meeting, and Melissa Trevvett will take the notes. At this time, the agenda includes a discussion of the organizational structure we want LCAC to have. Nuts and bolts questions of leadership, more formal roles and functional responsibilities may need to be worked out, possibly by a smaller committee charged with coming up with some ideas to present to the larger group. What we have at present is a committed core group of talented people who are especially interested in the town's seniors and their

needs. To ensure a long-term effective advocacy role for ourselves, and to expand our membership, we may need a bit more structure. Anyone who has ideas for other agenda items should let Susan Granoff know so that she can create an agenda for the next meeting. Anyone with corrections to these notes should let Carol Seibert know.