

BROOKLINE TOWN MEETING

NEWSLETTER: Spring 2025 Town Meeting Highlights

by **Jesse Hefter** (Town Meeting Member - Precinct 14)
June 10, 2025

Our Spring Town Meeting occurred over four (4) nights in late May and early June 2025. There are various [files on our town's website](#) related to this Meeting, but you would need to be a dedicated analyst to pore through all the information spread across multiple documents and supplements.

Accordingly, this Newsletter aims to provide you with the high-level results of what was discussed and how your elected representatives voted overall (the Town website has published a [master file](#) with how each Town Meeting Member voted if you wish to see the nitty-gritty details). The Warrant Articles are presented in the order in which Town Meeting discussed them; certain non-voted and procedural articles are not included in this Newsletter.

Property Tax Exemption (Article 7)

Approved (Yes-226; No-0; Abstain-4)

Permit the Town to permanently grant additional property tax relief to approximately 75 qualifying taxpayers (including disabled veterans, blind persons, surviving spouses with low assets, and elderly taxpayers with both low income and low assets) in fiscal year 2026 and subsequent fiscal years until rescinded by Town Meeting. The total exemptions total \$37,150.

Electric Vehicle Revolving Fund (Article 8)

Approved (Yes-230; No-1; Abstain-4)

Establish an Electric Vehicle Charging Program Revolving Fund, which segregates the fees collected from town-owned electric vehicle chargers, allowing them to be used in their entirety to cover the costs associated with operating these chargers, including utilities, software, and maintenance.

Fiscal Year 2026 Budget (Article 9)

Approved (Yes-217; No-3; Abstain-6)

The FY26 budget required that four items be funded via bonding and were approved: Stormwater Improvements (\$500,000), Water System Improvements (\$2,000,000), Wastewater System Improvements (\$3,000,000), and the Town/School Roof Repair/Replacement Program (\$1,400,000). Within the DPW budget, a decision was made to fully outsource garbage collection (not unlike the vast majority of our neighboring cities and towns). The PSB budget was approved at \$142,325,953. Total appropriated expenditures were approved for \$408,222,486.

Community Preservation Act (Article 10)

Approved (Yes-223; No-1; Abstain-7)

Brookline collects revenue for the Community Preservation Trust Fund via a 1% property tax surcharge and a variable matching contribution from the state. Applications made and approved for 2026 include \$500,000 for community housing, \$1,319,608 for historic preservation, and \$2,717,994 for open space and recreation. Total appropriations for all categories are \$4,537,602 spread over 18 projects. One high-priority project is the Larz Anderson Outdoor Ice Rink Design and Public Design Review Process.

Amend the Zoning By-Law for People with Disabilities (Article 14)

Approved (Yes-176; No-43; Abstain-15)

Amend the Town's Zoning By-Law to establish a timely and equitable process for reviewing reasonable accommodation requests under federal and state disability laws.

Amend the Demolition By-Law for People with Disabilities (Article 15)

Approved (Yes-188; No-27; Abstain-20)

Amend the Demolition By-Law to authorize the Building Commissioner to issue Demolition Permits earlier to applicants who have received reasonable accommodations for disabilities related to buildings in accordance with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA).

Prohibit the Sale of Foie Gras (Article 20)

Approved (Yes-114; No-78; Abstain-14)

Amend the Town's General By-Laws by adding a new By-Law prohibiting the sale, or offering for sale, of foie gras produced by force-feeding in Brookline, along with a corresponding penalty (\$300/day). No farms in Massachusetts produce foie gras.

Brookline as a Sanctuary City for Transgender, Non-binary, and Gender-diverse People (Article 29)

Approved (Yes-203; No-0; Abstain-10)

This **Resolution** asks Town Meeting to affirm Brookline's bylaws and policies governing the protection of gender-diverse individuals. Current bylaw protections for gender-diverse individuals in Brookline include access to gender-affirming healthcare and accommodations in town and schools.

Floodplain Management (Article 12)

Approved (Yes-218; No-0; Abstain-4)

Brookline is required to periodically update its floodplain insurance maps to continue participation in FEMA's (Federal Emergency Management Agency) National Flood Insurance Program. Updated maps are provided by the federal government every 10 years. This Article seeks to:

1. Adopt the updated FEMA Flood Maps.
2. Create a Floodplain Administrator role within the Town (without adding more staff);
3. Amend the Zoning Bylaw to comply with updated floodplain regulations; and
4. Establish a Floodplain Development Permit process for parcels in Floodplain Overlay Districts.

Constable Terms of Office (Article 13)

Approved (Yes-217; No-1; Abstain-2)

This article is a bylaw amendment to remove obsolete language in the bylaw that established staggered terms for Constables.

Bicycle Parking Improvements (Article 16)

Approved (Yes-210; No-4; Abstain-9)

The steady increase in the use of larger bicycles in Brookline has led to a proposal to modify the process for allowing the parking of these vehicles. Accordingly, the proposal is to increase the number of large bicycle parking spaces in new residential construction with eight or more long-term bicycle spaces, decrease the number of regular bicycle spaces within the same total, and increase the bicycle parking requirements in new affordable housing construction to match the number of spaces currently required in other new multi-unit buildings.

