

**Town of Brookline
Advisory Committee Minutes**

February 22, 2022

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Passcode: #E76&p!J

Present: Scott Ananian, Carla Benka, Ben Birnbaum, Harry Bohrs, Cliff Brown, John Doggett, Dennis Doughty, Katherine Florio, Harry Friedman, David-Marc Goldstein, Neil Gordon, Susan Granoff, Kelly Hardebeck, Anita Johnson, Georgia Johnson, Janice Kahn, Carol Levin, Pam Lodish, Linda Olson Pehlke, Donelle O’Neal, David Pollak, Stephen Reeders, Carlos Ridruejo, Alok Somani, Christine Westphal

Absent Amy Hummel (on sabbatical), Alisa Jonas, Lee Selwyn

Also Attending: Deputy Town Administrator Melissa Goff, Interim Finance Director/Assistant Town Administrator Justin Casanova-Davis, Mark Gray, Perry Grossman and other members of the public.

The meeting was called to order at 7:00 PM.

Announcements: Pursuant to this Board’s Authority under 940 CMR 29.10 (8), all Advisory Committee Members will be participating remotely via telephone or video conferencing due to emergency regulations regarding the Corona virus. The Chair has reviewed the requirements of the regulations. There is a quorum physically present and all votes taken will be recorded by roll call so all above listed Advisory Committee members will be allowed to vote.

AGENDA (All times are approximate)

7:00 pm Public Comment-There was no public comment

7:15 pm Tutorial on using OpenGov

Justin gave a brief overview of OpenGov and addressed questions. Go to website and click on Budget Central and click on the link for the departmental budget you want to review. Previous detail was an image, not a live interactive area that allows for report downloads.

Q: Where is the narrative summary? Also, when you look at this table you cannot print it out, you never see the whole list at one time. A: What you could do is click Report, Collapse All, and the information will be presented in that manner. If you want to upper right click Share Image to get a picture, or click Table Only.

Comment: It doesn’t work with Safari Browser. Chrome is the preferred browser. Justin will reach out to OpenGov regarding this issue.

Ways to show data was reviewed – Pie graph is popular but default is Bar graph. Click Pie Graph. You can also download/export to Excel to get percentages. With Bar charts you need to hover over the tiles to get the detail.

Q: How do we show variances? A: Maybe Budget Office can provide some support. Click spreadsheet and do a formula to get the percentages. They are still upgrading the way they report but we are caught in the transition and hoping it will be fixed in the next iteration.

There was a question about the target audience for OpenGov. It hasn't worked well for Advisory Committee. It does work for Town Administration and it is growing. The system is designed for online review and reporting. We will continue to make improvements.

Trying to move out of reporting mode into analysis mode.

Q: Access to historical data, interested in seeing trends. A: There is data available. Justin will create a report that goes back to 2018.

Q: Are there other features of Open Gov that can be used for hypothetical planning. A: A component of OpenGov is their forecast ability. Possibility of analysis. Definitely something we are interested in and just beginning to look at this but only on the back end, not available to the public.

Q: Is there an easy way to get to FTEs for each department, from salary line item to associated FTE report? A: Open the department, scroll down to FTEs and click on report to show just salary.

Q: Looking at full budget report, only prints out what is visible. How to get the full report? Replicating what appears in the printed version of the budget, the Budget Book? A: You can download the full table.

Q: Does Firefox also work? A: That question will be brought up with the provider.

7:35 pm Continuation of discussion of departmental budget process and subcommittee assignments

The Chair reviewed documents sent out earlier and attached to these minutes, regarding budget reports and processes; hopefully they are not too controversial. It might be helpful to discuss the process for collecting information for the budget process and invite subcommittee chairs who have already begun hearings to comment.

Questions and Comments

Aspirational and questions you need to ask Department Heads in order to get the information. Goal of having consistent questions is to increase our effectiveness as an oversight body. Allow Town meeting members to get a clear understanding, and consensus on our oversight role.

Regarding FTEs, how many departments have depends on when you look at it in a point of time? There are vacancies so we need to identify a point in time, end of year, beginning of fiscal year, etc. and understand where they are relevant to the plan before the end of the fiscal year.

Assumption for Police Department in general is that there will be positions available over time. Vacancies create problems for doing the work. Size of the work force is a factor regarding vacancies.

Important to highlight this in the report and whether it is appropriate to take into consideration for the future.

Helpful for newer subcommittee chairs to get a list of questions that will help us get the filled versus vacant information, especially departments with part time employees.

There was a discussion of vacancies in departments - how to address them and understand how long the vacancies have been in place. Look at patterns for shortages. It is difficult to find labor as we are being outbid by private sector.

Are functions not being done so services are not being accomplished? What is not being done because of the vacancies? Are there things we can identify that are a result of those vacancies and is there an immediate negative impact or is that impact going to be felt down the road?

With the IT department, the rest of the team has picked up the slack and that team has pulled together and done more work but this speaks to the health and wellbeing of that staff.

For Police and Fire, and other departments should be able to give us a sense of the cycle – maybe ask HR for this trend and then address each department about the impact of these vacancies in their departments.

Are we managing and operating effectively? Suggest a template to include operational concerns as well as budget concerns. Segregate them.

Police Department makes up vacancies with overtime. A Sustainability Coordinator position or Planning department planner - you don't feel the effects of the vacancy.

