

BROOKLINE COMMUNITY AGING NETWORK
Livable Community Advocacy Committee (LCAC)
October 4, 2021

Attending: Susan Granoff (Chair), John Seay (Co-Host), John VanScoyoc (Guest Presenter), David Trevvett (Presenter), Jamie Jensen (Brookline Senior Center Program Manager), Carol Seibert (note-taker), Paula Friedman, Lou Crimmins, John Harris, Janet Gelbart, Henry Winkelman, Ellen Bick, Marsha Frankel, Martha Farlow, Melissa Trevvett, Marion Freedman-Gurspan, Ruth Seidman, Matt Weiss, Lydia Kaufman, Carol Caro, Judith Kidd

1. A Conversation with Select Board Member John VanScoyoc

Guest Presenter: John VanScoyoc, retired producer of TV nightly news/talk programs on New England Cable News/NBC10Boston (1995-2018) and managing editor of Christopher Lydon's 10 O'Clock News on WGBH (1984-94). Of note, John VanScoyoc is the Select Board liaison to the Brookline Council on Aging and to the Age-Friendly Cities Committee.

Question: Why did you decide to run for the Select Board?

As a local journalist, John had long been interested in the Town Meeting form of government, and became active in it when he was elected as a Town Meeting Member. He was asked to serve on the Advisory Committee and then approached about running for the Select Board. Following his retirement, he ran for a second time and joined the Board in 2020.

Question: What are the challenges facing Brookline's Seniors now and in the future?

John arranged his comments using a Livable Community theme.

COVID-19, which threatens the very lives of our residents who want to feel safe on the streets and in the shops, and take full advantage of all Brookline has to offer. We have to aim at vaccinating all those who are eligible. At this time it is frustrating that the statistics available from the State do not accurately reflect our success in vaccinating Brookline residents. Because the totals are inaccurate, there is no way to obtain breakdown figures that would allow for targeted efforts. It would be useful to follow vaccination trends on a weekly basis. A new weekly COVID vaccination clinic is being offered by the Brookline Health Department, a step in the right direction. Pat Maloney, former Assistant Director of Public

Health for Brookline, is filling in for Dr. Jett, who has resigned as Health Commissioner and is moving out of state. John is hopeful that the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021 (ARPA) funds will be used to build up the Department.

ARPA funding decisions: BrooklineCAN and its Livable Community Advocacy Committee must be heard in the process of allocating ARPA funds. Now is the time to follow the town's website on how funds are being allocated and to lobby for what seniors need. We must take advantage of the public comment period, address the Select Board, and participate fully in the funding decision-making. In response to a question about how we might lobby for additional support for subsidized transportation for low-income seniors in Brookline, John agreed that this is important and that, in addition to being sure residents know about our current programs, we should look to neighboring communities for programs that might, with modification, be transferable to Brookline. In discussing how to meet the challenge of isolation among seniors, and possible need for additional geriatric social work staff at the Senior Center, John suggested a broad approach to lobbying: the Council of Aging, the Senior Center, BrooklineCAN and LCAC already know quite a lot about the needs of our residents and ARPA funds are allocated in part based on a community input process which is going on right now. The Town will await the results of the community engagement period in November before making funding decisions.

Attendees raised some issues for discussion:

Redistricting: In the wake of the 2020 Census, Brookline must re-define some of its Town Meeting Precincts. This is complicated by the State's re-drawing of its State and Federal Legislative Districts, which happens independent of the Brookline Select Board sending its new maps to the State Legislature. Maps for Brookline can be accessed on the Town website under the Committee Files of the Redistricting Committee.

Loss of Departmental leadership: Recent departures of a number of department heads was addressed. Is this indicative of a systemic problem? Some of the departures have been cases of retirement after long-term careers or moving out of the area. Though it is a challenge to replace these valued Town employees, we should not conclude that Brookline has a problem retaining high level leadership.

Need for a satellite Senior Center in Brookline: While it is clear that there is a need to address the current overcrowding at the Senior Center, we must be sure

that all constituencies are heard and consider all the options, including a possible site at Newbury College.

Should Brookline be a City? Are some intractable problems, as for example the difficulty of retaining a Superintendent of Schools, the result of our unwieldy form of government? Would we be wise to consider becoming a city? John has found there are points on both sides of this question. Town Meeting, is essentially more participatory, but requires a great deal from the volunteers who govern. On the other hand, we should not underestimate the hunger of our residents to participate in governing. If we form a Charter Commission, we will perhaps find that many of our young new Town Meeting Members do not want to give up a Representative Town Meeting form of government.

