

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

Attending: Susan Granoff (Chair), Janet Gelbart (Notetaker), Liz Linder (Guest Speaker), Carlos Ridruejo (Guest Speaker), Marilyn Benson, Roger Blood, Carol Caro, Susan Cohen, Marion Freedman-Gurspan, Leslie Friedman, Perry Grossman, John Harris, Katie Hope, Carol MacBain, Bea Mikulecky, Richard Nangle, Fran Perler, Betsy Pollock, Yolanda Rodriguez, John Seay, Ellen Shoner, David Trevvett, Melissa Trevvett, Paul Warren

**I. A Conversation with Select Board Candidate Liz Linder**

Guest Presenter: Liz Linder (Town Meeting Member P 4)

Ms. Linder has been a Brookline resident and small business owner in Brookline Village for over 20 years. She attributes her values to her father who taught her to be independent and resourceful, and to balance confidence with humility. As a business owner and resident in Brookline Village, she will bring a perspective not currently represented on the Select Board. She has been front and center to some of the key issues facing Brookline as it balances the conflicting needs for housing, transportation, and adequate parking while still maintaining the appeal and vibrancy of its neighborhoods and commercial base. (See the attached flyer for more information on her background.)

Q&A

1. What is the biggest issue facing a small business owner? What would you do to resolve it?

I moved to Brookline because of the vibrant local commercial areas. Parking is an issue for both customers and employees. We need loading zones, short-term parking and more effective policies. To attract and retain independent shopkeepers, we need a more streamlined process for opening a business, including licensing, permitting and inspections. Especially, small business owners can't afford to pay several months' rent while waiting to open.

2. What is your perspective on local preference [the proportion of below market units reserved for local residents] and what did you learn from your experience with the Station Street proposal?

Brookline reduced the preference for local residents to encourage more diversity. As this has reduced options for seniors to remain in Brookline, I believe this should be reconsidered to increase the percentage of below market units available to local residents, especially seniors. I got involved with the proposed senior housing project at Station Street as an abutter, worked on three committees, reviewed developer proposals, and learned a lot about the process. That led me to become a Town Meeting Member.

3. Do you think that the Town should include a satellite senior center at the Fisher Hill property purchased by the Town of Brookline?

We do need a satellite Senior Center and Fisher Hill is certainly an option. There is a committee studying uses for the site led by Bernard Greene and we need to let the committee go through its public process.

4. What is your position on providing additional transportation options for seniors, such as Newton's NewMo program?

Seniors have many needs for transportation including medical visits and access to social activities to reduce isolation. The current TRIPPS program is funded through grants and other resources that are at risk; we need stable funding to continue providing these services, as the cost of not providing these services would be significant. Newton's program is a great idea.

5. What should the Town do to help seniors who wish to downsize but can't afford to do so without leaving Brookline?

Part of the answer is to increase local preference for affordable units. We need to focus on approachable housing by which I mean smaller units which are less expensive. We also need to reduce the number of properties that are bought for investment purposes.

6. How should we approach the parking problem?

First, we need to retain the parking we have. Studies for Center Street and Washington Street must include recommendations that improve parking usage policies and replace parking that may be removed for bike lanes or other amenities. We also need wayfinding to make it clear through signage where people with special needs for accessibility can find parking. We should also have well-placed loading zones for business so that trucks are not taking up available parking spaces.

7. If you could only accomplish one thing as a Select Board Member, what would that be?

Finding the right balance for parking, pedestrians, residents, businesses, and cyclists on the public way. It means extending the solutions for Complete Streets that we found on Washington Street to other areas.

8. What do you think should be done with the Center Street parking lots? Would you favor a reduction in the number of parking spaces available?

That's the same problem we wrestled with in Brookline Village, and I personally do not favor reducing parking. We still have cars and need to protect spaces for business owners and residents. We need robust studies to come up with the best solution.

9. How does the Town remain financially sustainable given the school budget gap and long-term structural deficit?

Costs are rising faster than revenues under the limits of proposition 2-1/2. Cutting back means reducing staff. Overrides are unaffordable for people on fixed income. We need input from the Expense and Revenue Study Committee and the result of the examination of school finances, both of which are just getting underway, and then we will have to make some tough decisions.

