



Brookline PAX Recommendations

Annual Town Meeting, May 22, 2012

Art. 8 – FY13 Budget

SUPPORT CARO AMENDMENT, then AC MOTION

PAX urges support for an amendment adding \$8,000 to the library budget, providing a total of \$15,000 to keep the Coolidge Corner branch open on Sundays all summer long instead of just during July. The Library Trustees had originally asked for the full \$15,000 but bowed to Selectmen pressure to reduce their request. They also feared union opposition if librarians were required to work on August Sundays in case enough employee volunteers couldn't be found, although the librarian contract allows such Sunday assignments.

Sunday openings would serve residents of all ages, income levels, and ethnic backgrounds. But elderly and low-income folks for whom the library offers an oasis of respite and enrichment, plus observant Jews who cannot use the library on Saturdays, would be particularly aided by Sunday openings for the entire summer. The benefit to the public outweighs the concerns of the Library Trustees. We urge Town Meeting to provide the additional \$8,000 as an indication to the trustees of town-wide support for keeping the library open on Sundays all summer.

Art. 9 – Require boards and committees reviewing a warrant article to hold a public hearing **REFER to CTO&S**

The petitioners raise an important issue: the need for more and better citizen input on warrant articles. PAX strongly supports the concept and much of what the petitioners propose, especially for boards like the selectmen and Advisory Committee, which make recommendations in the Combined Reports to TMM's. However, in its present form the proposal leaves too many questions unanswered: To which committees and boards would the requirement apply (and why does the School Committee not appear in the list on pp. 9-9 and 9-10)? What constitutes a public hearing? What is "adequate notice"? Shouldn't boards and committees making recommendations on warrant articles be required to engage in affirmatively active outreach to all potential stakeholders for the public hearing? PAX looks forward to reconsidering—and ultimately supporting—this article when such details have been worked out.

Art. 10 – Create Wild-Sargent local historic district

SUPPORT

Articles 10 and 11 create a local historic district and place a preservation restriction on 26 Weybridge Road. The owners wish to permanently preserve both the historic buildings and their open setting for the benefit of both the neighborhood and the Town. This is a magnificent gesture that should be accepted unanimously.

Art. 11 – Accept a preservation restriction on 26 Weybridge Road

SUPPORT (See Article 10.)

Art. 12 – Increase legal age to purchase tobacco products from 18 to 19

SUPPORT

According to Needham's experience, this proposal would substantially reduce the number of BHS smokers in the future. In 2010 we banned the sale of tobacco products on college campuses; this is a worthwhile additional step to reduce youth smoking, since the earlier a smoker begins, the greater the risk of smoking-related disease.

Art. 17 – Amend public benefit incentive provisions of Zoning Bylaw

SUPPORT

The Zoning Bylaw permits developers to receive dimensional bonuses in return for "public benefits." This amendment provides that things already required by the Bylaw or any other law may not be claimed as public benefits. Also, since a developer should not receive an extra story worth millions in exchange for a park bench, it requires the Board of Appeals to grant bonuses commensurate with public benefits. This is a neighborhood-friendly amendment.

Art. 18 – Amend Zoning Bylaw to limit extensions for variances to 6 months, and eliminate requirement of Planning Board advisory report

SUPPORT

Currently, special permits can be extended repeatedly, and a Planning Board report is required for each request. This proposal limits the time that special permits may be extended to six months, and for this single extension no report would be required. This makes us more consistent with State law, and it is another neighborhood-friendly amendment.

Art. 20 – Increase monthly retirement allowance for survivors of certain Town retirees from \$250 to \$500

SUPPORT

The Town’s current annual benefit to survivors of this small group of retirees (about 25) is a strikingly meager \$3,000. Even with this increase (recommended by the Pension Board at an annual cost of \$20,000 declining over time to zero), the resultant annual amount (\$6,000) will be far less than the minimum wage (\$13,600).

Art. 21 – Increase retiree cost-of-living adjustment (COLA) base from \$12,000 to \$13,000

SUPPORT

PAX urges support for increasing the base amount on which a COLA (of 3% maximum) can be awarded to retirees from the current \$12,000 to \$13,000. This would increase the maximum annual COLA that could be awarded for retiree pensions from \$360 to \$390. An increase of \$30 annually may not seem like much, but as years go by, the effect is cumulative: the second year, pensions will have increased by \$60 above what they would have been if the base were kept at \$12,000 – and after ten years, retiree pensions would have increased by \$300, assuming a 3% COLA award every year.