Vacancies per se are not a good measurement but rather are you achieving what you need to do?

Need to look at the end of the year – what did you want to achieve and did you in fact do that (next year budget review) if not, why not.

Need to have a pattern so that we ask questions consistently.

Comment about staff morale was raised.

Doesn't the HR Department keep track of all of the comings and goings? Personnel Subcommittee will reach out about details. However, HR should talk to AC about what they are seeing (trends in all departments) and share that data.

Reporting and OpenGov: There are big improvements as well as last year's accomplishment and future objectives. However, 2-3 is a better focus. Long term we may suggest to reframe to fewer objectives in the budget book and subcommittees could ask for 3 and flesh them out, and review them in the following year.

We have an opportunity to raise vacancies as a bigger issue. It is clearly impacting the Town's delivery of services that are not being highlighted elsewhere.

Important to recognize that it doesn't matter if we are competitive or not, we would still have a labor shortage. It is just the current state of the environment.

Can we go back to pre-Covid times to see vacancies in the platform?

Not helpful given current drivers (this timeframe has a small cohort of college age students) – people have stepped out of the workforce due to COVID uncertainty.

But is Brookline competitive or do people feel undervalued?

Let Personnel Subcommittee find the raw data regarding vacancies and turnover.

Should we ask departments what the impact of COVID has had on their departments? Yes!

Where does that information take you? And then and so...

What is the capacity for Departments to take on new work? You can only do so much with what you have.

What is a reasonable bump in salary – are we being bitten by this?

Working from home, some people can and some people can't – this may translate into need for more (or less) physical space.

DICR, for example - not much wriggle room in terms of capacity to take on more work without additional staff. Push education to Town Meeting Members on how the budget works and we should be stricter about approving warrant articles that have expenditure implications.

Have to get past this idea that “we are a wealthy town so anything can happen” – superficial on how a municipality delivers services.

Would like to have a more consistent coherent response to warrant articles with budget implications. Should be in the budget message.

Appreciate all that has been shared. Not a tick off list regarding budgets and there is a certain amount of flexibility for Subcommittees but there are themes – measurable objects (3), emphasis on what has changed in year after year.

8:35 pm Other Business

Next meeting on March 1 and then we will update the schedule. Update on our meeting on March 22nd to review Spiegel billing and the meeting may be held earlier.

There being no other business, a **MOTION** was made and seconded to adjourn. By a unanimous vote the meeting adjourned at 9:05 pm.

Documents Presented:

- [Budget Oversight Draft Feb 22](#)
- [Budget Example Report](#)

Human Resources Department Budget

Overview	FY21	FY22	FY23	
Request	xx	\$604,195	\$607,890	Variance of 0.6%, due to COLA. Insignificant to department objectives.
<i>(% of Town budget)</i> xx		0.164%	0.15%	
Major Changes				
Supplies	xx	28,200	\$14,900	Rationale for decline in supplies, etc.
<i>(% of dept budget)</i> xx		5%	2.5%	
Some other item	xx	\$0	\$23,000	Where this expense comes from, etc.
<i>(% of dept budget)</i> xx		0%	3.4%	

Staffing	FY21	FY22	FY23
FTE - filled	12	13	13
FTE - vacant	3	2	2

Could include the bar chart exported from OpenGov (breakdown of department expenses) or could just link to it.

Recommendation: The subcommittee recommends favorable action on the budget request of \$607,890. OR The subcommittee recommends amending the budget request as follows: ... ETC

 Meat of the report (including details of who attended the meeting, etc.)

Summary of department’s purpose (often boilerplate from year to year) and objectives (often will change from year to year), with notable objectives **highlighted**. If the objectives are amenable to tabular form, include a table.

Discussion of Departmental Budget, including assessment of the metrics for the objectives and the subcommittee’s opinion, including any recommendations for objectives to track and report on. This could include best practice benchmarks (if any), any important trends, etc.

Recommendation

Oversight Responsibilities

Utilize common goals and objectives for the AC's budget oversight.

1) Changes in departments' budgets from previous year(s). On Open Gov this is shown as the "variance" from the previous year's BUDGET, and 3-years (FY 21 actual, FY 22 & FY 23 budget) of information can be shown as a chart and table.

- Is the variance "substantial" (1% or greater of budget)?
- Is the variance meaningful to the delivery of the department's services?

2) The OpenGov Expense Bar Chart shows each Department's Chart of Accounts broken down by year (salary, services, supplies . . .)

- Has the allocation among these categories changed, and if so why?
- Unfortunately, the Salary information for each department does not link to information on FTE's and vacancies. This will need to be asked for in advance.

3) What portion (% and \$) of the department's budget is governed by (ideally these will total 100%):

- Regulatory requirements
- Contractual or collective bargaining agreements
- Federal/State/Private funding requirements
- Town meeting directives: resolution vs WA
- Administrative discretion

4) Department's effectiveness: Discuss with department heads what are reasonable ways this can be assessed?

- Each Department has a list of objectives for FY 23 in its budget. Are these the best/correct objectives? Have they changed from the previous year? If so why or why not?
- What metrics should be used to measure how successful the department is in meeting these objectives?
- What other metrics can be used to gauge the effectiveness/efficiency of the department's efforts? Are the department heads members of professional associations/trade groups What metrics are used in communities following best practices?