

BROOKLINE COMMUNITY AGING NETWORK
Livable Community Advocacy Committee
February 10, 2025

Attending: Susan Granoff (Chair), Janet Gelbart (Notetaker), Katie McClean, (Guest Presenter), Michael Rubenstein (Guest Presenter), Cathleen Cavell (Guest), Remus Sottile (Guest), Marilyn Benson, Carol Caro, Susan Cohen, Regina Frawley, Marion Freedman-Gurspan, Kristel Heinemann, Katie Hope, Maureen Mayotte, Anne Meyers, Bea Mikulecky, Fran Perler, John Seay, Ruth Seidman, Ellen Shoner

I. Presentation and Discussion: Spotlight on In-home Services for Brookline's Seniors – The Senior Center's Home and Escort Linkage Program (H.E.L.P.) and Other Available Services

Guest Presenter: Katie McClean, LICSW, H.E.L.P. Coordinator

The Council on Aging has sponsored the Home and Escort Linkage Program (H.E.L.P.) for over 30 years with a goal of providing affordable, reliable and flexible homecare services to Brookline residents over 60 years of age. It includes such things as laundry, meal preparation, shopping, medical escorts, light housekeeping and respite care. The program does not provide heavy cleaning, personal care or medication management. Staff consists of Ms. McClean and Anne Essaran who is also a licensed social worker. Services are billed at \$20/hour with a minimum of two hours per visit. Fees are paid directly to the worker by the client.

Pre-enrollment involving a 30- to 60-minute in-home intake visit from Ms. McClean or Ms. Essaran is required. Afterwards, each client is matched to a service provider who has been oriented to the program and vetted through an interview, CORI background check and reference check. Once matched, participants communicate directly with the service provider. Program staff are available for support and to answer general questions.

In addition to homecare, H.E.L.P. provides free transportation and/or medical escort services to eyecare appointments in the greater Boston area through an ITNAmerica “Trusted Transportation Partner” grant sponsored by Regeneron Pharmaceuticals. Pre-registration in H.E.L.P. is required. Rides must be scheduled through the H.E.L.P. line (617 730-2752) at least five business days in advance. Free transportation for non-emergency medical visits can be scheduled through the Senior Center Medical Transportation Line (617 879-4878). Other H.E.L.P. initiatives include assistance in obtaining parking permits for residents’ caregivers (P.A.R.C.), and loans and exchanges of durable medical equipment (E.L.F.).

H.E.L.P. providers are all local, tend to be middle-aged or older, and include mothers and part-time workers with flexible schedules. Because of the minimum two-hour charge, H.E.L.P. is not a good alternative for very small jobs, like changing a light bulb. It is okay to schedule an intake meeting before you require assistance so that you are already screened should the need arise.

Other home care resources available to Brookline residents include FriendshipWorks, a local non-profit which provides free support and companionship to isolated older adults as well as free help with small tasks like changing lightbulbs; Springwell, which provides friendly visits, home delivered meals and in-home services on a sliding fee scale; and a

variety of private pay organizations. More information about these programs, including questions to ask private providers, can be found in the attached slide presentation.

II. A Conversation with Select Board Candidate Michael Rubenstein

Guest Presenter: Michael Rubenstein (Town Meeting Member Precinct 13)

A 30-year resident of Brookline, Mr. Rubenstein has ten years of experience in public service. He is an advocate for affordable housing and was active in the YES for Brookline campaign and the Town Meeting coalition that passed the MBTA-Communities Act Consensus Warrant Article in November, 2023. As a leader in the Greater Boston Interfaith Organization and Co-Chair of its Health Care Campaign, he helped to lower hospital and MassHealth prescription drug costs and improve access to affordable mental health care. He also led the Governance and Facilities Committees on the boards of two schools serving under-resourced students. A consensus builder, he believes his housing work and Town Meeting experience will help him address the interrelated and complex challenges Brookline faces in meeting all of its needs within the budget constraints of Proposition 2-1/2. (See attached flyer for additional details.)

Q&A

1. What is your position on street parking and residential construction parking?

You need to understand the competing needs and how to provide services for pedestrians, cyclists, seniors, and local businesses. I would engage all stakeholders and take a balanced approach recognizing that safety is an important concern. In residential areas, the needs are different in different part of town, e.g., young professionals and families tend to live in different types of residences. Our zoning code allows for different strategies which reflect the different markets.

2. How would you deal with the fiscal constraints without relying on repetitive overrides? Would you rebalance the apportionment of funding between the Town and School sides of the budget?

We need to expand the pie by encouraging commercial development. That requires understanding the needs of all stakeholders and building consensus. There are several mixed-used development opportunities that have been identified by EDAB (Economic Development Advisory Board) like Coolidge Corner, Putterham Square, Washington Square and others. In the short-term, we should look for efficiencies within and between existing Town departments. Before addressing the Town/School Partnership, we need more transparency and the results of the management audit the Select Board just approved.

3. What do you mean by mixed-use?

Mixed-used is a way to develop the commercial tax base by having multi-story buildings with the bottom one or two floors devoted to a commercial use like retail or office space and the upper floors containing apartments. One example is 264 Washington Steet. The vibrancy of Harvad Street is reinforced through a combination of commercial and residential use. Residents benefit from having services close by and businesses benefit from the availability of customers. It's a win-win

4. Chains are replacing small businesses in our commercial areas. How would you attract and keep the businesses that have made these areas unique?

Unfortunately, individuals lack the resources of chains and cannot easily compete. We can offer incentives to help lower costs for the type of development we want but we cannot overcome economic reality.

5. What is your position on the best use for the Fisher Hill property purchased by the Town of Brookline?

The site is not particularly close to public transportation. It is currently being used by the Schools while Pierce is under construction. Proposed uses have included an outdoor pool, a senior center, a recreation center, as well as many others. I cannot take a position until we have input from the community and that process is currently underway. The ultimate decision has to factor in the need for housing and the budget crunch. We need to identify all the needs and build consensus for the broadest solution within our budget constraints.

6. How do you feel about the Brookline Charter initiative?

Whether or not our current form of government is serving our needs is a legitimate question. The formal process underway to answer it is valuable work.

7. How much of an impact will the new Trump policies have on the Town?

We need to review the places reliant on federal funds and plan accordingly. That involves transparency in examining our relationships and developing resilience.

Concluding Remarks

I have lived here for over 30 years and am grateful for all the community has given me. This is my opportunity to give something back. My focus is on understanding all the competing needs and helping to develop the most effective, efficient, and joyful solutions which embrace diversity and our natural world. You can learn more about me on my campaign website <http://michaelforbrookline.com>

III. Updates and Announcements

New COA Director Search

The initial finalist for the position has taken another job. New resumes received in December produced a candidate endorsed enthusiastically by all members of the working group and she was given a preliminary offer subject to approval by the Council on Aging and the Select Board.

Real ID

The deadline for obtaining a Massachusetts driver's license or other identification card that can be used for boarding domestic flights is May 7, 2025. For assistance in completing the necessary application, contact the Senior Center and ask for the Social Worker of the Day.

Center Street Parking Lots Committee

Applications for the Committee reviewing uses for the Center Street parking lots are now posted on the Town website.

Future Agenda

The March meeting will feature conversations with Select Board candidates Liz Linder and Carlos Ridruejo.

IV. Date of Next Meeting: March 10, 2025

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.