

BROOKLINE COMMUNITY AGING NETWORK
Livable Community Advocacy Committee
February 5, 2024

Attending: Susan Granoff (Chair), Alec Lebovitz (Guest Presenter), David Pearlman (Guest Presenter), Janet Gelbart (Notetaker), Elaine Bakal, John Bowman, Carol Caro, Susan Cohen, Marion Freedman-Gurspan, Bambi Good, Katie Hope, Susan Howards, Carol Macbain, M. Mayotte, Anne Meyers, Fran Perler, Yolanda Rodriguez, John Seay, Ruth Seidman, David Trevvett, Melissa Trevvett, John VanScoyac, Matt Weiss, Barbara Wilhelm, Henry Winkelman

I. A conversation with Select Board Candidate Alec Lebovitz

Guest Participant: Alec Lebovitz (Town Meeting Member Precinct 8)

Mr. Lebovitz has lived in Coolidge Corner for seven years and is in his second term as a Town Meeting Member from Precinct 8. He believes the town is exceptional in its wealth of community resources and is inspired by the expertise and resourcefulness of its residents. The town faces major challenges: the rising cost of living, the housing crisis, and the rise of poverty, particularly among seniors. Mr. Lebovitz believes these challenges can be met by focusing on affordability, maintaining an inclusive, open-minded dialogue across the political spectrum, fostering equity, and creating opportunity. He is running for Select Board to bring to town leadership his perspective as a young person, a renter, and someone just starting out. (Additional details about his personal and professional background appear in the materials circulated to the attendees and attached at the end of these notes.)

II. A conversation with Select Board Candidate David Pearlman

Guest Participant: David Pearlman (School Committee Chair, Town Meeting Member Precinct 15)

Mr. Pearlman has lived in Brookline almost all of his life and is currently a child welfare attorney who advocates on behalf of indigent families and children. He has been a Town Meeting Member from Precinct 15 for ten years and is currently completing his sixth year as a member of the School Committee and his second year as its Chair. During his tenure on the School Committee, he did not shy away from tough decisions, and worked diligently to keep costs down while fulfilling the commitment to our schools and the environment. Mr. Pearlman is running for Select Board because he believes he has the leadership experience, deep Brookline roots, and professional background to address the many challenges facing the town. His priorities include affordability, climate sustainability, and enhancing our recreational and learning experiences. (Additional details about his personal and professional background appear in the materials circulated to the attendees and attached at the end of these notes.)

Q&A

Note: Although the candidates spoke separately and did not participate in each other's conversations, many of the same questions were posed to both of them. In those instances, their responses have been combined to enhance readability.

1. If you could only do one thing during your tenure on the Select Board, what would it be and how would you achieve it?

Lebovitz: One thing we can do is reverse 30 years of disinvestment in public health and the elimination of the Human Services Department. We know what some of the challenges are: financial insecurity, mental health issues especially among young people, isolation and loneliness particularly among seniors. The Health Department has completed a community health assessment and will be conducting a survey to engage the general public on the issue. This will establish a framework for seeking funds from community partners like the Brookline Foundation. One thing we can do is establish a medical debt repurchasing program like the one in Connecticut. They used \$6.5 million in state funds to purchase \$1 billion in medical debts from collection agencies, removing an onerous burden from people on the brink of insolvency. I'd also like to reinstate the Human Services Department to achieve efficiencies through consolidation of services. This is being studied by the Health Department to see how it can be done in a non-disruptive way so that if it includes agencies like the Council on Aging, the COA would still retain its autonomy.

Pearlman: The one thing I would work on is creating an affordable community. We need to focus on economic vitality to grow the pie and extricate ourselves from the cycle of overrides. The only way to achieve all the things we want is to bring in more revenue. That means encouraging commercial development particularly along the Route 9 corridor. I'm excited that the Economic Development Advisory Board is reviewing development on Route 9 West from Hammond Street to the Newton border. There are undeveloped parcels on Commonwealth Avenue, and we just approved the consensus plan for developing Harvard Street. Washington Street and Beacon Street present other opportunities. Boston, which surrounds us on three sides and Newton which abuts the fourth, have both developed their commercial areas; so can we.

2. ZEAB (Zero Emissions Advisory Board) has proposed new taxes on fossil fuels to encourage people to switch to heat pumps and electric vehicles and eliminate fossil fuels in Brookline. They estimate that converting to heat pumps costs about \$10,000 but that isn't true for older homes and condos which need to upgrade their electrical systems to accommodate the demand for additional electricity. And no one talks about conservation but the only time we reduced emissions effectively was during the pandemic when people stayed home. What's your position?

