

BROOKLINE COMMUNITY AGING NETWORK  
Livable Community Advocacy Committee (LCAC)  
January 10, 2022

Attending: Susan Granoff (Chair, Presenter), Deborah Brown (Guest Presenter), Ruthann Dobek (Presenter), Carol Seibert (Notetaker), Julie Washburn, Emily Rindermann, Carol Caro, Janet Gelbart, Marion Freedman-Gurspan, Lou Crimmins, Ruth Seidman, Marsha Frankel, Yolanda Rodriguez, Matt Weiss, David Trevvett, Susan Cohen, Roger Blood, John Harris, Ruthann Sneider, Melissa Trevvett

1. Brookline Improvement Coalition's Proposal Seeking ARPA Funding for a Home Repair Grant-and-Loan Program to Help Low-and Moderate-Income Brookline Senior Residents Make Essential Repairs

Presenter: Deborah Brown (Town Meeting Member and President of Brookline Improvement Coalition, BIC)

Background: Brookline Improvement Coalition is Brookline's Community Development Corporation (CDC) focused on providing more affordable housing for the people who live in the town. As President, Ms. Brown has become aware of an important unmet need and is presenting her proposal for consideration by LCAC. She is hoping to gauge the degree of our interest in partnering with BIC to apply for funding through the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021 for a program aimed at providing financial grants and loans to low-and moderate-income senior residents of Brookline to allow them to make essential repairs to their homes. She provided us with a brief draft of her proposal and entertained questions and suggestions. There followed a vigorous engagement with many of the meeting attendees participating. As the proposal undergoes further elaboration, the following topics would benefit from clarification:

Who will administer the proposed program? What age qualifies as senior? Would landlords and/or renters be eligible? Who will do the needs assessment to determine qualification? Should the program offer both grants and loans? If limited to grants of \$5000., how much can realistically be done with that amount of assistance? Should the program focus on

small home improvements that materially improve safety and permit older residents to remain in their homes longer such as bathroom grab bars, new toilet, small plumbing replacements, etc, as opposed to larger projects for which the cost could be very high? Could the program negotiate prices with selected contractors? If loans are to be included in the proposal, which financial institution might be interested in writing the loans, determining the terms, and dealing with re-payment? How might senior applicants feel about assuming additional debt? How does the program duration to 2026 fit with the termination of the ARPA program?

Several attendees were familiar with a Brookline program which existed about twenty years ago and was administered through the Building Department. A home improvement loan at 0% interest to be repaid before 18 years allowed for projects like house painting. This program eventually terminated when it was felt that there were too few recipients to justify the administrative costs given that it was very labor-intensive for town staff. But would the same be true today? That would need to be researched. Further discussion included an offer on the part of Climate Action Brookline to support BIC proposals for efforts aimed at reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

Outcome: The group expressed its appreciation to Deborah Brown and BIC for initiating a proposal to help this currently unmet need in Brookline. There was general agreement that the LCAC supports the proposal's goal of facilitating home repairs to improve the health and safety of the living conditions of low-and moderate-income Brookline seniors. Based on the questions raised, it seemed that more work, thought, and research will be needed before the proposal can be finalized. Once the proposal has been further revised (perhaps after further consultations with the Building Department and the Council on Aging/Senior Center Director), a more final version of the proposal could be presented at a future LCAC and/or BrooklineCAN Steering Committee meeting.

## 2. COVID-Related Services Offered by Brookline's Senior Center and LCAC Advocacy Opportunities

Presenter: Ruthann Dobek (Director, Brookline Council on Aging; Director, Brookline Senior Center; and Co-Chair, BrooklineCAN)

The ever-evolving COVID picture has now resulted in Brookline infection rates higher than at any time in the pandemic. The Brookline Senior Center attempts to stay on top of developments as the State and Town Department of Public Health provide new data and guidance. As things change, the Senior Center communicates through its list-serves to keep residents up to date. Currently, the Senior Center has paused its programming and in-person gatherings for a minimum of two weeks. They continue to offer the Grab-and-Go lunch program, medical transportation, Podiatry services, and Social Services. Individuals may enter the building fully masked. Approximately 18,000 at-home rapid COVID test kits have been received by the Brookline Health Department and Senior Center staff obtained a supply that allowed them to distribute approximately 900 test kits in the week before Christmas. Ruthann reports that the town will be setting up another testing site at the underground garage and plans a Moderna booster clinic for January 20th as well as some additional vaccine clinics. In response to several questions, Ruthann Dobek also reported that the Senior Center has seen a higher demand for Social Services due to COVID. In the past week alone, there have been seven new Social Work referrals. A therapy group had been preparing to focus on resilience and coping skills. With the surge in COVID, this group has unfortunately been postponed. The Senior Center has been working with Patrick Maloney, the Brookline Acting Commissioner of Public Health and Human Services, as the town is reportedly interviewing for a new Director. Once that position has been filled, Ruthann hopes LCAC will be in a position to actively advocate on behalf of older adults. The Council on Aging has submitted three proposals for ARPA funding to the Town. These will address food insecurity, transportation, and mental health. Current Senior Center options for seniors in need of transportation to medical appointments include Modern Ride (formerly Bay State Taxi), subsidized rides with Uber and Lyft, and Senior van transport which has been limited by the loss of one of their two van drivers. There is a labor shortage which complicates the effort to recruit a second van driver. Last month more subsidized medical transportation rides were provided than pre-pandemic.

