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BROOKLINE PAX NEWS

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March 2008

Co-chairs: Frank Farlow & Marty Rosenthal

Newsletter production by Mark Levy

Please join us for our

2008 Brookline PAX Annual Meeting and Awards

Monday, March 10, 7:00 p.m. in the Devotion School Cafeteria, 345 Harvard Street
“Empire & Decline: Urgent Issues the Presidential Candidates Aren’t Debating”

Speaker: Joseph Gerson, Director of Programs and Director of the Peace and Economic Security Program for the American Friends Service Committee in New England

Honorees:

PAX Community Service Award: BROOKLINE GREENSPACE ALLIANCE for its leadership in the preservation, protection and enhancement of Brookline’s open spaces

Ethel & Ben Alper Progressive Activism Award:° ARTHUR CONQUEST for his productive activism within the Brookline educational system and his inspiring advocacy of human rights

Jack Backman Social Justice Award:° Judge NANCY GERTNER for standard-setting work during her many years as an advocate in important cases affecting women, minorities, and the poor, and her exemplary service since 1994 as a federal district judge

Business meeting – Election of Officers and Board Members

Campaign Kickoff Party—Sunday, April 6, 3:00-4:15 at 123 Buckminster Rd.

Help PAX kick off the Town’s election races by supporting thoughtful, progressive candidates! Share FOOD, FUN and FELLOWSHIP and meet PAX-endorsed candidates as they begin their runs for victory in the May 6 Town elections.

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Brookline PAX Board: Co-chairs Frank Farlow and Marty Rosenthal; Treasurer Gary Jones; Members Judy Alland, Catherine Anderson, John Bassett, Craig Bolon, Edith Brickman, Nelson Brill, Margaret Burnham, Cathleen Cavell, Susan & Abram Chipman, Susan Cohen, Joyce DesRoches Golden, Shira Diner, Andrew Fischer, Phyllis Giller, Jack Golden, Ruth Golden, Rachel Goodman, Lisa Guisbond, Amy Hendrickson, Gilbert Hoy, Julie Johnson, Estelle Katz, David Klafter, Jody Lally, Virginia LaPlante, Mark Levy, Richard Levy, Rita McNally, Burton Nadler, John Reinstein, Evelyn Roll, Richard Rosen, Harriet Rosenstein, Bill Schlesinger, Susan Senator, Maxine Shaw, Will Slotnick, Rep. Frank Smizik, Diana & Stanley Spiegel, Donald Weitzman, Karen Wenc, Sarah Wunsch and Ellen Zucker

Join PAX or renew your membership today – See back cover

Co-chairs' Column—Marty Rosenthal

With mea culpas for the long hiatus between newsletters, I assure you that it doesn't reflect, even slightly, reduced activity on our part. The scope of our activities, including those of individual board members, defies succinct summary. Among them – aside from this newsletter's topics (environment, immigration and override) – have been state and national elections, including many people working for Deval Patrick; civil rights and liberties advocacy, e.g., for drug law reform and against the death penalty; work within several Town committees on planning, development, and zoning issues; efforts supporting more aggressive school funding and less aggressive use of MCAS; and leadership of several neighborhood groups.

We finally won a six-year struggle to reform Brookline's two-hour daytime residential parking ban, through the adoption of a permit system, in part due to our success in persuading Town Meeting – and then Rep. Frank Smizik and Sen. Cindy Creem – to also restore its ultimate authority over Transportation Board regulations.

Many PAX leaders and members have been active concerning the thorny and embarrassing incident involving Town Meeting Member (TMM) Arthur Conquest, a member of the Zoning Board of Appeals, and several Town and police officials. Both Frank and I have published op-eds in the TAB, which received welcome positive feedback (e.g., "Group wants bias policies reviewed," 1/13/08 Sunday Globe), urging the selectmen to take responsibility for their Police Commissioner responsibilities. So far, only Selectman Gil Hoy has heard our voice and the voices of scores of TMM's and even more citizens. The Board has instead formed a study committee (of which I am a member).

We saw our Resolution Reaffirming Sanctuary Status for Undocumented Immigrants adopted by Town Meeting (see Nelson Brill's article below). And we, and all those who feel development in residential neighborhoods must be regulated, earned a hard-fought victory through a 2/3 Town Meeting vote protecting a number of two-family buildings in multi-family zones – in the face of stubborn resistance from our selectmen (except Gil Hoy again, this time joined by Betsy DeWitt) and planning officials.