Town employment does not come with Social Security benefits, and many employees rely heavily on their pensions upon retirement. For a pension of \$30,000, the maximum COLA adjustment with the \$12,000 base amounts to an increase of just 1.2%, and increasing the base to \$13,000 as proposed only raises the COLA increase to 1.3%, hardly a boondoggle. There will be a cost to the town budget, but it will be manageable and not out of line with other ongoing increases in governmental costs. Increasing the COLA base is the right thing to do for our hard-pressed retirees.

Art. 23 – Prohibit contra-car-flow bicycle lanes

Vote NO ACTION

The petitioner offers some important general ideas for better citizen input by the Transportation Board – indeed by lots of Town boards and commissions – e.g., “prior to approval of any regulation...[they] should first undertake to... publish for public comment a set of...specific guidelines”, and “[they] should affirmatively solicit input and comments from... governmental and nongovernmental bodies and individual neighborhood associations that have a legitimate interest in the development of such guidelines, and based thereon should formulate and through a public process adopt such guidelines.” Currently the Planning Board must do these things by state law, and the Selectmen often do so on police policies (a practice they adopted in 1987 after the Police & Community Relations Report), but many boards and commissions do not.

However, we do not think contra-car-flow bicycle lanes – which in some locations have clear value and minimal downsides – merit being singled out for such process improvements, or being micro-managed to the extent prescribed in the proposed resolution.

Art. 24 – Remove Brookline as a member community in Norfolk County

Vote NO ACTION

As indicated in last year’s selectmen’s recommendation, there is “virtually no chance” that the legislature would pass this legislation, since the remaining communities would inherit our tax burden. For the very same reason, those communities would be less receptive to our future home rule petitions on other matters if we were to attempt to withdraw. We share the selectmen’s “major concern” that the Brookline District Court would be more likely to be closed as a result of passing this resolution. But unlike their concern, ours has not been alleviated. Court closings are, indeed, partly a political process. We say (for the third time), “we oppose any such legislative action until the crucial concerns [primarily regarding the court] expressed in Chief O’Leary’s letter of April 6, 2011, are substantially alleviated.” This resolution plays with political fire.

Art. 25 – Resolution to abolish Norfolk County government

Vote NO ACTION

For the reasons concisely stated by the selectmen (p. 25-2), here we agree with them – and the Advisory Committee.

Art. 26 – Resolution concerning Runkle School and public construction projects

SUPPORT AC MOTION (p. 26-11)

This resolution asks Town officials to consider relocating some of the rooftop HVAC units on the renovated Runkle School to provide meaningful remediation for impacted abutters at reasonable cost. It also calls for the Town to implement policies to help prevent last-minute surprises like the size and location of the HVAC units that caused the chair of the Runkle School Building Committee to exclaim “Yikes!” when she first saw these structures in place.

The resolution doesn’t assess blame, but recognizes that this aspect of the renovation could have come out better, and seeks steps to correct it without interfering with September’s planned reopening of Runkle or impeding the functioning of the school next year. No funds are committed; any funding deemed reasonable would require a future Town Meeting appropriation vote. Besides acting on concern for the impacted abutters, the resolution will inspire confidence that Brookline undertakes school and town construction as needed, but does so recognizing its obligation to protect

neighboring properties to the extent reasonably possible—thus nurturing public support for future projects.

Art. 27 – Resolution concerning slavery in Brookline

SUPPORT PETITIONERS' MOTION

We strongly welcome and support this effort, particularly all of its “*Resolved*” clauses. We agree that it’s important to “publicly acknowledge [Brookline’s] painful past” in order to “resolve to be vigilant against any and all recurrences of such prejudice.” Our forward-looking commitment to civil rights and liberties merits constant vigilance and reaffirmation, including by owning our own community’s flawed history.

Art. 28 – Resolution to support clean construction standards

SUPPORT

The members of YMORE are to be commended for bringing before us the important issue of diesel pollution, and for pointing the way for Brookline to take action that will improve public health and reduce the community’s greenhouse gas emissions. PAX looks forward to future warrant articles that will further reduce diesel emissions in Brookline.

Art. 29 – Resolution urging a constitutional amendment to reverse Citizens United and control the influence of money in elections

SUPPORT

The nation-wide campaign to amend the Constitution has achieved extraordinary momentum. Many municipalities have passed resolutions similar to this one – some 52 in Massachusetts alone. Resolutions have likewise been introduced in 25 state legislatures, and this year three states have passed them: New Mexico, Hawaii and Vermont (with California on its way). PAX wholeheartedly urges Town Meeting to add Brookline to the list, and to encourage our legislative delegation to work to add Massachusetts.

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.

Think globally, act locally—see: www.BrooklinePAX.

**Brookline PAX
PO Box 470525
Brookline MA 02447-0525**

