



Brookline PAX Recommendations

Annual Town Meeting, May 26, 2015

Article 6 – Annual increase in property tax exemption for disabled veterans, the blind, etc.

SUPPORT

This article, championed originally by PAX board members Mark Levy and Stan Spiegel and approved annually since 1989, provides property tax exemptions until the sale of the property or the death of the owner for a small number of veterans and disabled or elderly residents deserving of financial assistance. The categories, base amounts, and permissible doubling of the exemptions are prescribed by state law.

Art. 8 – FY16 Budget

SUPPORT, with AMENDMENT to S/A #40

We have submitted, and ask you to support, the following three-word amendment to Special Appropriation #40 (on p. 8-75 of the Combined Reports): “\$100,000, ... for the development WITH NEIGHBORHOOD INPUT of a conceptual study for the Center Street East Parking Lot and surrounding area.” We expect neighborhood input to happen anyway, and Planning staff have already begun to receive it with a presentation and comments at a meeting of the North Brookline Neighborhood Association on April 15—but it always bears emphasis in this type of context.

Art. 10 – Reduce number of Town employees covered by minimum wage provision of Living Wage Bylaw **NO ACTION**

As a general principle, PAX supports working people, fair wages and a Living Wage. Thus, we look with skepticism on any measure seeking to reduce the wages of working people, even if those working people are part-time employees or students. This article would broaden the exceptions to the requirement that the Town pay a living wage. Although there is some appeal to the argument that the broader exception to the living wage would create greater flexibility for youth jobs in the Recreation Department, this change would also affect seasonal and temporary DPW positions (which are occupied disproportionately by the Town’s few Black employees). For this reason—and without a better explanation of the necessity for this proposal, including especially the numbers of employees in each impacted category—PAX urges voting NO ACTION.

Art. 11 – Establish a Crowninshield Road Conservation District

SUPPORT

This self-contained gem of a neighborhood, pressured by Dexter Park, Comm Ave, BU and St. Aidan’s, has worked hard for the protection sought in this proposal, and it’s hard to think of a neighborhood better suited for it.

Art. 12 – Increase sidewalk snow removal fines

SUPPORT PROPOSED AMENDED VOTE AND FURTHER STUDY

Our Board did not yet have the pared-down motion by the selectmen (or petitioners) in hand, but our discussion elicited no objection to it. We have for decades prioritized this by-law for the safety of pedestrians, especially elderly and kids. We welcome the work of the Town Administrator’s task force, the general idea of intra-departmental “hearings,” and the recognition of “due process” issues in the latter’s coordination with non-criminal enforcement under By-law 10.3, which for many years we’ve urged to be better scrutinized as to its discretionary nature. We hope that, too, will now finally happen, with the promised further study of the original warrant article, which we hope to see again—but refined.

Art. 13 – Require food service establishments to offer tap water to customers

SUPPORT SELECTMEN’S MOTION

PAX recommends Favorable Action on the selectmen’s motion, supported by the petitioners. This by-law would require restaurants and other food service establishments to provide tap water to customers upon request. Most but not all common victualers already offer tap water, but without the by-law a business could end this practice at any time, preferring to sell a packaged beverage rather than serve free tap water. This proposal addresses Brookline’s transition away from reliance on bottled water. More generally, though, it is part of a longer campaign to reduce the consumption of water and other beverages packaged in plastic.

Art. 14 – Prohibit sale of bottled water at (non-athletic) events on Town property and for use in Town offices

SUPPORT SELECTMEN’S MOTION

Water sold in plastic bottles directly harms the environment and is unsustainable in every phase of its commercial processing. Article 14 seeks to remove Brookline from the loop with a by-law based on a successful San Francisco ordinance. PAX urges support of the selectmen’s position in the following order: (1) YES on dividing the question;

(2) YES on referring to a selectmen's committee all sections other than Section 8.36.4(a); and (3) YES on Section 8.36.4(a), which prohibits the use of Town funds to purchase bottled water for general office use (except when necessary to protect health or safety). The sections that would be referred to a selectmen's committee seek additional restrictions (e.g., on the sale of bottled water at events on Town property or by Town licensees) and would be brought back to Town Meeting within a year.

Arts. 15 & 16 – Permit construction of a solar electricity facility at 813-815-817 Newton Street **SUPPORT**

These addresses are the site of the DPW waste transfer station. Photovoltaic panels will be mounted on the roof of an open-walled structure in which trucks will park and equipment will be stored. The open space of the adjacent Lost Pond will not be affected. Article 15 extends the Town's Renewable Energy Overlay District, which currently contains only the Singletree Hill Reservoir, by adding the transfer station site—a major step toward Brookline's earning Green Community designation by the state's Department of Energy Resources, making us eligible to apply for special grant funding. Article 16 permits 30-year leasing of the site to solar development company Blue Wave Capital, which was selected by the MAPC to develop the project. Any financial risk will be borne solely by Blue Wave. The project enables Brookline to generate electricity by renewable means and will reduce the Town's dependence on fossil fuels and lower our carbon footprint. PAX looks forward to endorsing many similar projects in the future.

Art. 18 – Resolution to consider eminent domain for greenspace buffer zones on the edges of Hancock Village **SUPPORT**

This proposal urges the selectmen to study taking by eminent domain the buffer areas along Russett & Beverly Roads, about 6 acres, for park and recreation uses. Submitted by neighborhood petitioners, it seeks only a study. According to the Planning Board in the 1940s, when negotiating the Hancock Village development, the buffer areas were to remain permanent open space, although left zoned for single-family houses. Once in the 1950s and again in the 1960s, the Zoning Board of Appeals rejected proposals for putting parking lots there. A taking would not stop the majority of housing units now proposed by the Hancock Village owner from being constructed as a Chapter 40B development; they're located elsewhere on the property. Also, as pointed out at the bottom of page 18-6 of the Combined Reports, a strong precedent exists for a taking to foreclose further development at Hancock Village.

For more information see "Advisory: new park land for Putterham neighborhoods," *Brookline Beacon*, April 10, 2015, at <http://brooklinebeacon.com/2015/04/10/advisory-new-park-land-for-putterham-neighborhoods/>

Art. 19 – Resolution opposing Boston 2024's Olympics bid **SUPPORT**

This resolution, with both PAX co-chairs among the principal petitioners, is largely self-explanatory. While some Brookline officials have a right to be miffed that neither Boston 2024 officials nor Mayor Walsh have thus far taken seriously either the obvious impact of the Olympics on Brookline or this article, that's not the main issue. Nor even are the likely impacts on our town and our citizens, or even the well-founded fears of public funds inevitably being tapped. Mostly, and more simply, we do not believe (1) that Boston (or Brookline) needs "showcasing," or (2) that unelected "officials" (sic) should be deciding the details of alleged/predicted "public benefits." Those decisions are for what's appropriately called "government" officials.

Marty Rosenthal (TMM-9) and Frank Farlow (TMM-4), Co-chairs

PAX supports: Excellent public education and services, Respect for public employees and organized labor, and Advocacy for the environment, diversity and social justice.

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