

BROOKLINE TOWN MEETING

NEWSLETTER: Spring 2024 Town Meeting Highlights

by **Jesse Hefter** (Town Meeting Member - Precinct 14)
May 31, 2024

Spring Town Meeting occurred over three (3) nights in May 2024. There are various [files on our Town's website](#) related to this Meeting but you have to be a dedicated analyst to make sense of the information (for example, the document including all the Warrant Article details for this meeting is nearly four hundred pages long!).

Accordingly, this Newsletter strives to provide you with the high-level results of what was discussed and how your elected representatives voted (the Town website has published a [master file](#) with how each Town Meeting Member voted if you wish to see the nitty-gritty details).

Geothermal well drilling at Pierce Playground (Article 1 - *Special Town Meeting 1*)

Approved (Yes-217; No-22; Abstain-7)

Authorize the Town of Brookline to seek Legislative authorization to encumber the park area west of School Street with an additional subsurface utility easement for the Pierce School geothermal wells. The wells will be placed below five feet from the surface. The park surface will be reconstructed after the well installations. The only visible post-construction object in the area will be a single manhole cover in one of the existing walkways. The park is protected public land and therefore this change of use requires the Town to petition the Legislature for an Article 97 disposition.

Remove all Police Department positions from the civil service laws (Article 1 - *Special Town Meeting 2*)

Approved (Yes-228; No-3; Abstain-8)

Removing the Police Department from the civil service system reduces barriers to entry, increases the pool of potential applicants, and provides opportunities for current police

officers to advance. These improvements make the department more attractive to new officers and for lateral hires. It makes Brookline more competitive with neighboring communities and provides the Town with more discretion related to hiring, promotion, and discipline of employees in the Department.

Collective Bargaining (Article 2)

Approved (Yes-234; No-1; Abstain-8)

This article enables Town Meeting to approve funding for any collective bargaining agreements. This year, the Town entered into two Memoranda of Agreement, one with the Brookline Police Union (including the removal of the Department from Civil Service) and the other with the Brookline Teamsters Local 25 representing Public Safety Dispatchers.

Golf Course Transfer/Sustainability Position (Article 5)

Approved (Yes-227; No-7; Abstain-10)

Amend the FY24 budget to allow the use of \$400,000 from the Golf Enterprise Fund to address revenue shortfalls due to a high number of rainy days, and make a \$25,000 adjustment from the Planning Department to the Public Works Department to support the funding of a Sustainability Director.

Unpaid Bills (Article 6)

Approved (Yes-235; No-0; Abstain-4)

Two unpaid bills from prior fiscal years are funded through this Article: \$8,952.75 for printing and mailing of real estate tax bills (FY22) and approximately \$30,000 to the USPS to settle an old balance related to the rental of four (4) post office boxes.

Local Property Tax Exemptions (Article 7)

Approved (Yes-239; No-1; Abstain-2)

The Town, in this annual Warrant Article, which has been passed by Town Meeting every year since 1989, is authorized to provide additional property tax relief to approximately 90 qualifying taxpayers in Brookline. These residents include disabled veterans, blind persons, surviving spouses with low assets, and elderly taxpayers with both low income and low assets. The total estimated cost for FY25 of increasing these modest state-mandated exemptions is \$44,000.

Public Health Revolving Fund (Article 8)

Approved (Yes-234; No-0; Abstain-4)

The Town was asked to establish and authorize a revolving fund for use by the Department of Public Health especially in the administration of influenza and COVID-19 vaccines.

Reserve Fund for Compensatory Time (Article 9)

Approved (Yes-231; No-1; Abstain-7)

This Warrant Article asks Brookline to amend the Bylaws to establish and authorize a reserve fund out of which certain accrued liabilities to employees shall be paid. Over many years, allowing employees to accrue compensation time and vacation time has resulted in a nearly \$4.6 million liability. This Fund will help to reduce fluctuations in the operating budget as the accrued time is paid out and eventually eliminated.

Annual FY25 Budget Appropriations (Article 10)

Approved (Yes-229; No-8; Abstain-3)

A balanced Town Budget of \$389,519,081 was approved. This includes \$136,847,619 for the Public Schools of Brookline. An Amendment to increase the School Budget by \$1,079,213 to be used for bringing back the K-5 World Language Program in FY25 was defeated (Yes-68; No-167; Abstained-7).

Community Preservation Act Grants (Article 11)

Approved (Yes-227; No-10; Abstain-7)

Eleven applications for financial grants from the Brookline Community Preservation Act Committee were approved. The CPA is funded by a 1% local surcharge on property tax, a match from the State Community Preservation Fund and accrued interest. The recipient categories span community housing, open space and recreation, and historic preservation projects.

Senior Citizen Property Tax Workoff Program (Article 12)

Referred to Select Board (Yes-235; No-0; Abstain-2)

This Article raises the maximum annual property tax exemption by \$125/year for program participants to \$2,000 annually in exchange for 133.33 hours of volunteer work for Town departments at the current state minimum hourly wage. This program provides tax relief to 35 participants in the Program and skilled workers for Town departments at a very low cost.

Modify a Zoning Bylaw relating to Accessory Dwelling Units (Article 13)

Approved (Yes-228; No-7; Abstain-6)

This Article aims to remove/relax existing restrictive provisions on the creation of ADUs by increasing the maximum allowable ADU by-right living area from 750 to 900 square feet, eliminating the current five-year minimum ownership period before a current owner's ADU application can be approved, and eliminating restrictions on separate mailing address, mailboxes, utility metering, and second street-facing egress.

Modify a Zoning Bylaw relating to Heat Pump Installations (Article 14)

Approved (Yes-232; No-2; Abstain-4)

This Article supports the state's 2050 and the Town's 2040 Net Zero Carbon commitment by removing a barrier to converting from fossil fuel to high-efficiency air source heat pumps at some properties. It changes the minimum setback from side and rear lots lines to a two-foot minimum. The change does not apply to multifamily dwellings of more than 6 units. Larger conversion projects will still require a Special Permit.

Staggered elections for Constables (Article 15)

Approved (Yes-212; No-3; Abstain-4)

Amend the Town bylaws to provide for staggered terms for the five (5) constables elected in town-wide elections. The positive impacts of staggering the terms are to increase awareness of the office in each annual election, potentially provide more opportunities for citizens to run for Town-wide office, and provide mentoring opportunities.

Reducing the membership of the Commission for Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Community Relations (Article 16)

Approved (Yes-222; No-9; Abstain-2)

Reduce the number of voting members within the CDEICR from fifteen (15) to nine (9). The frequent inability to fill vacancies or to achieve a quorum at meetings and the resulting disruption in the continuity of the Commission's work are the main driving forces of this change requested by the Select Board and agreed to by the Commission's chair.

Provide for the creation of Special Police Officers (Article 17)

Approved (Yes-222; No-7; Abstain-9)

This Home Rule Petition looks to utilize retired police officers as special police officers for the performance of police details and related activities when current officers cannot fill the need. There is a small revenue upside to the Town as Brookline receives 10% of the cost of the detail work (yearly estimate of \$600,000).

Resolution asking Brookline Town Meeting to Join the Call for a Ceasefire and a Lasting Peace Between Israel and Hamas (Article 19)

Tabling Motion Approved (Yes-180; No-42; Abstain-10)

A motion was made to table this resolution (meaning that no discussion, debate, amendments, or further voting would occur) and the motion passed by a two-thirds majority.

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Jesse Hefter - Town Meeting Member - Precinct 14
 653 Chestnut Hill Ave
 Brookline, MA 02445
 Email: jesse.hefter@gmail.com
 Web: jessehefter.com