

**BROOKLINE COMMISSION FOR WOMEN**  
Meeting of WEDNESDAY MARCH 3RD, 2021  
7 PM (online via Zoom)

Meeting Minutes:

Commissioners Present: Rebecca Stone, Felina Silver Robinson, Carol Caro, Hadassah Margolis, Liz Stillman, Homa Sarabi, Lucy Chie, Aileen Lee, Meenakshi Garodia, Nicole McClelland

Commissioners Absent: Gloria Rudisch

Others Present: Caitlin Starr (staff), Carolina San Miguel

1. Administrative details:

i. Review of the Calendar: It is Women's History Month: Ms. Stone would like to post something every day on the Facebook page like we did for Black History Month. Town Meeting Warrant closes on March 4th at noon: we will discuss articles at an upcoming meeting. This is the warrant for May's town meeting.

ii. Vote to approve minutes from meeting of February 3rd, 2021: Moved by Ms. Garodia, seconded by Ms. Caro, passes unanimously.

2. Public Comment: No one appeared for public comment

3. Update on Planning for Women of the Year – Ms. Stillman reported we have received 18 nominations as of 7:05 p.m.: about 15 unique. Ms. McClelland will post the announcement on the Townwide Discussion Group. Ms. Stillman will post to Public Schools Discussion and Families as well. Event planning is still in progress; Ms. Garodia will call a meeting of the event planning committee and set a date for the event that will work around other events, school vacation weeks, etc. Ms. Stone noted April would be better because May is full of town election and meeting. The event planning committee will also consider details of the event, such as length and use of video clips. Ms. Stone and Ms. Stillman will figure out a plan for reviewing nominations and choosing winners in time to have the event by the end of April.

4. Subcommittee Reports

i. Legislation & Advocacy (Nicole McClelland): Ms. McClelland reported that the subcommittee met and set priorities for the year. Discussed: sex ed curriculum, supporting women's health (local clinic and Roe Act), Paid FMLA (the new state law does not apply to municipal employees), and childcare initiatives. Narrowed it down to advocacy on sex ed curriculum and appropriate roles, fact-finding and exploration of a warrant article to support FMLA in Brookline

for municipal employees. Securing campaign funds for childcare is still of interest and getting traction with the introduction of the bill in the MA legislature and recent Boston Globe editorial in support. Discussing how we can be supportive as this moves forward. There may be lobby days in the future and we should be on top of these events and make the community aware that they can participate in this advocacy. Ms. Stone emphasized that the subcommittee members should not feel that only they will do the work: the whole commission carries out our agenda, not just the subcommittee members.

Re: paid medical and family leave, Ms. Stone said she had looked into it when Michael Zoorab, a community advocate, wrote to the BCW about it. She was curious about why it doesn't seem to have been raised by public employee unions at the municipal level. She wants to look at Brookline's public employee contracts and compare current benefits to those in the state law. Ms. Caro pointed out that we should check with Ann Hess Braga (town director of HR) about current contract provisions concerning MFL. Ms. Starr believes Ms. Braga would be willing to help with it. She will send an email from Ms. Starr, Ms. Stone and Ms. McClelland asking to discuss it with her.

Dr. Chie thinks the news about sick leave and family leave is good information for the entire town to know about. She sees patients who have no idea what their coverage is especially with since the Federal COVID related act expired. The state legislature has not acted on the emergency sick leave act. The Public Health dept. might provide this information for Brookline.

Ms. Stone mentioned that there is a survey with results online through the ODICR that gathered some of the inclusion data we have been wondering about, particularly around attendance at meetings and what kept folks from attending. Ms. Starr said the survey was first sent two years ago, but it was never closed. She continued to get occasional new answers until closing it down recently. She will update what's on the website with the new data.

ii. Community Supports (Hadassah Margolis): Ms. Margolis said the subcommittee met about a month ago; their next meeting is Monday 3/8. The last virtual gathering event on Feb. 10 went well. At their last meeting, they talked about how to improve the virtual get-togethers, about promotion, marketing, and organization of the event and whether having a topic or a theme would be a good idea. Next get-together is in April, but may not be necessary if that is when we hold Women of the Year. Ms. Sarabi said the last get-together attracted around 4-6 people. Ms. Silver Robinson tried to attend but was unable to access the event. Members believe the event is accomplishing its goal, but marketing seems to be the key to bringing in more people. They continue to discuss partnering with Women Thriving. Two more virtual get-togethers are scheduled through June, then the format and need will be revisited. Ms. Stone said that if the need still exists for these get-togethers then it makes sense to continue, but there is no harm in determining that the need has passed or was not as large as we thought and perhaps end the series in June. She also acknowledged that if 6 people find value in the gathering, that is important too. Ms. Silver Robinson is planning to meet with Women Thriving next week and discuss possible collaborations with our commission. Ms. Sarabi believes there is a general need for Brookline women to have community but this might not be the space and form to

answer that need. Our virtual space has been pleasant and welcoming, fun and enjoyable but we need clearer goals for it. Ms. Stone agreed that these are conversations that are good for the subcommittee to raise and discuss. Other supports the subcommittee discussed: supporting women on housing, a collaboration on gender justice, a community resource list that is women-focused, and potentially a commission newsletter. Ms. Stone and Ms. Caro have discussed the newsletter and Ms. Caro will talk about that at the next subcommittee meeting.

