



**Brookline PAX**  
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Marty Rosenthal, Chair; Neil Gordon, Secretary;  
Gary Jones, Treasurer; Judith Vanderkay, Assistant Treasurer  
Brookline PAX was founded in 1962

## **Brookline PAX Recommendations** **Annual Town Meeting, June 23, 2020**

With the Covid Pandemic, the FY2021 Budget still in flux before our Board's June 14<sup>th</sup> meeting, and before the novel and understandably-late proposed budget amendments, we're more limited than usual in the extent to which we can weigh in, as our Board will not be able to reconvene as even more (expected and imminent) information becomes available.

In this abbreviated, virtual Town Meeting, only a handful of Articles will be considered, i.e., the annual budget, housekeeping articles, and those considered time-essential. Our recommendations follow; if an Article's not mentioned, we've taken no position on it. For more background and explanation on all Articles to be considered, refer to Combined Reports, and especially the Combined Reports Supplement.

During the Covid pandemic, we appreciate the enormous efforts -- including for this Town Meeting -- by all our Town officials, especially the Town Administrator, Clerk's office, Select Board, Advisory Committee, Moderator -- and, being on a singular hot-seat, Chief Lipson. While we're mindful of both the current -- & both statewide and national -- budget crisis, as well as understandable national pressures by some to "defund (all) police," we look forward to a thoughtful (i.e., not knee-jerk) Town Meeting discussion. While none of us mere humans, in townhall or in the 'hoods, are even close to "perfect," IO(our)HO, we're very appreciative of all Town services and employees. So, cutting any department budgets requires thoughtful scalpels, not sledgehammers.

### **Please have this available during Town Meeting.**

**Article 6 - Additional Property Tax Exemptions: Favorable Action:** This article provides for an increase in the property tax exemptions for certain classes of individuals, including surviving spouses, low-income elderly, the blind and disabled veterans. The proposed increases, which require annual reauthorizations, have been approved by Town Meeting continually since FY1989.

**Article 8 – Annual (FY21) Appropriations (budget) Article.** As we stated above, the FY2021 Budget still in flux, and an unknown number of potential amendments that might be brought. While PAX shares most people's concerns and emotions about horrific, racist, excessive force by police in recent incidents in other states, and while Brookline needs to keep working on Police issues -- e.g. a Task Force & many things as summarized in the Explanation for our (below) Motion -- we hope these votes will be also based on "facts," which are "stubborn things" (John Adams). Factually inaccurate assumptions and knee-jerk votes are -- sadly -- reminiscent of the otherwise unpleasant HL Mencken's "there's always a well-known solution to every human problem — neat, plausible, & wrong."

One amendment that WILL be on the table (& was mailed to everyone June 23<sup>rd</sup>), but might (we hope) be adopted by Advisory Committee, and on which we recommend **FAVORABLE ACTION**, is **OUR/PAX's** following proposed addition to the budget's **CONDITIONS OF APPROPRIATION**:

**MOVED: to amend the Advisory Committee's main motion under Article 8 by adding the following additional Condition of Appropriations, appropriately numbered:** Except for a seeming emergency, no Town or outside grant funds shall be expended, including to pay staff, for purchase or acquisition of "Riot Gear," including from a non-Brookline agency, except by vote of the Select Board ("S/Bd") as Police Commissioners, after a public hearing with no less than 14 days prior public notice -- with early and broad dissemination of the proposed vote, including related documents. If either (A) the Chief foresees an emergency meriting immediate need of acquiring a new specific riot gear item, if and to the extent practicable she/he/they shall consult with the S/Bd Chair as to immediately doing so, or (B) previously-acquired riot gear item is actually and visibly (to 1 or more civilians) used in Brookline (including by a coordinated non-Brookline agency); then the S/Bd shall soon thereafter get a report, and docket a vote deciding whether to schedule a later hearing, as stated above (including as to possible modification of the below list, as stated below).

"Riot Gear" is generally defined as "special clothes and equipment that the police use when they dealing with a large violent group of people"; here including but not limited to, body armor, tactical vests, riot helmets, gas masks, riot shields, tactical goggles, chest protectors, tactical hoods, riot suits, rappelling equipment, forced entry tools, night vision, thermal imaging, dogs, and assault weapons, all terms as generally understood, as well as similar equipment, but excluding traditionally carried protective vests and service weapons, and community service dogs. Such list may be modified by vote of the S/Bd, following a public hearing (as stated above).

**Articles 9-12 Welltower/Newbury College Properties: Favorable Action:** By most reasonable accounts, the agreements negotiated with Welltower by the Town reflect a fair deal and it's in our best interest to move forward. Attempts to renegotiate those agreements are fraught with the risk that we get no deal at all, that the properties are sold, and the next owner develops the property in ways we can't control and might not enjoy. Let's move forward with a transaction that will add significant new growth (i.e., significant new tax revenues), increase our supply of affordable housing (see Article 13), and bank a **significant parcel of land (see Articles 14 and 15)** that might be used for various municipal purposes, especially (we urge) affordable housing.

**Article 13 Holland Rd Mixed Income Overlay Zoning: NO ACTION:** Presuming Articles 9-12 are approved, then this Article presents a choice: (i) to pass the art. 13 zoning change, causing a small number of less-affordable units on Fisher Hill, or (ii) **VOTING NO ACTION**, gaining a far greater number of far-more-affordable units at BHA's Colonel Floyd complex -- reconstruction, upgrading **many old/deficient units**, and building 40 new units. Though PAX for decades has pushed for a lot more development of affordable units in less-dense parts of town -- with something like shuttle services to their by-definition more distant MBTA -- this choice since January seemed a no-brainer, which PAX then (& since) has supported. And, respectfully, some who assert that the Col. Floyd proposal can be accomplished with other (now un-identified funding are not fully listening to our very dedicated & expert BHA staff and Commissioners.

**Articles 14 & 15: Rezoning & Acquisition of Newbury's West Campus: Favorable Action on both Articles:** As stated above, approval of these Articles (and later, a debt exclusion by voters) will bank a significant parcel of land that might be used for any number of municipal purposes. We're cognizant of the fact that the Town, and many of residents, face financial challenges because of COVID, but the opportunity to acquire this significant property won't wait for a vaccine; we acquire it now -- or never. In the scheme of things, the purchase price of \$14.9 million is modest to both the Town's finances and the taxpayers. Getting back to Art. 13, we're especially hopeful for significant (and truly) affordable housing here, making a big win-win out of the Col. Floyd big win.

**Article 16, authorizing, not requiring sale of the parcels of 15-19 Oak St: No Recommendation:** While this, like most WA's, implicates at least some of PAX's values, the Board felt the nexus was too attenuated to make any recommendation -- except as per Spike Lee to "do the right [sic] thing."

Be/stay well, all.

Marty Rosenthal & Neil Gordon, PAX Chair & Secretary