Lebovitz: The ZEAB warrant articles that passed in 2022 were home rule petitions asking for the authority to impose additional excise taxes on gasoline-powered vehicles and have not yet been approved by the state. Affordability is an

issue, and the articles were amended to require the voters to approve any increase. While it is true that homeowners would recoup their investment in heat pumps through lower electricity usage over time, the upfront costs are substantial. I've heard estimates as high as \$50,000 for an older home. For larger condos, it is substantially more. I don't support penalizing people who can't comply, but putting forward a program that excludes multi-family dwellings is not viable. The Town needs to invest to facilitate the transition away from fossil fuel, potentially through an emission reductions fund which residents could apply to for help with those upfront costs. How you pay for it is a different question and requires a community process. Weatherization is very effective at conserving energy and is much less expensive than electrification. Maybe that's an incremental step and again one where the Town could pool expertise and funds with private owners and condo associations.

Pearlman: The upfront costs of retrofitting an older home or condo can be astronomical and I'm not in favor of penalizing those who can't comply. It's not realistic to expect this to happen without significant incentives from the Town, state, and federal governments. Residents need a single source of information – Electrify Brookline is a good site -- and a dedicated fund they can apply to which is supported by the Town, the state, and the federal government. There are some incentives from organizations like MassSave but they are inadequate.

3. Everyday people don't get the services they need for street repair and rodent control. New tax levies adversely affect lower income people. Can things be made more efficient to reduce costs and do you think anything is sacrosanct?

Lebovitz: When I first became a Town Meeting Member, I was able to pass a warrant article to transition to virtual documents instead of paper documents for Town Meeting. Over time, this results in millions of dollars of savings. But we need to find new revenue sources. We need to increase what we collect in PILOTs (voluntary agreements in which tax exempt organizations make Payments in Lieu of Taxes to the Town). Approximately 50% of the property in Brookline is tax-exempt, so the Town is not paid for the services it provides such as police, fire, street cleaning, etc. The PILOTs under agreement request about 25% of the taxes that would be owed and not all tax-exempt organizations participate. A Moderator's Committee reported that increasing both the percentage paid and the participation rate would result in an estimated \$2 million in annual revenue. To incentivize participation, we could offer to extend the Town's bulk purchasing agreements to those organizations.

4. As you noted, the schools receive 60% of the town's funding even though enrollments are declining. As a Select Board Member, would you support reducing the school budget so that long-ignored town services can receive a more equitable share of funding?

Pearlman: No town department's budget is sacrosanct, including the schools. I am a proponent of zero based budgeting so that we look at everything each year and decide what to prioritize. That's what I've done on the school budget.

5. The Town is increasing parking meter fees to \$2.00 per hour. Won't that keep customers away from the commercial districts and decrease the viability of local businesses? The number of parking spaces is also decreasing which makes it difficult for seniors with mobility issues to park close to their destination.

Lebovitz: Raising meter rates alleviates stress on the budget and avoids the potential for spending cuts. The increase brings us into parity with Boston and neighboring communities and doesn't increase the tax burden on residents. My understanding is that the commercial districts attract a lot of people from out of town so Brookline residents won't bear the brunt of the increase.

Pearlman: Increasing the rate to \$2.00 per hour is comparable to other municipalities in the greater Boston area. We can explore issuing parking permits which people with lower income or mobility issues can apply for. As to the more limited number of parking spaces, under the Complete Streets program we need to balance the need for parking with wider sidewalks and bike lanes.

Note: Audience members pointed out that while Boston charges \$2.00 per hour for parking, meter rates in Newton and Cambridge are lower [\$.75/hour in Newton; \$1.00 per hour in Cambridge]. Residents in the commercial areas oppose parking permits which limit their ability to find accessible parking.

6. The HAB (Housing Advisory Board) reduced the local preference for subsidized housing units to 25% as opposed to 70% in other communities. This disadvantages lower income Brookline residents and is particularly hard on seniors when wait times approach ten years. As a Select Board Member, would you advocate to change this?

Lebovitz: I would support raising the local preference to at least 50%. The Town should also promote increasing the affordable units set aside in new developments, especially for seniors. Their portion of the population is growing as is the percentage of seniors that live in poverty. The impact of 2Life on the ability of seniors to stay in the community has been incredible and we need to encourage more developments like that.