Discharging and Carrying of Firearms in Certain Locations (Article 17)

Approved (Yes-219; No-0; Abstain-7)

Following upon earlier firearm restrictions enacted in Brookline in 2023 and 2024, two additional regulations are being introduced. Carrying and discharging a firearm will be prohibited in:

- An establishment that serves alcohol for consumption on-site; and
- A medical/healthcare setting.

There are Supreme Court decisions that uphold these restrictions.

Sustainable Food Containers and Packaging (Article 18)

Approved (Yes-224; No-2; Abstain-5)

This Article seeks to amend existing bylaws related to plastic food packaging. It aims to further restrict such packaging to reduce demand for plastic products in Brookline. Specifically, the changes include:

1. Require all food establishments in Brookline to only provide single-use utensils and single-use condiment containers when requested by the customer;
2. Eliminate the exemption for caterers from the restriction on the usage of non-recyclable, non-biodegradable, and non-compostable products except when necessary to meet food safety rules;
3. Simplify and expand the definition of “caterer”;
4. Further clarify the prohibition against the use of black plastic containers to provide prepared food to customers; and

5. More clearly define which food service ware is prohibited, the terms “biodegradable” and “compostable”.

Sustainable Bags (Article 19)

Approved (Yes-220; No-5; Abstain-5)

Amend an existing bylaw to further reduce demand for plastic products in Brookline. Specifically, eliminate exemptions based on square footage and gross income for retailers and expand the restrictions to restaurants. Furthermore, the article aims to align the definition of a reusable checkout bag with that established by recent Massachusetts legislation.

Create Commission on Thriving Children (Article 21)

Approved (Yes-214; No-0; Abstain-12)

This **Resolution** seeks to support the Department of Health and Human Services in advancing the development of children from birth through high school. This will be accomplished by collaborations across Town departments and non-Town entities that benefit children and youth.

Timely Bylaw Updates (Article 23)

Approved (Yes-222; No-1; Abstain-4)

This **Resolution** requests that the General Bylaws be updated within the Town’s online files in an expedited manner once approved by the Attorney General’s office. The intent is to allow citizens timely access to current laws.

Real Estate Transfer Tax (Article 24)

Approved (Yes-130; No-87; Abstain-13)

This **Home Rule Petition** proposes that a real estate transfer tax be imposed when certain types of real property transfers ownership. When a sale is processed, any proceeds greater than a set minimum threshold shall be taxed at a rate between 0.5% and a maximum of 2% of the sale price. A portion of the collected tax will be transferred to the Town Affordable Housing Trust, and the balance will be provided to the Town General Fund.

Support of Climate Change Superfund Bill (Article 25)

Approved (Yes-193; No-3; Abstain-15)

This **Resolution** states Town Meeting's support of state legislature bills, HD. 3369 and its twin SD. 1674 in establishing a climate change superfund to be financed by the most significant greenhouse gas emitters. This superfund will support climate change projects throughout the state. Such legislation will enable Massachusetts to prepare for the inevitable impacts of climate change resulting from legacy emissions.

Prevent Forced Payments of Broker's Fees (Article 26)

Approved (Yes-201; No-3; Abstain-6)

This **Resolution** supports amending state law to prevent tenants from being forced to pay brokers' fees during rental lease negotiations. Town Meeting would urge its elected delegation to support amending Section 87DDD1/2 of M.G.L. Chapter 112 to require that the party retaining the services of a real estate broker pay any associated fee or commission.

Preventing Nuclear War (Article 27)

Approved (Yes-161; No-17; Abstain-31)

This **Resolution** states that Town Meeting expresses its support for State Resolution S.D. 669, "*Resolution to Embrace the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons and Move the US Back from the Brink of Nuclear War*". Brookline would be added to the list of 21 other cities and towns in Massachusetts that have already taken a similar action to protect their citizens from the existential threat of nuclear war.

Defending our Democracy (Article 28)

Approved (Yes-173; No-15; Abstain-26)

This **Resolution** affirms that the Town of Brookline is committed to democracy and the United States Constitution. This Article is a response to what some citizens have viewed as anti-democratic, illegal, and unconstitutional actions by the Trump administration.

Forms of Government for Brookline (Article 30)

Rejected (Yes-49; No-153; Abstain-9)

Town Meeting voted in the Fall of 2023 to empower the Meeting Moderator to establish a Committee on Forms of Government, which began its work in February 2024. The goal of the Committee was to study various municipal government options for Brookline and to produce a comprehensive report by May 2025. Several committee members produced “working papers,” which provided perspectives on various forms of municipal government. However, no overall report was created. This **Resolution** sought to extend the work of the Committee to November 2025, including additional analysis of the pros and cons of our existing Town Meeting form of government.

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