PAX also took the lead in extending the state's Open Meeting Law by requiring more information about committee agendas, decisions, and meeting reports to be made public. This information will soon join meeting notices on the Town's website and e-mail listserv.

For the two Town Meetings each year, we mail recommendations to TMM's about, often offer speeches on, and sometimes sponsor controversial warrant articles; and we are influential with many of the 240 TMM's. One reason is the electoral success of PAX-endorsed TMM candidates in the majority of precincts. The five or six mostly southern precincts where we enjoy less success have higher voter turnouts – which poses a challenge for PAX candidates for town-wide offices. However, since our legislative branch remains generally progressive, so does Brookline's government.

At our 2007 annual meeting, BHA Commissioner Barbara Sard gave a timely keynote address on "Affordable Housing in a Shifting Political Landscape: Federal and State Funding Priorities and Opportunities in Brookline." We decided to finally name two of our annual awards: the Jack Backman Social Justice Award, which was presented to former state Rep. John Businger, and the Ethel & Ben Alper Progressive Activism Award, to Diana and Stanley Spiegel. A Lifetime Achievement Award was also given to Maxine Shaw for her two decades of leadership of the Brookline-Quezalguaque Sister City Project.

Finally, although we haven't yet started our endorsement process for the May 6 town election (since the March 18 deadline for candidates to submit their nomination signatures hasn't arrived), many PAX members have started working hard for GIL HOY, whom we've always endorsed and who has been – on issue after issue – the most forceful progressive selectman in recent years (e.g. the only one who actively supported our 2002 Resolution opposing on the invasion of Iraq!). He faces a tough campaign for re-election to one of the two seats open this year and will need lots of help. The PAX Board voted to authorize the co-chairs to get involved in Gil's campaign before the PAX endorsement process, and we hereby do so!

Check out www.BrooklinePAX.org for a list of Board members and more information. Please send us your DUES; and please join our e-mail LISTSERV (not much activity—maybe 1-2 messages per week) by sending an e-mail to dianaspiegel@yahoo.com

Immigration Notes—Nelson Brill

Last year, Town Meeting voted in favor of a PAX resolution re-affirming Brookline's status as a Sanctuary City. The resolution expressed the Town's commitment to the safety and equal, humane treatment of immigrants, both documented and undocumented. It also restated Town Meeting's wish that Town employees refrain (when legally permissible) from assisting in immigration enforcement operations, which is the sole purview of federal authorities. Sanctuary resolutions such as this, although containing no legal teeth, are vital expressions of local communities' solidarity with immigrants, both legal and illegal, as erosion of the rights of immigrants continues unabated in the current political climate.

As a result of a recent example of this erosion, a lawsuit was initiated last month by Seton Hall Law School's Center for Social Justice (CSJ) and a Brazilian organization in New Jersey seeking to compel the Department of Homeland Security to release documents regarding its practice of carrying out pre-dawn, warrantless raids of immigrants' homes in New Jersey. In raids of this type, Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) agents enter immigrant homes in the early hours of the morning without search warrants, using intimidation and, on occasion, force to gather together and question everyone in the home. The agents then arrest individuals who cannot immediately prove legal residence.

According to ICE statistics, of the 2,079 "fugitive" arrests that ICE made in New Jersey last year, 87% of those arrested had no criminal record. Those subjected to the home raids include children and adults who are U.S. citizens or Lawful Permanent Residents. "Many victims of the raids believe they were duped or coerced into opening their door to ICE agents and still have no idea why their family was targeted. Often the individuals arrested in a raid have lived in the U.S. for years, raised U.S.-citizen children, worked hard, paid taxes and established community ties," said Bassina Farbenblum, a CSJ attorney. Scott Thompson, a lawyer representing SHLS, noted that "because the ICE agents apparently don't get search warrants and no official records are available, there is currently no way to know whether they had any legitimate basis or lawful authority to enter a particular home."

Warrantless raids on private homes and businesses are happening here in the Boston area as well, and it is critical that such raids be publicized and condemned as contrary to the rights of all persons to security and privacy. These raids are just another aspect of the U.S. government's fostering of a domestic climate of repression and fear, making it difficult to organize citizens and non-citizens for better living conditions and preserving an underclass of illegal persons working in highly exploitive conditions.

Immigration attorney Nelson Brill is a recent addition to the PAX board and worked with Marty Rosenthal, the lead petitioner, in ensuring the passage of the Sanctuary City resolution.