Pearlman: I would strongly encourage the HAB to change its policy and give preference to long-time residents. The whole point of building community is to establish a strong sense of stability and belonging. People from other communities who come here enrich Brookline, but we shouldn't forget those who are already here. I would strongly advocate to increase the preference, maybe not all the way to 70% but more than 25%. I also think we should re-visit accessory dwelling units to make it easier for people to add an additional unit to a single-family property. Since the bylaw was changed there's been only one accessory

dwelling unit created. I believe this will be addressed in the warrant for the upcoming Town Meeting.

7. Several years ago, a Select Board committee proposed lowering the lamps on existing light poles below the tree canopy so that sidewalks receive light, not just roadways. This is particularly important to the senior community because night vision deteriorates with age. But it is on a back burner due to lack of funding. How much of a priority would you give to this issue?

Lebovitz: Accessibility is one of my top priorities and that includes improving visibility on our streets with better lighting. The answer is to lead with a revenue strategy that makes investment in things like our streets and sidewalks, street lighting, signal coordination, and bus stop lighting possible.

Pearlman: Accessibility needs to be prioritized and better lighting is a part of that. Poor lighting leads to more accidents which leads to costs for medical care and property damage. I would approach it from a strategic planning perspective. There should be a study which incorporates the data we already have to see the type of accidents caused by poor lighting. We may save money in the long run by investing in better lighting. When evaluating competing interests, we need to make data driven decisions, and we can do that by looking at the information in accident reports.

8. Newton has a program called Newmo which provides door to door transportation for residents to a location in Newton or a medical facility nearby for a nominal fee of \$2.00-\$5.00. Newton's cost for the subsidy is a half million dollars per year. Do you think Brookline would benefit from a similar program, especially since it would connect north and south Brookline?

Pearlman: Brookline is a tale of two towns divided by Route 9. Everyone should be able to enjoy the amenities offered on both sides of town so accessibility should be near the top of the list in balancing priorities for funding.

9. Why are you leaving the School Committee to run for Select Board?

Pearlman: All of the issues we face center around resources and that's the responsibility of the Select Board. At a personal level, my interests are broader than just well-functioning schools as reflected in my being a Town Meeting Member for ten years. I can contribute more as a Select Board Member.

10. Seniors are the fastest growing demographic but the Council on Aging receives only 1/4 of 1% of the town's budget. How should the Town prepare for the additional services that will be required as the population continues to age beyond 80?

Pearlman: That is deeply concerning, but beyond the revenue side I think we should do more in terms of tax relief since many seniors are on fixed incomes. They have lived here the longest and supported the Town for many years. We

should be returning that support and follow the Sudbury model which is a means tested plan for tax relief. Lexington and Natick use a higher age cap as a way of controlling the number who qualify.

11. The town has outgrown the Senior Center and needs a second site. Is that a good use for the property on Fisher Hill?

Pearlman: The Select Board has been slow to start the process to determine how to use the Fisher Hill site. It would be a good option for a senior center but my ideal use for that site is a multi-purpose center with dedicated space for seniors.

12. Town employees' salaries are no longer competitive with those of surrounding communities and it has been difficult to recruit and retain staff. What would you do to resolve this?

Pearlman: We should better advertise the Materials Fee opportunity as an added benefit available not just to school personnel but to Town employees as well. (Under the Materials Fee program, school employees who are not residents of Brookline can pay a nominal annual fee for their children to attend Brookline schools). We should be offering competitive salaries and that ties back to growing the revenue base. We also need to address morale and work hard to repair relationships where some employees have been made to feel disrespected. That is a longer term issue but with new leadership I think we will see improvement in the morale and culture in some departments. Departments might also intentionally leave some positions unfilled as a financial savings mechanism. We have done that on the school side.

13. Seniors are appalled at plans to reduce parking and terrorized by cyclists who don't follow the rules of the road. So when you talk about Complete Streets, do you consider that they are more dangerous to pedestrians?

Pearlman: Complete Streets is rolled out neighborhood by neighborhood so that we can test and amend it as necessary. We need to develop a culture of reporting incidents so we can make data driven decisions. Other communities have done this successfully.

Concluding Remarks

Lebovitz: I want to express my appreciation for the invitation to speak today. It is extremely important for seniors to have a voice and to focus on affordability issues. LCAC does both and it is invigorating to be here. For more information about my campaign, go to alecforbrookline.com. My contact information is there if you want to pursue specific issues. Thank you again for having me.

