

Town of Brookline Redistricting Committee

Date: 9/16/2021

Start Time: 7:00 PM

Meeting held via ZoomGov

Committee Members Present: Heather Hamilton, Chair; Michael Berger, David Gacioch, Elizabeth Schafer, Ilan Wapinski, Jeffrey Rudolph, Jennifer Raitt, Kimberley Richardson, Mary Dewart, Neil Gordon, Stephanie Bruce, Nathan Shpritz, Sassan Zelkha

Staff Present: Ben Kaufman, Town Clerk; Jed Fehrenbach, GIS Administrator

7:00 PM: Meeting called to order. Chair Heather Hamilton presiding.

I. Introductions

Committee Members and non-voting staff members provided introductions. Introductions from: H. Hamilton, B. Kaufman, J Fehrenbach, N. Gordon, K. Richardson, M. Dewart, J Raitt, J. Rudolph, I. Wapinski, E. Schafer, S. Bruce, D. Gacioch, M. Berger, N. Shpritz

N. Gordon disclosed that the number of precincts impacts the amount Constables are paid for each posting.

II. Presentation: 2020 Census and Redrawing Precincts

Presentation from B. Kaufman:

Overview of 2020 Census Process

Overview of 2021 Redistricting Timeline

Run-through of 2020 Census numbers for Brookline

Overview of legal criteria for a precinct, other considerations, and the impacts on Town Meeting

Discussion: Initial Goals for the Committee

M. Berger spoke about what it was like on the Committee 20 years ago.

H. Hamilton spoke about the importance of figuring out how many precincts we should have.

D. Gacioch ran through some of the issues that needed to be tackled by the committee.

N. Gordon spoke about the disruptions and other impacts of drawing precincts. Emphasized that figuring out the number of precincts first

M. Berger asked if it would be possible to stay with 16 precincts.

D. Gacioch said that 16 precincts is possible, but makes other goals difficult.

H. Hamilton suggested the idea of subcommittees at different number of precincts. Spoke about the potential timing of a public hearing.

N. Gordon suggested that we hear from the public about the number of precincts. Suggested that 16 precincts is not possible.

J. Rudolph agreed that 16 precincts is difficult. Asked for clarification on the number of Town Meeting Members in each precinct.

B. Kaufman explained the math on the number of Town Meeting Members per precinct.

J. Rudolph asked what would happen if a precinct grew larger than 4,000 people in the next few years. Do we have to change precincts then.

B. Kaufman explained that the number for population is from the census, and that number would not change until the next census. Suggested that drawing precincts with expected growth smaller could be considered.

M. Dewart asked about how to project the growth of a precinct.

B. Kaufman can work with planning department to identify future growth.

H. Hamilton said that you can see a projection in certain neighborhoods that could indicate future or continued growth.

M. Dewart asked how you can include the information in the short amount of time.

H. Hamilton said it is not perfect, and you have to go with what you have.

I. Wapinski asked a question about shrinking precincts.

D. Gacioch spoke about the current precincts and changes.

H. Hamilton expressed a desire to change all precincts if we change several so as to be fair to all incumbents.

N. Gordon said that staying with 16 precincts means giving away all other priorities.

M. Berger said that the Committee owes it to the Town to look at 16 precincts.

M. Berger asked how many precincts changed in past redistricting efforts.

B. Kaufman said that in 2010, 7 precincts remained the same, and 9 precincts changed.

J. Raitt suggested talking about better representation. Looking at factors such as: race, ethnicity, age, income, home ownership, and other factors. Equity should be one of the criteria we use.

J. Raitt was curious about polling locations.

H. Hamilton acknowledges that Nathan Shpritz has joined the meeting.

M. Dewart was interested in neighborhoods.

J. Raitt expressed need for maps of schools and parks.

I. Wapinski suggested making a list of priorities and put them in order.

N. Shpritz requested data.

J. Fehrenbach said they would work on providing that data offline.

H. Hamilton said that at one point you will be faced with under different priorities.

H. Hamilton asked if committee members had thoughts on polling locations.

N. Gordon said that there are constraints on various polling locations.

M. Dewart asked if we have data on mail in ballots.

H. Hamilton said that last year is the high water mark for mail in ballots

N. Shpritz said they would not want to run out of space.

D. Gacioch said that what locations are available for polling locations is a key question. They asked that we identify all of the potential polling locations.

D. Gacioch identified a few census blocks with erroneous populations, and we will need to decide where to put those blocks.

D. Gacioch agreed that putting a ranking of priorities together will be important.

B. Kaufman provided data on mail in ballots.

H. Hamilton asked if it was possible to put together data on absentee voting.

E. Schafer said they believed the data was fuzzy on purpose.

M. Berger said they supports getting things written down. They had a question about sharing materials with Town Meeting members and the public.

