

Brookline PAX: Who We Are: Six Decades and Still Kicking

It is reported that anthropologist Margaret Mead was asked by a student what she considered to be the first sign of civilization in a culture. Dr. Mead explained that the first sign of civilization was a femur (thigh bone) that had been broken and then healed. A healed femur is evidence that someone has tended to the person through recovery. Helping someone else through difficulty is where civilization starts.

Brief History: Brookline PAX was established in 1962 to promote peace and justice at home and abroad, including opposition to nuclear weapons and the Vietnam War. Support for civil rights and social justice were founding principles, as PAX activists helped expose racial discrimination in Brookline, when people of color were often prohibited from buying or renting property here. Support for rent control was soon another high priority.

Brookline PAX was one of two forerunners of CPPAX -- *Citizens for Participation in Political Action* -- a statewide organization in Massachusetts active from 1962 – 2002. Our original 1962 motto, “Think Globally, Act Locally,” has defined us to this day. Brookline PAX is one of the longest continuously operating grass-roots progressive activist groups in the nation.

PAX has been led by community activists, beginning with Ethel Alper whose political engagement began in 1936, supporting the Republic of Spain in its civil war. In 1988, when Board member and now former State Representative Frank Smizik was chair, he described PAX’s work: “Peace in Central America; disarmament; nuclear weapons and nuclear power reductions; reform of our criminal justice system; abolition of the death penalty; support for abortion rights and gun control; and fair, affordable, and rent controlled housing.” He also stated, “*We believe working on these issues on a local level is a way of effecting change on a national level.*”

Several years later, during Frank Farlow’s and Marty Rosenthal’s years as co-chairs, additional PAX fundamental principles were spelled out: support for excellent public schools and public services; respect for our natural environment; respect for the dignity of work and workers’ rights; support for Brookline as a Sanctuary Town; and a world in which human rights are protected and conflicts are resolved peacefully. *For more history, current activity, and the list of our Board members, see: <https://brooklinepax.org>.*

Today: Since 1962, PAX has mobilized Brookline residents in many ways: endorsing candidates for state /local office; recommending positions on most Town Meeting warrant articles; advocating for local, state, and national policy changes, including through legislation, public forums, and peaceful protest. All positions are approved by at least 60% of the Board.

This statement, ***PAX: Who We Are***, is a political document. To us, politics is the opposite of a dirty word. *Politics is the process through which “We the People” decide how we will live together as a local community/Commonwealth/nation/global community.* Our collective progressive priorities today include:

- **Ensuring the integrity and strength of our constitutional democracy**, with universal, fair, and equal rights enforced by laws; voting rights guaranteed; voting made easy and accessible, including same day registration; where every vote is counted; where gerrymandering and the Electoral College are reformed; where *Citizens United* is ended and election campaigns are all publicly funded; and Election Day is a state and national holiday.
- **Advocating for free, fully and equitably funded, high quality comprehensive Pre-K-16 public education.** We strongly support our public school students, educators, staff, their unions, and we support high quality and affordable child-care for all parents. We support teaching our students to think critically, and schools’ curriculum must include the full evidence-based history of our nation – the good, the bad, and the ugly. We work to ensure that all students receive the educational, social, emotional resources, and the guidance they need and deserve.
- **Eliminating poverty and reducing our nation’s staggering income and wealth inequality**, honoring the dignity of all work; supporting a guaranteed living wage, paid family leave, and robust post-employment benefits for all workers; growing strong labor unions; enacting progressive tax policies at the local, state, and national levels; and opposing the privatization of essential public programs and services.
- **Supporting gender justice, including women’s rights, LGBTQ+ rights, and reproductive rights**, by codifying Roe v. Wade, ratifying the Equal Rights Amendment to the US Constitution, and combatting gender violence and discrimination in any form.
- **Confronting our nation’s historic and systemic racism and building a proactive anti-racist community**, including collaborative work with many like-minded residents and groups in progressive but not infallible Brookline; supporting strong affirmative action programs; advocating for policies like immigration reform, criminal justice reform, and opposing the death penalty. We also respond to inflammatory exaggerations about our community that can discourage people of color and immigrant families from moving here; and we work energetically to be a welcoming and safe community for all people.

- **Working to establish the right to safe and affordable housing for all people, including in costly Brookline.** Because home ownership is a proven path for people of modest means to accrue personal wealth and ensure stability in housing, we support policies that make home ownership viable for all who want it. We support policies that will increase affordable housing in the private market, public alternatives such as additional public housing, and remedies like rent regulation, stronger inclusionary zoning, land trusts, and community housing.
- **Politically and financially supporting Brookline's excellent and progressive public safety departments and officers** so that we attract and retain an outstanding and diverse work force. Simultaneously, we support continuous ongoing police reforms such as body/dashboard cameras, improved traffic stop criteria, and generally better civilian control (with community input) by the Select Board.
- **Guaranteeing high quality, comprehensive, affordable, and accessible health care** – including dental care, mental health care, home care for seniors -- for all people in our community and in our nation.
- **Protecting the natural environment in response to the existential global climate crisis** through creative proactive policies and practices that reduce greenhouse gas emissions, increase sustainability and resilience as we transition from fossil fuels to 100% clean energy.
- **Working to end the epidemic of gun violence by drastically reforming gun policies and practices, rejecting the Supreme Court's bastardization of the 2nd Amendment to the US Constitution.** Its language -- "A well-regulated Militia, being necessary to the security of a free State, the right of the people to keep and bear Arms, shall not be infringed" -- should not empower individuals to purchase military grade weapons or prevent restrictive "right to carry" gun laws or universal background checks.
- **Working for peaceful and just resolutions to local, national, and global conflicts,** from very tightly limited use of our military to respectful and civil community discourse.
- **Understanding that without sufficient tax revenues, government cannot provide essential public services.** Supreme Court Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes, Jr. said, "Taxes are the price we pay for civilization." Yet, our corporations and wealthiest individuals – after *Citizens United* and large tax cuts in 2017 -- now pay less and less of their fair share of taxes, and their influence over our elected officials is increased and solidified. We need to change this anti-democratic financial and political structure.
- Embracing this statement in the 2020 platform of the Democratic Party: "**We will give hate no safe harbor!**" Every human must have the freedom to define themselves and feel safe in that definition.

- **Encouraging citizen engagement and activism:** Another Supreme Court Justice – Louis Brandeis -- said, “The most important office in a democracy is the office of citizen.” Messy though it can be, we strongly support Brookline’s “republican” form of legislature, now 255 TMMs strong, with a five-member Select Board (which deserves a more robust stipend to reward hard work and increase inclusivity).

The society we envision lives at the intersection of America’s private enterprise economic system and the people’s rights and responsibilities as embedded in our local, state, and national democratic governments. We recognize that capitalism is a powerful economic engine. However, under-regulated capitalism is a formula for staggering economic and political inequality, exploitation of workers, and the degradation of our natural environment. Although sometimes capitalism and the common good coincide, capitalism is driven by corporate and individual profit, not the common good. Capitalism is the economic context but the common good – including public schools, public safety, public health, environmental protection, public recreation, public transportation, and the community’s infrastructure – is mainly the responsibility of the people and our governments. There must be a balance between free enterprise economics and our responsibility for the common good. Robert Reich calls this “democratic capitalism.”

The Persian poet/philosopher Rumi wrote, “Out beyond ideas of right-doing and wrong-doing is a field. I will meet you there.” Brookline PAX believes that in our democratic society, especially in today’s toxic and divided political environment, Rumi’s field is where healthy and constructive debate happens. We hope to see everyone there!