Pearlman: I'm running for Select Board because I am a unifier whose leadership ability, deep community roots, professional background, and pragmatic creativity put me in a strong position to meet the challenges facing us and to unlock

opportunities. I am committed to: improving affordability; growing our economic vitality; leading by example on climate sustainability; expanding recreational opportunities; strengthening public education, public safety and other town services; pursuing senior friendly initiatives; responding to crises with cultural sensitivity; encouraging government transparency and community engagement; and stoking civic pride. The challenges we face require tactful leadership and vision from someone familiar with the day-to-day work, structure and function of municipal governance. I have that experience as Chair of the School Committee leading the district through the Covid pandemic, negotiating labor contracts, and establishing a sustainability policy. I've participated in many town committees and cultivated relationships with diverse stakeholders throughout town for over a decade. If elected, I will be ready on day one and will always be professional, respectful and diligent, and promise you will always have a seat at the table. You can reach me at 617 894-6893 or at dpearlman515@gmail.com. Thank you.

III. Other Business

Announcements

Carol Seibert, who has been our notetaker for three years, is moving to Hingham. Her departure is a great loss to the LCAC and she will be sorely missed by all of us. Anyone interested in taking notes at future meetings should contact Susan.

Future Agendas

Select Board candidates Bernard Greene and Susan Park will be the guest presenters at our March 11 meeting. Attendees expressed interest in inviting representatives of the Bicycle Advisory Committee, bicycle advocacy groups, and the police department to discuss concerns about cyclists and pedestrian safety at a later meeting.

IV. Date of Next Meeting: March 11

The Livable Community Advocacy Committee is one of several BrooklineCan committees. Everyone is welcome to attend, but if you do so regularly, we invite you to support BrooklineCAN with your membership. You can join using PayPal, credit card or by check. Instructions are on the right hand sidebar on the front page of brooklinecan.org Thank you.

An Introduction to Alex Lebovitz

Dear LCAC Membership:

It is my absolute pleasure to get the chance to meet with you as a candidate for the Brookline Select Board. My name is Alec Lebovitz. I am a long-term Brookline resident, a Coolidge Corner renter, and a second-term Town Meeting Member. I first moved to Brookline 8 years ago with my partner, Cat, as students and we have been here ever since. I got involved in local government to make a difference for our community, and I am committed to ensuring that opportunity and stability exists for everyone in Brookline. In my career, I am a policy analyst specializing in state and federal Medicaid policy, the safety net of our healthcare system. In various roles in the public, private, and non-profit sectors, I have utilized my policy expertise to expand access to affordable healthcare to those who need it most.

I am running for Select Board because I care about our Town and I have seen firsthand the difference that compassionate and data-driven leadership can make in local government. There are many challenges facing Brookline – a housing market in crisis, a structural budget deficit, a competitive municipal labor market, and growing financial pressure on residents. But Brookline is an exceptional community. With the right leadership, we can make real progress on the issues that matter and create a community that embodies our values of equity, inclusion, and opportunity for all.

I know that it is possible to make progress on the big issues because I have done so in Town Meeting. Over the last two years, I have led the passage of eight warrant articles that addressed critical issues including the management of our municipal finances, the protection of reproductive rights, improving housing stability, equity, and sustainability efforts, and the strengthening of our public health and rodent control programs. But intractable issues like housing affordability, maintaining and improving municipal services, closing the deficit, and providing long-term relief to vulnerable residents require sustained effort and focused executive leadership – which is why I am asking for your support.

As a member of the Select Board, I am committed to prioritizing affordability across all policy areas, ensuring that Brookline can continue to attract and retain exceptional municipal staff, leading the effort to reduce emissions, and implementing more transparent budgeting practices. If you are interested in learning more, I would encourage you to visit my website which includes a detailed list of my policy positions: <https://alecforbroadline.com/>.

I look forward to presenting at the upcoming LCAC meeting on February 5, and I especially look forward to your questions and comments regarding the issues that matter to you. Please feel free to contact me with any thoughts or feedback, before or after the meeting, at alecforbroadline@gmail.com or (401) 793-6279. Serving Brookline as a member of the Select Board would be both my privilege

and solemn responsibility. Join our campaign and help us build a brighter future for the Town that we all love. I humbly ask for your support and your vote on May 7th, 2024.

Sincerely,

Alec Lebovitz

An Introduction to David Perlman

Dear esteemed colleagues and fellow residents of Brookline:

As a near-lifelong Brookline resident and K-12 graduate of the Public Schools of Brookline, I am deeply committed to continue serving the town I've called home since pre-school. I grew up in Coolidge Corner, graduated from what is now known as the Florida Ruffin Ridley School, and then graduated from Brookline High School (Class of 2000). After graduating from Brandeis University and Boston University School of Law, I became a child welfare attorney at the trial and appellate levels. I specialize in child protection and parental rights cases, where I advocate on behalf of primarily indigent parents and children in a broad spectrum of areas, including abuse and neglect, housing, substance use treatment, domestic violence, mental health, and public education.

