

Brookline PAX Recommendations

Annual Town Meeting, May 25, 2010

Art. 8: FY11 Budget

SUPPORT two amendments + AC version

PAX always encourages Town Meeting Members to ask questions, as the Advisory Committee has about this article, and not passively rubber stamp our officials, who are talented, hard working and sincere but not infallible. We favor the resultant AC motion, adding a needed and affordable part-time outreach worker for the Council on Aging – to provide direct assistance in food stamps, fuel assistance and financial aid applications, Medicare counseling, etc., and to work with local clergy and other social service providers in serving the needs of our most vulnerable low-income elders, who seldom come to the Senior Center.

First, however, we recommend support of two amendments to the AC motion:

- Frank Caro’s would boost the selectmen’s compensation by \$1,000. PAX recently supported a larger proposed increase – the first in decades – mainly to help encourage less affluent citizens to run for selectman.

- Library Trustee Gary Jones’s would open the Coolidge Corner library (already the branch library with the highest circulation in the state) on summer Sunday afternoons. Many working residents, especially those with young children, find it difficult to visit the libraries on weekdays. If this passes, we are confident that the budget can be balanced by Town officials as later developments unfold.

Art. 10: Police & Fire “Commissioners”

OPPOSE referral by recorded vote; SUPPORT PAX’s motion

We’re perplexed by the reluctance of some officials to formalize these important, traditional titles, and we urge that there’s not the slightest reason to refer this PAX-sponsored article – except to unnecessarily delay and try later to defeat it. There is nothing complicated about the proposal, which should be laid to rest before hiring a new Town Administrator. Town Meeting recently passed three resolutions addressed to the selectmen (regarding the Conquest incident and the DHS surveillance cameras) underlining the fundamental importance of their role as policy-setting police commissioners. They need to fully embrace – not shy away from – both their statutory role and the universally used title which has helped define and emphasize that role since “*sometime before the memory of man remembereth [when] the Selectmen acquired the additional title of Police Commissioners,*” as stated in former Town Counsel David Turner’s memo of 1997. For 13 years since then, the title has continued to be commonplace, but always uttered under a cloud of double-talk, albeit unknowing and/or unintentional. It’s time to call a commissioner spade a commissioner. Since referral will be the critical motion, we urge support of a recorded vote on that motion.

For more details as to the article’s importance, and answers to all the ostensible referral questions, see (a) our original description (Combined Reports, pp. 10-1 to 10-4), (b) our amended motion and its explanation (supplemental mailing), and (c) a TAB op-ed, we hope, this week.

Art. 11: Establish a Stretch Energy Code

SUPPORT

By adopting this code, we will reduce the Town’s carbon footprint, reduce our nation’s dependence on foreign oil, and reduce utility costs. Adoption will also help qualify Brookline as a Green Community under the State’s Green Communities Act, entitling the Town to significant grant money.

Art. 12: Adopt a nuisance control bylaw amendment

SUPPORT

We are pleased to join the selectmen and Advisory Committee in support of Precinct 2 and 8 petitioners who have managed to come up with a promising solution to rowdy neighborhood gatherings. Patterned on a law recently adopted by Amherst (another town with college students) that has proved highly successful, it also has the strong support of Chief O’Leary. We also appreciate that it uses only civil enforcement, minimizing issues of Due Process and an excessively discretionary criminal enforcement option.

Art. 13: Eliminate requirements to mail certain documents

SUPPORT PAX amendment + AC motion

A clearly worthy effort to reduce the paper storm and simultaneously save the Town some money year after year. We strongly support the AC version requiring printed Combined Reports for Town Meeting

members to bring to Town Meeting; neither opt-in nor opt-out is acceptable. The PAX amendment would ensure that Town Meeting Members and others can obtain a printed copy of the Financial Plan (“budget book”) by picking it up at Town Hall. A reduction of 100 copies will save about \$7,000 annually for printing and mailing.

Art. 14: Red Cab site zoning amendment

OPPOSE EDAB amendment, SUPPORT AC motion

The AC motion presents a rare opportunity to get zoning right. A recently abandoned development proposal showed clearly what current zoning for this parcel allows. The neighborhood wants protections from those visual and shadow impacts. The Economic Development Advisory Board wants more floor area. But the two are not in direct contradiction; given time, they’ll compromise. The EDAB amendment makes few concessions and offers little protection to neighbors. It also includes no sunset clause, so whatever discussion continues wouldn’t be time-limited, and it does not look forward to better zoning. The AC motion with its sunset clause creates a development moratorium – a first step toward getting the zoning right. The White Place neighborhood and the PAX board urge Town Meeting to reject the EDAB amendment, if offered, and to approve the Advisory Committee motion.

Art. 16: Ban texting while driving in Brookline

SUPPORT

Nine years ago the Attorney General rejected Town Meeting’s PAX-supported attempt to prohibit talking on cell phones while driving in town, based on the state’s preemption of authority in this domain. We join the selectmen and AC in supporting this more limited article, since even if it, too, is rejected, it sends a message to our state representatives and senator, and to others as well, that municipalities are becoming fed up with state reluctance to outlaw a lethal practice. We wish, in fact, that the state would go further and ban even hands-free cell phones, by now a well proven hazard.

Art. 17: Resolution on commemoration of MLK Day

SUPPORT petitioner’s motion

PAX was among the earliest to voice regret that there was no 2010 MLK Day event, and we commend the selectmen for forming an MLK Day committee.

We favor the petitioner’s motion, which among other things calls for an annual report on diversity. The AC, concerned that the report would be divisive, too demanding for the committee, and unnecessary without proof of discrimination, eliminates all reference to the report. We feel that these concerns are misplaced. The selectmen can appoint any number of qualified members to the steering committee, and long experience shows that the Town is full of able citizens willing to devote their time and energy to preparing studies on a broad array of subjects. We should be able to embrace the cause of diversity without unduly offending racial sensitivities. The purpose of the report is not to level criticism, but to provide the Town with a guide for measuring our progress toward MLK’s vision of equality.

PAX considers it desirable to celebrate Dr. King’s legacy of striving for equality in part by taking practical steps to continue his work in the present. We commend the petitioners for introducing a resolution encouraging the selectmen to do just that.

Art. 18: Resolution on Town participation in regional bike sharing network

SUPPORT

Generally favoring initiatives to encourage alternatives to carbon-powered transportation, we’re pleased to add our support to that of the selectmen and the Advisory Committee.

Marty Rosenthal and Frank Farlow, Co-chairs

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