M. Berger suggested different subcommittee topics.

H. Hamilton began to list priorities for the committee. Suggestions were offered by M. Berger, I. Wapinski, D. Gacioch, J. Raitt, J. Rudolph, H. Hamilton, L. Schafer, N. Gordon

J. Rudolph said that many people don't know what precinct they are in. Do we want to prioritize diversity within precincts.

H. Hamilton recognized Sassan Zelkha had joined the meeting.

N. Gordon suggested the most important be the math.

S. Zelkha introduced himself.

D. Gacioch suggested that the committee should not prioritize the impact on Town Meeting Members.

H. Hamilton agreed with not factoring in existing Town Meeting Members.

III. Public Comment

Scott Ananian: In communications with prior Town Clerks, that it is difficult to find polling locations that will last 10 years. Not all polling locations are in their precinct. Doubling the polling locations does not mean doubling polling locations, or doubling the number of election workers. There are other ways to do it.

Harry Friedman: When you are looking at increasing the precincts, I think you might want to look at 17. It will be less disruption, and add to Town Meeting, potentially making it more accessible. If you don't do as many precincts, you will have to look at who you move in the end. It is a political process, and it will have to go to the Select Board. It is something to add to your list.

Ruthann Sneider: Asked about difference between "polling site access" and "walkability to polls." Question was answered by H. Hamilton.

Elizabeth Neal: Asked that we embrace shifting demographics. This is a moment for change. Provide poll access to BHA and Section 8 residents.

Discussion: Next steps

H. Hamilton proposed breaking into subcommittees: 16/17 precincts, 18 Precincts, 20 Precincts, and an Access/Equity subcommittee.

N. Shpritz said they would like to be on the Access/Equity subcommittee.

J. Rudolph asked about a 16/17, 18, and 19/20 committees to look at all options.

D. Gacioch asked if there was consensus around polling locations.

H. Hamilton said that B. Kaufman would discuss polling locations next week.

M. Dewart asked for a bigger sense of how to be helpful in the subcommittees before they decided what to do.

E. Schafer said it would be good to identify communities of interest as soon as possible.

H. Hamilton asked what they meant by communities of interest.

E. Schafer made suggestions of communities of interest.

H. Hamilton said that there is a time limit that can limit some options.

M. Berger would like to know how to share the work of the committee with the public.

H. Hamilton said that information can be freely shared.

B. Kaufman said information can be found on the Town website.

M. Berger asked how Committee Members should communicate between meetings.

H. Hamilton discussed the limitations of the Open Meeting Law.

There was discussion on the quorum of the subcommittee. Discussion included: N. Shpritz, S. Ananian, H. Hamilton, J. Raitt.

J. Raitt asked if the committee page on the Town website was up.

B. Kaufman informed the committee that the page was up and running.

J. Raitt suggested providing an FAQ on the Town website, and finding more ways to interact with Town Meeting Members and other community members in the lead up to the presentation to the Select Board.

M. Dewart asked for a copy of the priorities that had been discussed.

H. Hamilton said that the list can be sent out.

B. Kaufman gave an overview of the potential agenda for next week.

J. Rudolph asked if there were tools that the committee can use.

B. Kaufman said there are resources that can be used, and that Town staff would be able to help people get set up with tools.

M. Berger said that it may be premature to determine precincts next week.

I. Wapinski asked that we all work from the same datasets.

E. Schafer said that they would like to start with precincts, to have time for other conversations.

E. Schafer suggested that the subcommittees follow next week's agenda categories.

J. Raitt suggested break out groups within the meetings.

N. Shpritz said talking about potential polling locations should be done earlier.

N. Gordon asked the Town Clerk to put together an A list and a B list of polling location.

N. Gordon said that the discussion of priorities should not be given to a subcommittee. Suggested a poll be sent around to Committee members to guide the conversation. Everything flows from the number of precincts.

H. Hamilton said they do not think they can reach consensus in one night. There is a need to rank priorities, and to get consensus on the number of precincts.

D. Gacioch suggested committee members submit priorities to be discussed for next week.

B. Kaufman said they would send out lists, and would gather other suggestions.

B. Kaufman said they would get clarity from Town Counsel about the allowed use of Google Docs.

H. Hamilton suggested we have subcommittees for the next few meetings, and then have them change.

9:02pm The meeting with ADJOURNED by Chair Heather Hamilton, without objection.

NEXT MEETING: The next meeting is scheduled for September 23, 2021 at 7 p.m.

The above minutes were approved at the October 7, 2021 meeting.

PREPARED BY:

Ben Kaufman, Staff for the Committee

APPROVED BY:

Heather Hamilton, Chair of the Committee