I benefitted greatly from the excellent public schools and services that Brookline supports. As a result, I have a sustained commitment to this community that has given me so much. I am serving my tenth year as a Town Meeting Member representing Precinct 15. I am also in my second year as Chair of the School Committee, and sixth year overall on School Committee. In this capacity, I have served on the following:

- Brookline Fiscal Advisory Committee
- Town-School Partnership Committee
- Chair of the Policy subcommittee of the School Committee for the last four years
- Land Bank Study Committee
- Select Board Climate Action Committee
- Naming Committee
- Capital, Finance, and Negotiations subcommittees of the School Committee

Importantly, during my time on the Negotiations subcommittee, we have successfully reached multiple collective-bargaining agreements with the Brookline Educators Union and American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME). I did not shy away from tough decisions. I led by listening to diverse stakeholders and negotiating compromises. The school budget is the largest of our municipal departments accounting for approximately 60% of the overall town budget. I have worked diligently to keep costs down while meeting the needs of our schools and our commitment to the environment.

I now rent with my wife and 7-month-old son in Precinct 15. We are located near my parents who also live in Precinct 15, and like so many other older adults in this community hope to age in place. As I look toward continued service to this community that I love, I will lead by listening and making thoughtful decisions that unite rather than divide. I am running for Select Board because I am a unifier whose leadership experience, deep Brookline roots, professional background, pragmatic creativity, temperament, and record of bringing diverse communities together through difficult

circumstances put me in a strong position to address our challenges head-on and to unlock exciting opportunities.

My priorities include the following:

1. Affordability. Too many people are compelled to make significant sacrifices to stay in Brookline. Our seniors, younger generations just starting out, and many families who like me have called Brookline home for years are all affected by tax increases, whether they are renters or homeowners. In a community that values excellent public schools, high-quality town services, and diversity, Brookline will need to find ways to generate more revenue without overly taxing our residents. This is not only an economic priority, but a housing priority, and a racial justice and equity priority. Growing the proverbial pie through well-planned mixed-use economic development and housing production (with a significant affordability component) will be essential to expanding our tax base in a sustainable manner that can support the level of services we expect and deserve. This will also help make Brookline the welcoming, socioeconomically and racially diverse vibrant community that we want it to be, where our town and public safety workers can live and thrive, seniors like my parents can comfortably age in place, and historically marginalized communities can flourish.
2. Climate Sustainability. Brookline should continue to be at the forefront of innovative climate crisis initiatives that serve as examples for other communities to emulate and follow. As a first time recent father, I worry about what kind of world my son will grow up in if we do not take the lead in combatting climate change as a municipality, state, and country. As Chair of the School Committee and Chair of the Policy Subcommittee of the schools, I helped draft and lead the passage of a Sustainability Policy for the Public Schools of Brookline that includes action plans in six major categories: (1) education and engagement, (2) energy-efficient high-performance buildings, (3) outdoor spaces, (4) food services, (5) waste, and (6) transportation. I also helped create a Sustainability Task Force comprised of many stakeholders, including Town Meeting Members, educators, students, town residents, and sustainability professionals. The Task Force is actively pursuing zero-emission buildings, low EUI levels, elimination of PFAS, Zero Waste, improved safety and infrastructure for zero-emission vehicles including bicycles, and grounds maintenance following best practices in organic management and Integrated Pest Management.
3. Enhancing our recreational and learning experiences. In addition to preserving and enhancing our public green spaces and other town properties, let's explore the many private amenities already existing within our borders (and just beyond), including on the campuses of Boston University, Boston College (Pine Manor), and Hellenic College, and at private elementary and secondary schools. From acres of playing fields and tennis courts to conference centers and maker spaces to gymnasiums and observatories, Brookline already boasts a plethora of amenities. I want to make them equitably accessible to all of our residents.

Beyond my three main priority areas stated above, goals include: (1) economic vitality, (2) excellent public safety and services, (3) senior-friendly initiatives, (4) excellent public schools, (5) a welcoming, just, accessible, racially and economically diverse, vibrant community that responds to crises with cultural sensitivity, (6) government transparency, (7) strong community engagement, and (8) civic pride.

The challenges and opportunities that lie ahead for Brookline necessitate tactful, experienced leadership and vision from someone familiar with the day-to-day work, people, structure, and function of high-level municipal governance. As Chair of the School Committee, I have that experience and will be ready on day one of my Select Board term.

With gratitude,

David A. Pearlman

Website: www.electpearlman.com