



Brookline PAX Recommendations

Annual Town Meeting, May 27, 2008

Art. 6: Property tax exemptions for certain classes of taxpayers

SUPPORT

PAX annually recommends adoption of these increased tax exemptions for surviving spouses, the elderly, the blind, and disabled veterans.

Art. 8: FY2009 budget

SUPPORT Selectmen's amendment (p. 8-23)

The Trustees of the Public Library seek \$465,000 from the CIP to purchase an RFID (Radio Frequency Identification) system to replace the current bar-code system for checking materials in and out. This is an attempt not to cut costs, but to provide better service for library patrons. Throughout the country, library personnel budgets are being reduced, putting a premium on automation to compensate for the reduced staff size. During the past fifteen years in Brookline, the number of full-time staff positions has declined, but a bigger issue is that library circulation has increased during the same period by nearly 150 percent – from 580,000 to a projected 1,300,000! As a result, all library administrators, including the Town Librarian himself, put in time each week at the checkout desk.

The RFID system will permit borrowers to check out and return most items without help from library staff. Some 600 library systems across the country use RFID systems. By moving now, Brookline will help determine the direction that the Minuteman Library Network will go in. Four other communities are in various stages of preparation for adoption of RFID; if we wait, we run the risk of having to use a system chosen by others.

Art. 12: Property tax abatements for seniors in return for volunteer services

SUPPORT

A modest but commendable one-year trial program for citizens over 60, limited to 20 participants with household incomes of less than \$40,000. Providing tax relief for residents on limited fixed incomes while wider facilitating voluntary citizen provision of services of value to the Town is a win-win proposition.

Art. 13: Reduction of interest rate on deferral of property taxes by seniors

SUPPORT

State law permits certain seniors who are property-rich but cash poor to defer part or all of their real estate tax until time of their death or the sale of the property. This article reduces the interest rate on the amount deferred.

Art. 15: Parking spaces at 2 Brookline Place

SUPPORT Selectmen's motion

Article 15 would reduce the minimum number of parking spaces that must be provided by the developer of the proposed medical office building at 2 Brookline Place (2BP). While easing the burden on the developer, it would provide flexibility for the ZBA and the Town to negotiate a plan, based on Transportation Demand Management, encouraging alternative means of transportation to reduce traffic and congestion in Brookline Village, as originally contemplated in the 2004 Town Meeting vote creating the special "GMR" district that allowed the 2BP development.

The 2BP project was proposed as a model of "smart growth" development. The zoning adopted by Town Meeting called for reduced parking in light of the proximity of the Riverside D line (200 feet away), four bus routes and the E line. However, since the original proposal has changed from research labs to medical offices, the parking requirement is now governed by a zoning bylaw provision, applicable town-wide. This provision in no way recognizes the reduced

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

<http://www.BrooklinePAX.org>

need for parking in a setting rich with public transit—this at a time when oil prices are over \$130 per barrel and when reducing our dependence on oil and carbon emissions has become a critical priority.

The number of parking spaces proposed in this amendment is consistent with trip reduction plans currently used by the developer, Children’s Hospital, as part of MASCO, the LMA transportation management collaborative recognized nationally as a model for reducing traffic congestion and promoting environmental sustainability. In the LMA only 37% of employees drive to work. This amendment of the zoning bylaw would allow the Town and the developer to work in the same direction while still allowing the developer the full amount of parking required for patients. With our national energy crisis and lack of leadership, we must act locally.

Art. 23: Town plowing of residential sidewalks **OPPOSE, but ongoing serious concerns**

While PAX agrees with the Selectmen and the AC that we cannot afford to plow all streets, we are appalled by the current practice – *more of the same, less than enough*. We have long urged the issuance, under a more effectively coordinated plan, of far more warnings for failure to shovel sidewalks. In FY07 only 35 warnings were issued, and FY08’s estimate is a still paltry 100. By contrast, in 2007 there were 119 tickets issued for Leash Law violations.

Last year’s Moderator’s Committee on Snow Removal, to which we conveyed this concern, said in January, “We suggest that the Town work to dramatically increase resident involvement in maintaining clear sidewalks. The actions to be taken should include increased enforcement of existing regulations and regular use of citations for failure to clear sidewalks.” Yet we still see reliance on citizen complaints, inadequate prioritizing, and no appropriate leadership for this effort, which is sorely needed to reduce danger, especially to elderly and children. It’s time to scrap the system of “inter-agency coordination” and to simply have routinely patrolling police cruisers give out the warnings. For two decades now, talk has been cheap, as have been non-solutions.

Art. 24: Increased fines for dog control violations **SUPPORT**

The Park and Recreation Commission deserves great credit for its hard work in trying to make dog ownership fair and safe for both dog owners and others. The long overdue Green Dog program, while understandably still in its early stages and working out kinks, has been a welcome step toward achieving these goals. The Commission deserves not only our thanks, but our support – by passing this article.

Art. 29: Creation of Selectmen’s Climate Action Committee **SUPPORT**

This article provides, for the first time, a locus of responsibility within Town government for the many issues relating to climate change that challenge our community at present and will continue to do so long into the future.

Art. 30: Resolution concerning state’s group health insurance plan **SUPPORT**

PAX calls for the town and municipal unions to negotiate joining the state’s group health insurance plan. The savings generated would strongly benefit union workers as well as others, affording better and more cost effective health care. Over time, alternative means of compensating for constantly increasing health costs range from the imposition of a greater share of health care costs upon employees to layoffs – all harmful to working men and women.

Art. 32: Urge state legislation to establish greenhouse gas emission targets **SUPPORT**

As with Article 29, we support this resolution, offered by the Selectmen, to put Brookline on record in support of state legislation to set greenhouse gas reduction targets of 20% by 2020 and 80% by 2050.

Marty Rosenthal and Frank Farlow, co-chairs