### Concluding Remarks

My campaign is about listening, collaborating, and using common sense. One in five residents of Brookline is an older adult, and we need to keep their interests front of mind as we deal with the issues of transportation, accessibility, affordable housing, fiscal accountability, rising taxes, and town services. To learn more about me, go to my website [lizlinder4brookline.org](http://lizlinder4brookline.org).

## **II. A Conversation with Select Board Candidate Carlos Ridruejo**

Guest Presenter: Carlos Ridruejo (Town Meeting Member P 14)

Mr. Ridruejo grew up in Spain and immigrated to the U.S. to study architecture, earning a Bachelor's degree from Cornell and a Master's from MIT. He and his wife settled in Brookline in 2005 and have a son at the Runkle School. Since 2019, he has been a member of the Advisory Committee and a Town Meeting Member and has served on multiple advisory, review and selection committees. Given the town's current focus on its built environment, such as development of a comprehensive plan, the use of Fisher Hill property, Chestnut Hill West, and the Center Street parking lots, he feels his perspective as an architect will be an important addition to the Select Board.

### Q&A

1. What would you do to improve the lives of seniors?

It has to start with the budget. Seniors are 20% of the population but services for older residents are less than one-third of one per cent of the budget. Much of the COA budget comes from philanthropy and I think we need to change that. It's almost as if we're saying these are things that are nice to have instead of things we must have. The Select Board can push the Town Administrator to start increasing the COA budget incrementally. Even small amounts of money will make a great deal of difference.

2. The Town solicits input from residents from surveys developed by consultants or Town staff but the questions asked often don't reflect the needs of older residents. For example, many of us have mobility issues so parking three blocks away and walking to the restaurant is not a viable solution. How can the Town get input from residents in a more meaningful way?

Parking is an issue for the Town. DPW staff take their lunch breaks in Cleveland Circle because they can't find parking in Brookline. I think we need to do a reality check on the utility of existing parking. It's not meaningful to add to the overall number of spaces if they are too far from the stores and restaurants to be useful to the people who need it.

3. What is your view on adaptive re-use of existing buildings which is better for climate change instead of tearing down buildings and starting over?

I voted against the reconstruction of Pierce because the cost was too high. Thirteen years ago, capacity at Runkle was doubled for \$18 million. Ridley cost \$100 million Driscoll \$105 million, and Pierce is projected to cost \$212 million. We are letting our wishes become needs and creating buildings that are too fragile. For example, when kids are at lunch in the cafeteria in the lobby of the new high school it is difficult to hear in the classrooms above. The tiles are too fragile to bounce a basketball on. We have created signature buildings that cost a lot but that we don't have the funds to maintain.

4. I've been told that seniors cannot be exempt from overrides because you cannot target just one part of the population, but aren't you doing that when the overrides primarily benefit the schools?

By law, we cannot target whose taxes change. But the burden on people on fixed income is higher, and I don't think we can rely on overrides every two or three years. We can make sure future overrides benefit all Town services and not just the schools.

5. How much does the Town spend on consultants?

Part of the reason to use consultants is that the Town does not have the necessary expertise especially since it relies heavily on volunteer boards. There is more work than Town staff can handle so consultants are called in. I'm thinking specifically of the design work in zoning projects. But we need to be careful that the consultants don't have their own agenda and that the outcomes reflect the input from the community.

6. If you could accomplish only one thing as a Select Board member, what would that be and how would you achieve it?

I would increase the budget for the COA. The Town Administrator always finds ways to fund his projects. A priority has to be to devote more resources to the senior population.

7. Seniors who wish to downsize can't find affordable ways to do that and remain in Brookline. What can the Town do to help?

The market dictates pricing. We need to find more ways to build smaller units that are lower priced. ADUs (accessory dwelling units) are a perfect example. These are

owner sponsored projects, not developer sponsored projects. The owner can build an ADU and live in it and rent his house for income.

### Concluding Remarks

The questions highlight the problems the Town is facing, -- housing, parking, tax increases. In most cases, the Select Board can do a fair amount by directing where the issues are handled. Part of the reason I'm running is to be able to massage the direction that things are taking. Go to my website [electcarlos.com](http://electcarlos.com) for more information about me or to ask additional questions you may have.

### **III. Updates and Announcements**

#### New COA Director Search

Emily Williams has been appointed as the new Director of the COA/Senior Center with a start date of March 24. Ruthann Dobek is continuing on a consultant basis to insure a successful transition.

### **IV. Date of Next Meeting: TBD**

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](http://brooklinecan.org)  
Thank you.