5. Discussion re: Community Engagement (invited guest: Community Engagement Specialist Carolina San Miguel): Ms. Stone welcomed Ms. San Miguel who has been in her new job about a month. Ms. San Miguel introduced herself: originally an architect, career shifted to community design and planning, human development, education and care. She has just received her doctorate from the Design School at Harvard. She has worked with vulnerable and marginalized populations, such as homeless kids, single moms, victims of domestic violence. She is particularly interested in how to engage and reach those populations. She is getting to know how things work in the town and the community; trying to figure out what people in Brookline need and want. COVID has made this particularly challenging.

When asked to reflect on the issues discussed earlier in the meeting, Ms. San Miguel said bringing people into community conversations is very hard. There are many reasons why people cannot come to meetings: time, child care, length of meeting. She likes the idea of a room for childcare during meetings. We also need to get information to women. Community engagement and communication work together. She would like to build a hub of communication where people can get the information they need: Info about child care, entrepreneurship, family leave etc. Part of the community engagement plan is to think smart: what are we doing, who are stakeholders, where, when and how: be purposeful or things will get lost.

She explained her role is to bring less heard voices into the process, low income, people of color, vulnerable groups. Right now, if each commissioner can find one person who is in that list and have a conversation, we can draw more voices to the table. It is not realistic to think people will come to commission and other public meetings, we need some parallel support because people may be more comfortable in those spaces.

Ms. Stone asked how the BCW can work with her and her office? Ms. San Miguel replied she is frustrated by not being able to physically go to places and meet with people. She would appreciate if we can help her connect with even more people. She believes in horizontal leadership, urging everyone not to think they know what's needed but to listen because the best ideas will come from the community. We need to reach out to them rather than try to draw them to us. We need to understand and listen.

Ms. Sarabi agreed, saying that we often discuss increasing participation in local politics for women and especially women in vulnerable populations, but she wonders if we even know if these populations want to be approached or invited. Ms. San Miguel says you need to offer something fun as a starting point to getting folks interested. One-on-one conversations can be successful as a first step. Ms. McClelland agreed that it is hard to work on engagement when

everyone is homebound. She believes one way the town has missed the mark on engagement is by not using social media more. She's aware of other towns that have really tapped into the way social media works to engage people since traditional in person events will not happen for a while, such as engaging the help of social media "influencers." She sees Brookline's efforts as minimal and ad hoc and hopes Ms. San Miguel might bring some energy to that.

Ms. San Miguel said it's part of the discussion but they have no budget for the work. What they are doing is working on making the town website easier to use and easier to access/use on phones rather than computers to reach more people, especially those without desktops or tablets. She said Brookline needs a communication hub, but we need to ask people what is most efficient in reaching people. She is working on how funding works, hoping to raise money to help make this happen. This is a learning experience.

Ms. Caro spoke about seniors, those 65+ (20% of population), and said this group needs better communication/engagement as well but is unlikely to be on social media like Twitter. A good deal of seniors do not have smart phones. We have around 4 public housing areas for seniors and they are the most isolated people and mainly women. Ms. San Miguel agreed that this is why social media isn't inclusive enough. Ms. Caro suggested connecting with the Senior Center. Ms. San Miguel has a meeting tomorrow with them and is looking forward to it. Ms. Stone thanked Ms. San Miguel on behalf of the commission. Ms. San Miguel said to feel free to reach out and provided her email: [csanmiguel@brooklinema.gov](mailto:csanmiguel@brooklinema.gov).

