

Brookline Community Aging Network

Livable Community Advocacy Committee

March 2, 2020

Notes

Attendance: Clara Chin, Susan Cohen, Maria Foster, Marion Freedman-Gurspan, Susan Granoff, John Harris, Sherry Lee, Rose Rothstein, John Seay, Carol Seibert, Gordon Szerlip, David Trevvett, Melissa Trevvett, Matt Weiss, Nancy White, & Frank Caro. Guest: Todd Kirrane

Proposal for improved use of curb lanes in commercial areas. Todd Kirrane spoke about making better use of curb lanes in selected commercial areas. He focused mostly on Beacon Street in the St. Mary's commercial area. His starting point is that there is heavy demand for use of the curbside. The demand includes parking of cars, handicapped parking, unloading of commercial vehicles, and drop offs and pickups by taxis, ride hailing services, and personal cars. Currently, with most of the curbside devoted to parking, the bicycle lane has served as the loading zone. The consequence is congestion experienced by cyclists and motorists. Todd is encouraging more businesses to use the private roads behind their buildings for deliveries. His major proposal is to take away two or three metered spaces in the middle of the block to create a loading space. Package delivery trucks, ride hailing services, and personal car drop offs and pickups would be expected to use those spaces instead of double parking in the bicycle lane.

One result would be greater safety for cyclists. Traffic flow would also be improved. The loss of total parking spaces would be modest.

Todd is also encouraging this approach on Green Street near Harvard Street. The Transportation Board is taking away two metered spaces on Green Street near the Harvard Street intersection to create a loading zone. He is also adding a second loading zone on Green Street for afternoon use only.

Todd considers these changes to be experimental. If the results are not satisfactory, he will propose other solutions. Todd is working closely with businesses to assure that there is good feedback and to assure that results will please business owners.

Todd was asked about possible loss of revenue from metered parking. The extent of loss of revenue from parking meters is not yet known. Todd believes that improvements in safety and efficiency in traffic flow are more important than the loss revenue from parking meters.

Todd answered questions on other transportation issues.

Todd explained the Transportation Board's long-term vision that use of private automobiles should decrease. Remaining automobiles will be powered by electricity. More people will travel by public transit and bicycles.

Todd defended the decision to move the bike lane on the outbound side of Beacon in the St. Mary's commercial area to the curb lane. Cars will be parked along the two travel lanes. Todd pointed out that there will be a three-foot buffer lane between the parking lane and the bicycle lane. Todd reported that there have been no accidents involving automobile passengers and bicycles in the existing curbside bicycle lanes in Boston on Beacon Street.

Todd addressed concerns about adequacy of parking for shoppers in JFK Crossing and Brookline Village. Parking spaces have been lost on a temporary basis in JFK Crossing because of construction projects. In Brookline Village construction workers have been using on-street parking. Parking pressure should be reduced after construction work is completed.

Short-term parking has been tried and abandoned in Brookline commercial areas. The approach failed because of inadequate enforcement.

Shuttle buses are not feasible in the Brookline commercial areas because of inadequate projected ridership.

Efforts are underway to speed up bus service. One idea is to eliminate fares. Another idea is to create bus & bicycle-only lanes. The bus-only lane idea is being explored on Washington Street. It is not being considered for Harvard Street because of the many curb extensions (to assist pedestrians) on Harvard Street.

Election forum. BrooklineCAN and the Senior Center will co-sponsor an election forum scheduled on Monday, April 27 from 4 to 6 PM. The first part of the forum will be devoted to Select Board candidates. At least three candidates will be competing for two seats on the Board. The candidates have been invited and have accepted the invitation.

Michael Allen will moderate the forum again this year.

The first three questions to Select Board candidates will be on senior issues. LCAC members will be expected to come up with questions for the candidates.

We hope to devote a portion of the forum to the Newbury College- Welltower debt exclusion proposal. If passed, the Town will borrow money to purchase a portion of the former Newbury College site from Welltower. We will need to recruit both proponents and opponents of the proposal to speak at the forum. Initial efforts to recruit speakers have not been successful.

We do not know yet whether the School Committee race will be contested. We are less interested in hearing from School Committee candidates because school issues tend to be a lower priority for seniors who attend our election forums.

Property tax legislation. Susan Granoff reported that H. 3682, a Brookline home rule petition to provide circuit breaker relief to certain financially stressed Brookline Senior Homeowners has been reported favorably by the Joint Committee on Revenue. The proposal would benefit Brookline seniors who do not qualify for the Circuit Breaker because their property values are too high. The proposal requires favorable action by another committee in the Legislature before it goes into effect. The cost of the proposed property tax relief will be covered by Brookline tax payors. This is the proposal that Susan developed and brought successfully to Town Meeting.

The other legislation in S. 1692 concerned with the senior property tax deferral program that we discussed at our February meeting has been referred for further study.

Visit to Brookline Housing Authority's Col. Floyd Development. Frank reported briefly on the LCAC visit to the Col. Floyd Housing Development on February 21. The visit was hosted by the Brookline Housing Authority. Mike Jacobs, chair of the Housing Authority, gave a presentation on plans for refurbishing existing senior buildings and replacing entirely the Col. Floyd development. The Col. Floyd development is on Marian Street. A new building on the Col. Floyd site would add at least 40 new units. The site is ideal for senior housing because it is close to Coolidge Corner and quiet. A taller building is appropriate because there are several taller buildings already in the area. Funding for the project might come from Welltower affordable housing payments to the Brookline Housing trust fund. Participants in the tour also visited O'Shea House on Park Street where existing senior units are being upgraded. Participants were impressed with a unit that had not yet been refurbished. (Because of a mix-up involving a lock, the tour group was not able to see a refurbished unit.)

Affordable Housing event on Sunday, March 29. The Diversity and Inclusion Commission is holding the first of three forums on HOUSING AFFORDABILITY on March 29th. The theme will be – “Brookline Together: Solving Our Housing Crisis.” The forum will be held from 1 to 3 PM at the Runkle School. BrooklineCAN has been involved in planning for the forum. Our participation is needed to assure attention to expansion of supply of affordable senior housing.

Transportation in cities in India. Frank reported briefly on his experiences as a pedestrian during a recent visit to Northern India. Typically, there are no sidewalks along streets in India. Pedestrians must walk in the street. Walking is hazardous because pedestrians often have to walk into travel lanes because of other activity along the side of the road. Motorcycles are the dominant mode of transportation. There is a continuous stream of motorcycles often four abreast. Crossing streets is dangerous because of the thick vehicle traffic. Pedestrians can cross most safely when they are part of a large group of pedestrians crossing together. Signalized intersections are rare.

Major topic for next meeting. John Harris requested that we discuss continuing care communities for older people living in their own homes.

Next meeting: Monday, April 6.