OVERRIDE OVERVIEW—Will Slotnick

Proposition 2 1/2, a ballot initiative approved by state voters nearly 30 years ago, restricted the annual increase in local property taxes to 2.5%. (Taxes on new construction are omitted from this calculation; when they are added in, our tax levy actually increases by about 4.1% per year.) Municipalities are permitted to increase their taxes above the 2.5% limit by voter-approved overrides. Brookline has passed three since the statute took effect in 1982: a "general" override (for operating expenses, and permanent in effect) in 1994, and two "debt exclusions" (for specific purposes, and they expire after 20 years or so when the bonds are paid off) for construction of the Lincoln School and the renovation of Brookline High School.

The recommendation for a general override made to the Selectmen by their study committee has four components:

- Addressing the anticipated FY09 budget deficit
- Addressing previously underfunded infrastructure maintenance (buildings, parks, streets and sidewalks)
- Lengthening the school day for grades K-12, and
- Restoring a K-6 World Languages program

Budget Deficit – We face a deficit of \$2.1 million (1% of the budget). Without an override, the Town and the Schools will have to make major program cuts and layoffs and increase revenues from other sources (primarily user fees). Balanced budgets have been achieved in recent years only by trimming existing programs and services, increasing revenues, and finding efficiencies. As a result, the committee concluded that if the Town is forced to make major cost reductions in FY 09, there will be little left to cut without eliminating entire programs. For example, the school superintendent foresees having to lay off about 20 employees, increase athletic fees by 30% and cut the World Languages program at Driscoll and the 4th-grade instrumental music program. To avoid such draconian cuts, the study committee has recommended a full override.

Underfunded infrastructure – Similarly, the Town has recently underfunded the construction and maintenance of roads, sidewalks and buildings, and has incurred new park maintenance obligations. Continued underfunding would eventually require such assets to be replaced rather than repaired. Additional funding of \$1.5 million is therefore the second component of the committee recommendation.

School day extension and World Languages restoration – These two components – particularly the World Languages proposal—have generated more debate than the previous two. The Schools have concluded that current curriculum demands can't be effectively met within the current school day. They propose to lengthen the school day by 20 minutes a day. Among 23 peer school districts, Brookline's instructional day is among the shortest nine in grades 1-6, shortest in grades 7 and 8, and third from shortest in 9-12. Extending the day by 20 minutes would permit BHS to:

- Meet the state's time and learning expectation of 990 hours of instructional time per year. Brookline achieves this now only by including extracurricular activities in the calculation.
- Schedule one long block (70 minutes) each week for all courses. This would allow science to be scheduled like all other courses. Currently, nearly all students have a science lab each week, preventing many from attending all four meetings of their elective course.
- Discontinue relegating elective courses (including performing arts) to a special block that begins 45 minutes early, at 7:45 a.m. Instead, a new eighth block would provide significantly increased scheduling flexibility.

In grades 7 and 8, a longer schedule would provide teachers with increased instructional flexibility and more time for both core curriculum and non-core subjects like health, art, music, and physical education. And in grades K-6, the extended day would permit restoration of the World Language program (if funding is approved) and more time for core subjects as well as health, art, music, and physical education. Note that adding language instruction within the elementary schools can only happen if the school day is lengthened.

Implementing this lengthened school day in FY09 requires an increase of \$1.8 million in teacher salaries, which has already been negotiated between the Schools and their teachers. A major motivation for the School Committee's agreeing to this increase was their recognition that salaries of Brookline teachers have been falling behind those of comparable towns. More importantly, the salary gap in relation to teachers in peer communities increases with experience at each educational level (BA, MA and doctorate). That is, the longer a teacher works, the bigger the gap.

World Languages refers to the teaching of foreign languages and cultures that would be implemented in Grades K-6 to:

- Provide proficiency in speaking, understanding, reading and writing
- Reinforce learning of the general curriculum through the study of a world language
- Produce proficiency in speaking, listening, reading and writing the target language
- Reinforce learning of the general curriculum content through the study of a world language
- Foster an understanding of and appreciation for other cultures.