Other pet peeves and challenges John discussed briefly:

Economic Vitality We need to help our businesses rebound from the pandemic.

Maintenance of infrastructure, for example the new benches and parklets.

Town website needs to be improved to make it easier to search.

Rats: A growing problem!

Noise: Large trucks, leaf blowers, construction all create noise that interferes with the quality of life.

Parking: We need a better handle on where parking space is available and where it is going unused.

2. Update on Brookline Government Actions/Meetings of Interest to the LCAC

Presenter: Susan Granoff, LCAC Chair; Town Meeting Member Precinct 7; Advisory Committee Member & Chair of AC Human Services Subcommittee.

October 5, 2021, 7 pm. Special Town Meeting to consider a) the Select Board motion to approve an \$11 million settlement with Gerald Alston and its bonding; and b) a \$4.9 million bonding request for a fossil-fuel-free ground source heat pump for the new Driscoll School. This Town Meeting can be viewed on Zoom.

Upcoming parking discussion at the Zoning Board of Appeals. The Brookline Transportation Board voted in favor of the Brookline Housing Authority's proposal of around 25 parking spaces for a planned 115 housing units at the Colonel Floyd low-income senior housing development. An expert report had suggested 60-80

parking spaces. The Zoning Board of Appeals has signaled support for the smaller number of spots. They meet again on November 4.

Multiple public hearings via Zoom will be held over the next few weeks on Warrant Articles for the Special Town Meeting which begins on November 16. Those interested in specific WA's can check the calendar of Upcoming Events for daily hearings which appears on the Town website and can register to attend the hearing where you can sign up in the Zoom chat room to make a public comment.

3. Presentation on Warrant Article 6 (to amend Town By-Laws to prohibit vegetative sidewalk and street obstructions)

Presenter: David Trevvett, Chair, Pedestrian Advisory Committee

When deciding what constitutes a sidewalk obstruction, Brookline follows national Public Right-of-Way Guidelines wherever possible. These mandate a 48" wide and 80" high unobstructed passage. But a detailed study by the Pedestrian Advisory Committee in 2021 found examples in every precinct of overgrown foliage which denies pedestrians full use of the sidewalks. These represent safety hazards that should be addressed. The current By-Law does not specifically prohibit obstruction caused by vegetation. Warrant Article 6 would explicitly prohibit vegetative obstructions, define what constitutes an offense, assign enforcement to an authorized agent of the Town rather than a police officer, establish a feasible period for compliance, and impose penalties for non-compliance. The petitioners for this Article are the Commissioner of Public Works and the ADA Coordinator for the Town. DPW would have authority to promulgate regulations. Discussion focussed on equitable enforcement of the regulation and whether businesses, non-profits, and even the Town would be held responsible for properties under their control. There was concern too that some areas of Town might be more subject to enforcement than others. David stressed that these regulations, like those for leaf-blowers, are not handled arbitrarily but are complaint driven. Those in attendance voted unanimously to support the basic concepts embodied in Article 6 including specific prohibition of vegetative sidewalk obstructions, DPW notification and enforcement, and penalties to be assessed for violations that remain uncorrected after a reasonable warning period. It was noted that the exact language may yet be modified before it is voted on in Town Meeting.

4. Discussion about Notes of LCAC Meetings

After a question about the notes of our September meeting, Susan Granoff and Carol Seibert wanted to hear from those who attend meetings of the LCAC about how to make these most useful. Currently, the notes are not considered as minutes or a transcript. We try to keep them brief and to summarize the content of our speakers' major topics, other agenda items, and announcements. We have not tried to reproduce the conversation or identify commenters since the free exchange of ideas that we enjoy does not seem to lend itself to precise attribution. We have never devised a plan for managing revisions. A lively discussion resulted in the following plan: Notes will be circulated to those who attended with a request for corrections, comments, and omissions to be returned within a 3-4 day period. Once revisions have been made, the final notes will be distributed to the entire mailing list (currently around 50 names) and will appear on the BrooklineCAN website.

No Other Business

NEXT MEETING: Monday, November 8, 2021 at 3:00 pm.