

TOWN OF BROOKLINE ADVISORY COMMITTEE  
Planning and Regulation Subcommittee Report  
FY22 Program Budget for  
Planning & Community Development

The Planning and Regulation Subcommittee of the Advisory Committee held a public hearing on Monday, March 8, 2021, virtually on the Zoom platform to review the FY22 Planning and Community Development budget. In attendance were Subcommittee members Steven Kanés (Chair), David Pollak, Lee Selwyn, and Neil Wishinsky. Also present were department Director Alison Steinfeld, Assistant Town Administrator Justin Casanova-Davis, Advisory Committee Vice Chair Carla Benka, and Economic Development Advisory Board co-chair Paul Saner, Linda Pehlke-Olson, Housing Advisory Board chair Roger Blood, and Jonathan Klein.

**Budget Summary**

The FY22 Planning and Community Development Department budget request is \$1,272,086, an increase of \$93,599 (7.36%) over the FY21 budget and an increase of \$41,829 (3.4%) from the prior year FY20 actual expenditure. Personnel expense makes up the greatest part of the budget, with outside planning and consulting services as the second biggest component.

**Presentation**

Director Steinfeld presented a ten-page budget presentation (attached) that:

- Lists the staff of the Planning and Community Development staff
- Gives an overview of mandatory responsibilities for the department;
- Describes the non-discretionary assignments and obligations which include Select Board directives and initiatives;
- Lists FY21 Accomplishments and FY22 objectives;
- Lists the planning studies currently underway and describes the methodical planning process.

Director Steinfeld described the budget as essentially level funded and highlighted the funding restored to the Economic Development-Long Term Planner position. She noted that her staff in the Regulatory Planning, Community Planning, and Economic Development – Long-Term Planning divisions are very dedicated and hard working. There are some vacancies in the department: In Regulatory Planning, the Zoning Coordinator has just been hired, the part-time Preservation Planner remains unfunded; in the Community Planning, the Community Planner is vacant; in Economic Development – Long-Term Planning, the Economic Development planner position will now be funded so the search for applicants will begin shortly. Finally, the Sustainability Assistant Director position is still vacant, but the search continues as it is hard to find the best applicant for this position.

Director Steinfeld wanted to highlight the work done by the Economic Development – Long-Term Planning division for maintaining their normal workload in addition to providing support to local business during this period of COVID-19, despite the division having a position vacant. In addition to her normal work load, Kara Brewton, Economic Development Director has also been undertaking a great deal of the sustainability planning.

The Director reviewed the accomplishments and workloads for FY21 which include the following. She also highlighted that support to vulnerable populations and business community, including CDBG and Housing Trust funds and COVID stimulus funds via CDBG, are the highest priorities of the department. This effort included

finding and managing surplus block grant funds, and working with the Department of Public Works in helping the business community with outdoor seating, short term parking and other COVID related efforts. There is ongoing support to the current Boylston Street Corridor committee, and sustainability efforts. The department produced the Fossil Fuel Free Incentives report and worked on several Warrant Articles on micro-units and age-restricted housing amendments. They have also worked with different neighborhoods, in helping them expand Local Historic Districts. Finally, an RFP for the Housing Production Plan will be issued, so a consultant can be engaged and work can begin on this important matter.

The Director reviewed the department's FY22 Objectives, which include a new study committee for Boylston Street west, initiating the study for municipal use for the newly acquired Newbury College west parcel at Fisher Hill, and continuing to strengthen the sustainability efforts. She highlighted the intent to complete as well as initiate new proactive planning studies and initiative including a multifamily housing study (for districts L, G, M), a parking demand study (examine the changing attitudes towards cars and parking supply), corridor studies (Boylston Street east and west, Harvard Street, Beacon Street) and a housing production plan (a systematic plan to create new housing). In her presentation, Director Steinfeld, described in depth the scope of each of the studies mentioned for FY22. She emphasized that all these planning initiatives are interrelated, will involve all divisions of the department and will incorporate extensive, interactive public input.

### **Discussion**

In response to questions from subcommittee members, Director Steinfeld provided the following information.

**Timing of the Parking Study:** There was concern about the timing of the study due to the change in lifestyles during COVID, and the Director acknowledged that the timing may have to be reevaluated. In that connection, she was looking into whether a delay could result in the loss of the \$30,000 allotted for the consultant to perform the study. Assistant Town Administrator Casanova-Davis clarified that the funding for this study has been removed for FY22.

**Boylston Street West:** This study would evaluate development potential west of Hammond Street, for mixed-use development or laboratory spaces in the underutilized office park areas. There is a developer who has expressed a great deal of interest in that area, so the Town wants to be proactive to the planning process. This would be an internal study.

**Sustainability Division:** The prior position of Sustainability Coordinator reported to the Regulatory division. An external consultant was hired by the Town and recommended to create the new division and the new management level position. A current Warrant Article redefines the by-law creating the Sustainability Division. For the time being, this division will be a single-person division. As soon as the position is filled, the division will be designed with the anticipated support staff.

**Comprehensive Planning and Housing Production Plan:** Existing comprehensive plan does provide a vision for the Town. It does not reconcile the different priorities. It is a series of different plans which are not interrelated. The Housing Production Plan state approval expires in a few months and with its loss we lose the opportunity of achieve a Safe Harbor, so we need to produce a new HPP. The goals the current HPP proposed have been exceeded. We are currently at 9.90% or 26 units short of the state threshold for affordable housing. It is estimated that the Town will be over 10% after the next property to get a comprehensive 40B or building permit.

Director Steinfeld does not think that the new census results will have much effect on the status. When discussing public engagement, she reiterated that the neighborhoods should not be asked to “buy-in” to proposed plans, but rather to help define the final product. The approach is not for the Department to create something and then go out and get support for it, but for the public to be an integral part of the process. There were different options discussed how to approach community engagement of in Town projects. One of the challenges described by Director Steinfeld, was of how to apply town-wide zoning principles to each neighborhood and what effects it has at the micro level.

**Long Term Planning and Economic Development:** The role of the Department was discussed in terms of providing support to other departments in Town, especially when considering major capital investments. The example of the proposed upgrades and possible relocation of fire stations was used to illustrate this issue. It was stressed that candidates for vacant positions in planning have a strong background in urban planning.

**Local Historic Districts:** The process for creating Local Historic Districts was discussed, including how and why do the studies for each district get funded. Director Steinfeld explained that typically, LHDs are grass-roots initiatives, so they are funded privately by the neighbors. In the current case of the Olmstead and Richardson site, she felt that it very important for the Town historically speaking, so she is looking for funds to fund the consultant for the report. The source of funding these studies (private or public funding) was heavily discussed. It was encouraged to further include the integration of preservation into our zoning.

#### **Recommendation**

The subcommittee voted 4-0 to recommend approval of the requested Planning and Community Development budget of \$1,272,086 for FY22.