The World Languages proposal is based on the recognition that Brookline students will be increasingly required to function in a multicultural, global economy. It is the most problematic of the recommendations in that it requires nine new full-time teachers. Since personnel costs are a major source of Brookline's deficits, funding the

program has the potential to exacerbate the Town's fiscal challenges going forward. The committee nevertheless agreed to support funding of this program because:

- Once funded, it will be sustainable as long as the Town succeeds in resolving the longer-term structural problems causing the deficit.
- Even if the Town does not so succeed, the program would add only about \$10,000 per year to the long-term deficit.
- Given the belief that it would be an effective program, and the importance of preparing our students to enter the workforce of an increasingly global economy, the study committee felt that it should be funded even given the above risks.

The selectmen intend to put the override on the May 6 ballot, but they probably won't decide until March 11 the amount(s) of the override question(s) and whether to bundle the four components into one or more ballot questions. The "cheapest" question will probably contain at least the deficit and infrastructure components, and it may well contain the lengthened school day component as well. The World Language proposal is the component most likely to be separated from the others in some manner that allows voters to accept or reject its funding.

(Co-chairs' note: The PAX board has voted to support the override in some manner, details awaiting the selectmen's decision as to the form the ballot question(s) will take.)

Will Slotnick, a Precinct 12 TMM and member of the PAX board, is President of Brookline Access Television and a member of the selectmen's Override Study Committee.

Sustainable Brookline Forum

By Don Weitzman

Think globally, act locally – or else. It's crunch time for the planet, and Brookline is feeling Mother Earth's discomfort, along with six billion of our sisters and brothers. So ...

On Sunday, February 10, over sixty local folks met at the Sustainable Brookline Forum to present and discuss specific actions we and our groups will take on in order to make our community a more sustainable place. Business and social concerns were considered along with the many environmental issues raised by the participants.

The organizations represented include Climate Change Action Brookline, Brookline GreenSpace Alliance, BHS's Environmental Action Club, Progressive Democrats of Massachusetts, several neighborhood associations, and Brookline's Chamber of Commerce, Solid Waste Advisory Committee, Transportation Board, Tree Planting Committee, Bicycle Advisory Committee and Conservation Commission. Several attendees came as interested individuals, and we had a good representation from political Brookline, including Selectmen Daly and Mermell and State Representative Frank Smizik. Our three-hour forum was graciously hosted by Wheelock College.

The action ideas presented were breathtaking in their variety, scope, and clarity of thought. Green streets. Saving wild habitats. Pay-as-you-throw. Low Carbon Diet. Support for state legislation for fuel-efficient cars. Green businesses. Updating of the Town's Climate Action Plan and Sustainability Report. Tree-Buddy program for elementary school students. Green taxis. Ban on plastic bags. Zoning changes to reduce parking requirements. And much more.

A truly exciting day, energy feeding on energy. But the work is just beginning. A subcommittee will try to pull together the various presentations and shape a sustainability agenda that we can all agree to, and which will help us move forward.

This is a big-tent effort. If you want to be part of it, please contact the author at donweitzman@rcn.com.

TMM-12 and former selectman Don Weitzman is a PAX board member and a founding member of Climate Change Action Brookline.



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BROOKLINE PAX ACTIVELY SUPPORTS:

Excellent Public Education – Brookline PAX is committed to the public schools. PAX and the political candidates it supports have a proven record in support of public education, from early childhood through graduate school.

Excellent Public Services – PAX supports sustained state and local investment in quality municipal services such as police, fire protection, public health, libraries, schools, parks, recreation, and public works, as well as state services such as social programs, transportation and environmental protection. PAX and its endorsed candidates pursue policies of support for basic human needs, including healthcare for all, affordable housing and services for both children and senior citizens.

Respect for Public Employees and Organized Labor – PAX stands up for fair labor practices and for policies that show respect for the dedicated people whose competence and commitment make Brookline and this Commonwealth work.

Respect for the Environment – PAX is committed to keeping Brookline and this Commonwealth livable and environmentally responsible – by support-ing recycling; energy conservation; the maintenance and enhancement of parks, playgrounds, and green space; and sound environmental regulation.

Diversity, Social Justice, and Peace – PAX works to preserve and protect ethnic and economic diversity and social and economic justice for all, through affordable housing, universal health care, and fundamental civil rights and liberties. We respect the human rights of all people, regardless of ethnicity, nationality, or location; and we support multilateral solutions to international affairs. We oppose the unilateral use of military force except (a) when applied defensively under international law when clear and convincing evidence exists of a serious and imminent threat of aggression, and then (b) only force that is no more than commensurate with the magnitude of the threat.

Brookline PAX
P.O. Box 470525
Brookline MA 02447-0525
www.brooklinepax.org