

# Brookline Community Aging Network

## *Livable Community Advocacy Committee*

### **Agenda**

May 6, 2019

Attendance: Pat Ahlin, Shirley Selhub, Melissa Trevvett, Matt Weiss, John Harris, Susan Cohen, Carol Seibert,. Guests: Heather Hamilton, Ruthann Dobek, Maria Foster, Yolanda Rodriguez, Saralynn Allaire, Jean Doherty, Nancy White, Barbara Kean, Monique Richardson, and Hugh Mattison

1. **Electric scooters, bicycles on sidewalks, and pedestrian safety.** Fortunately Select Board Member Heather Hamilton attended the meeting and provided an extemporaneous explanation of the rationale for the electric scooter trial. The aim is to provide a new transportation option to complement other modes of transportation. One aim is to reduce use of private automobiles by providing a low-cost, rapid option for short trips.

In the first month of the trial, demand for scooters exceeded expectations with 16,000 scooter trips taken by users in Brookline. The average trip was just under one-mile in length. The short trips are affected by the fact that the trial is limited to Brookline. Users are charged extra if they travel outside of Brookline.

Problems with scooters are concentrated in four areas: use of helmets, underage usage, operation on sidewalks, and hazardous parking of scooters. Users are informed by the app that they are required to use helmets. Compliance with the requirement is low. Over time compliance may increase. Those who begin as casual users may become regular users. Regular users may be more likely to invest in a helmet than casual users. Scooter rental companies may also make inexpensive helmets available to customers. Heather also reviewed evidence that bicycle riders with helmets are more likely to experience serious injury than those without helmets. One possible explanation is that motorists may give extra room to cyclists without helmets.

Use is limited to those who are 18 and over. One of the companies, Lime, invited underage usage by simply providing customers with an opportunity to self-report that they were either above or below age 18. The other company, Bird, requires that users

photograph a document such as a driver's license. Regulations have been modified. Lime is now required to gather evidence of age eligibility at the time that new customers register. Some parents have supported under-age usage. Some parents, for example, sign up for the scooter in their name so that their child can travel to an after school event. The child's use of the scooter saves the parent from have to drive the child to the event.

Users are more likely to operate on sidewalks when they lack confidence in their safety in the street. More experienced users of scooters are expected to make more use of the streets. The limitations of Brookline bike lanes provide reasons for some scooter users to ride on sidewalks. The town is using 3 mobile electric sign boards to encourage use of helmets and use of streets.

Parking of scooters in pedestrian traffic lanes has been less of a problem than has been reported elsewhere. Nevertheless, a number of attendees complained about irresponsible scooter parking. Parking near a senior residence such as 99 Kent Street was noted as a problem. Specification of some scooter corrals would help to resolve the parking issues. Those who left their scooter outside of a parking corral would be charged an extra fee.

Heather answered many questions. The follow are examples of information she provided:

Both the scooter rental companies and the Town have special insurance to protect them in case of an accidental injury associated with scooter use.

The only reported injury occurred on the day that the trial began. Nationally, there have been only two scooter fatalities. Most injuries are from falls; collisions with motor vehicles are rare.

Improvements are needed in bike lanes in Brookline to make the streets safer for both scooters operators and cyclists. Greater use of the bike lanes will provide a rationale for increased investment in bicycle accommodations.

The trial will end on November 15. An assessment of the trial will be made then. If scooter rentals will be permitted in the future, some changes will be made in agreements with rental companies.

The Town receives a fee of \$1 per day for each scooter.

Shirley Selhub is displeased with the many scooters parked on the tree lawn in front of her house. Shirley showed a photo. Shirley lives in the northernmost house on Winchester Street in Brookline. Scooter operators park at her home because they would be charged extra if they left Brookline on their scooter.

To date cooperation from the Police Department with public education and enforcement has been minimal.

Scooters are picked up every night and taken away to be recharged. On special occasions like Patriot's Day scooter operations can be suspended. On Patriot's Day scooters were inactive because of the Boston. If weather is bad, scooter operations can be suspended.

At present, there are no regulations in state law concerning operation of electric scooters. The Legislature is working on a bill. The Legislature hopes to learn from local experiences such as the Brookline trial.

Hugh Mattison spoke about the merits of scooters with seats. Hugh owns a scooter with a seat. Hugh provided a demonstration prior to the meeting. Several attendees had enjoyed short rides on Hugh's scooter prior to the meeting. Scooters with seats are much more attractive to older people than stand-up scooters. To date, rental companies have not shown interest in offering scooters with seats.

Frank provided some information on the committee's past efforts to address concerns about riding of bicycles on sidewalks, especially in commercial areas. Brookline has designated some sidewalks as commercial for bicycle regulation purposes. On those streets, the Town has placed "Walk your bike" signs. Police public education and enforcement efforts have been minimal. The Police Department discourages residents from communicating directly with cyclists and scooter operators about their use of the sidewalks.

Residents who have complaints about scooters have some reporting options:

1. Send an email message to [escooter@brooklinema.gov](mailto:escooter@brooklinema.gov)
2. Report to BrookOnLine. There is no special category for electric scooter problems, but badly parked scooters can be reported as a "sidewalk obstruction"
3. There is also a phone number to be called. (The phone number is currently unknown.)

4. Participate in a public meeting at Town Hall (6<sup>th</sup> floor) on June 12 at 6:30 PM. Heather Hamilton and Chris Dempsey (Chair of the Transportation Board) will conduct the meeting.

Our invited guest, Police officer Michael Disario failed to appear or excuse himself. For that reason, the meeting did not focus as planned on public education and enforcement of regulations to protect pedestrians from the hazards associated with bicycles on sidewalks and electric scooter operated or parked on sidewalks.

**Feedback on election forum.** We discussed the election forum held at the Senior Center on April 30. The consensus is that the format was successful. Michael Allen did an excellent job as moderator. John Seay's promotional statement for BrooklineCAN should have been shorter. Those who ask questions should do so concisely; some took too long to ask their question. Most are pleased with our format that allows attendees to ask their question directly. Heather Hamilton reported that as a candidate she like the pooling of questions by a moderator. With several questions combined, a candidate can pick the question that the candidate most wants to answer.

2. **Membership recruitment:** proposal for occasional evening meetings. Frank wants to recruit new committee members. Occasional evening meets would enable us to attract residents who cannot come to afternoon meetings. He would like to recruit some working people who would become fully active in BrooklineCAN after retirement. Response to the proposal was positive.
3. Next meeting: Monday, June 3