## 6. Liaisons and Other Updates:

i. Working Group on Sex Education: The group had a terrific meeting with the BHS SHARPWarrriors group, Ms. Stone reported. The number of students has expanded, and they met with 6-8 of them, including Alex and Meg who started the initiative. Dean Jenee Uttaro, head of the 9<sup>th</sup> grade campus at Old Lincoln School, said there are currently 30 students who are a part of it. We discussed moving forward on sex ed in two ways: first work with the School Committee to build a policy/directional framework for sexual health (one does not now exist either in the policy manual or in the PSB learning expectations), and then work with Schools staff to review the curriculum K-12 and assess how to align it to the stated goals. The students are eager to provide information from their peers about what's good and bad in their current experiences of the sex ed and health curriculum. They are also going to look at what a philosophy statement is and think about what would be a strong guiding philosophy. Dean Uttaro has been coordinating with health education staff, and has written to SC Policy Chair David Pearlman about the collaboration between SHARPWarrriors, health staff, and the BCW. Ms. Garodia added that the SHARPWarrriors are doing a student survey on experiences with the sex ed curriculum. Dr. Chie has been looking at the Wellness policy in addition to Ms. Stone and they have begun to frame some new language to suggest to the Sch Committee on the policy. Dr. Chie reported that the 7th grade health coordinator sent out an email about the "updated" GetReal curriculum that part of the spring curriculum for grades 7-8 (See Appendix A), and that the letter lists many topics to be covered, including consent. Ms. Stone added that the SHARP students made a presentation to the middle school health educators on what should and should not be part of the approach and curriculum and she wonders whether that

presentation led to any of the curriculum updates. Ms. Stone concluded that, even with senior Schools leadership in transition, there is receptivity to this by both SC and staff and the working group will continue its work with the students.

ii. Other liaisons: no other reports.

7. New & Old Business: Ms. Sarabi said she is working with a Farsi afterschool program on a celebration of the Persian New Year (the first day of spring (equinox)). They have been trying to promote it and would like to know who to contact in Brookline. Ms. Caro suggested the Brookline Public Library and said Lily Weitzman would be a good place to start ([lweitzman@minlib.net](mailto:lweitzman@minlib.net)). She also recommended reaching out to Library Trustee Karen Livingston. Ms. Caro will send email address to Ms. Sarabi. Ms. Starr said the Office of Diversity and Inclusion would be happy to promote and support such events. Ms. Margolis shared that Brandeis, where she works, circulates a list of all faith and cultural celebrations and wondered if Ms. Sarabi's workplace might do the same.

Meeting adjourned at 8:40 p.m.

## Appendix A: FR Ridley Sch Grade 7 Parent Notice re: Get Real Curriculum

02/23/2021

Dear Parent/Guardian,

This letter is to inform you about our seventh grade human sexuality unit. This unit is part of the health education curriculum. This unit is a continuation of learning begun in earlier grades to promote the health and well-being of our students and to help them make informed decisions during their teenage years and beyond.

Using the recently updated Get Real Sexuality Education Curriculum, your child will learn about many aspects of human sexuality. An inclusive approach will be used for a variety of topics including: puberty, anatomy and physiology of the reproductive systems, self-esteem, dating relationships, sexual orientation, gender identity, effective communication (assertive and refusal skills), consequences of unhealthy behaviors, protection methods, and refusal skills as they relate to abstinence and healthy decision-making.

Choices, consequences and outcomes will be clearly outlined. Students will explore their own decision-making strategies and will use active role-plays, modified for the hybrid environment, as a pragmatic method of exploring their own learning. Students' questions will be answered factually and in an age and developmentally appropriate manner. We will also use technology to implement the anonymous question box. Each student's privacy and values/beliefs will be respected at all times.

In addition, this year, due to Hybrid Learning and many different schedules at all the schools we want to ensure that students and families structure appropriate learning environments for this unit. Please go over the following guidelines with your child.

- Create safe learning spaces with headphones and discuss with your child where they would feel most comfortable learning. Please consider privacy for your student/teacher/class and structuring the environment, especially with younger siblings.
- All PSB technology rules apply- no videotaping Zoom meetings and class rights and responsibilities apply in both the virtual and in-person settings.
- Cameras are expected to be on unless otherwise arranged with your teacher.

Under Massachusetts Law and PSB School Committee policy, you may exempt your child from any portion of the curriculum that primarily involves human sexual education or human sexuality issues. To receive an exemption, simply send a letter to your child's health teacher and principal requesting an exemption for your child. Any student, exempt from this portion of the curriculum, will not be penalized. Alternative assignments will be provided for students who are exempt.

A comprehensive unit is not complete without communication. Your child will be encouraged to communicate with you around a variety of topics and establish a line of communication that will help with their overall wellness and development. If you would like to examine the *Get Real Sexuality Education Curriculum* or have any questions, contact me at [erin\\_grogan@psbma.org](mailto:erin_grogan@psbma.org) for an appointment.

In addition, this year we will hold a parent Get Real orientation webinar on Tuesday March 9, 7:00-8:00p.m. Details and links will be provided by your student's health teacher. We hope to 'see' you there!

Yours in collaboration,



Erin Grogan

Health Education Teacher