A ride service specifically for eye appointments continues to be available. The Senior Center is committed to covering medical transportation needs with funding from a variety of sources. The BrooklineCAN monthly newsletter publicizes the transportation options available and provides a link to TRIPPS. In addition, Maria Foster, the TRIPPS coordinator, is able to personalize assistance with transportation needs, and can be contacted directly. At an upcoming meeting, Ruthann Dobek will plan to discuss potential advocacy efforts for LCAC. The February BrooklineCAN newsletter will also feature an article highlighting vacancies available for volunteers to work on Town boards and committees.

3. Report on the New Community Preservation Act (CPA) Property Tax Surcharge, Brookline's 2022 Precinct Changes, and Key Fall Town Meeting Actions

Presenter: Susan Granoff (Town Meeting Member, Advisory Committee Member, and LCAC Chair).

A. CPA Property Tax Surcharge Exemption: This new 1% surcharge appears on current property tax bills. For income-eligible seniors there is an available exemption. To qualify, seniors must have a total 2020 household income no greater than \$70,750. for a household of one and \$80,850. for a household of two. For non-seniors, lower income limits apply. Of note, all 2020 medical costs can be subtracted from income. Details on the exemption program and application forms are available on the town Assessor's Office website section on the Community Preservation Act at the following link:

<https://www.brooklinema.gov/2046/community-preservation-act> Exemption applications are due by April 1. Ruthann believes that all those in the Brookline property tax work-off program will be eligible for this exemption and will notify those individuals. Susan Granoff will contact the chief Assessor to inquire whether the entire application must be completed. Streamlining the process would make it less intimidating for applicants and reduce the work of the Assessor's staff. Some residents may be reluctant to submit medical information unless it will materially affect their eligibility, and it may be that the 2020 State tax return is unnecessary. We want to

encourage the Assessor to advertise the exemption broadly. The COA and BrooklineCAN will include a piece in the Newsletter and note that the Senior Center has a staff person who is available to assist with applications for any of the available property tax exemptions.

B. Brookline Re-Precincting: In response to 2020 Census population growth in Brookline, an appointed re-precincting committee chaired by Select Board Chair Heather Hamilton worked through the Fall to comply with the requirement that precincts be re-drawn to limit the number of residents per precinct to 4000 or fewer. The Brookline Committee also had the goal of creating two minority majority precincts. The town now has one additional precinct for a total of 17 and the boundary lines of all but one precinct have been redrawn. Every Town Meeting Member except those in Precinct 16 whose term does not expire in 2022 will be up for re-election in the May, 2022 election. In addition, a number of new candidates will likely be inspired to run. This will be an excellent opportunity to encourage participation by seniors with an interest in taking an active role in town government. Matt Weiss points out that the next senior program on AFC TV will feature an interview with the Town Clerk who will give information on how to utilize the town's maps to determine your precinct and voting location. This program will also appear on the BrooklineCAN website.

C. Town Meeting Summary: Some key Fall 2021 Town Meeting actions were reviewed. Over a period of four days in November and December, Town Meeting voted on almost 40 warrant articles nearly all of which were not controversial and passed with overwhelming votes of approval. Among these were:

1. A By-law amendment brought by the DPW and ADA coordinator with the help of LCAC's David Trevvett which makes owners responsible for **removing vegetative growth** on their property if it obstructs passage on sidewalks and streets, and subject to fines if they do not.
2. A By-law requiring the town to create a plan to provide **language access services** by all town departments and to conduct a study and hire a staff person to be the town's Language Access Coordinator. About 30% of the town's residents are foreign-born and an estimated

9% have limited English language proficiency. This is of particular note to the senior community because a significant number of such residents are seniors.

3. New By-laws to establish **gun store zoning restrictions and to ban retail sales of fur products**. (We have no gun stores at present, but this would severely restrict possible future locations.)
4. Resolution creating a **planning process study committee** to jumpstart the long overdue process of revising our town's zoning code and developing a new comprehensive land use plan.
5. Many articles to **facilitate hybrid town and committee meetings** in the future. This includes resolutions to exempt the town from in-person quorum requirements, to establish a schedule for retrofitting all town hall meeting rooms with the necessary technology, and to submit a home rule petition authorizing the town to hold hybrid meetings.
6. **Climate control**: Resolutions encouraging the town's use of low carbon concrete, expanding the town's composting program, and giving the Zoning Board of Appeals much more power to amend zoning bylaws to reduce off-street residential parking requirements in parcels within a half-mile of a green line stop (Transit Parking Overlay District Zone).
7. There were three articles related to **recreational marijuana sale**. Town Meeting referred to committee the article requesting two new licenses and referred another article requesting study of our policies related to the sale of marijuana to the town's Public Health Advisory Board. In addition, it voted down the article seeking to round down the number of marijuana licenses permitted.

#### 4. Other Business:

Susan reports that Dennis Doughty is to be the new Advisory Committee Chair until July, replacing Michael Sandman.

Roger Blood informs us that there will be a new facility in Chestnut Hill, The Residence at Boylston Place, at the corner of Heath and Tully Sts. It will replace a previous residence primarily devoted to skilled nursing care with

a conversion to 51 new Assisted Living units and 18 memory care beds. Because it is a conversion, it should be available sometime this year. Roger also informs us that the Housing Advisory Board (HAB) is working with a consulting team to administer a Housing Production Plan for Brookline. Look on the town website under Planning and Community Development for details. The HAB is strongly urging community members and stakeholders in affordable housing to offer input for consideration. There will be a number of events set up, many on Zoom, to allow for participation by the public.

**NEXT MEETING: MONDAY, FEBRUARY 7, 2022 AT 3:00 PM**