

BROOKLINE ADVISORY COMMITTEE
Human Services Subcommittee
Department of Public Health and Human Services FY23 Operating Budget
Public Hearing on March 21, 2022 at 5 pm via Zoom

Attendees

Subcommittee attendees were Susan Granoff (Chair), Ben Birnbaum, Katherine Florio, David-Marc Goldstein, and Donelle O'Neal. Town staff attendees were Director of Public Health and Human Services Sigalle Reiss, Community Health Specialist Lesley Archabal, Public Health Policy Analyst John Kleschinsky, Director of Environmental Health Roland Lankah, Acting Finance Director/Treasurer Justin Casanova-Davis, and former Interim Director of Public Health and Human Services Pat Maloney. Also in attendance were Select Board Members Miriam Aschkenasy and Bernard Greene; Chair of the Advisory Council on Public Health Patricia Maher; and member of the public Susan Cohen.

Recommendation

The Human Services Subcommittee by a vote of 5-0-0 recommends favorable action on the Department of Public Health and Human Services FY23 budget request of \$1,340,667.

FY23 Budget Summary

The FY23 operating budget request of the Public Health and Human Services Department is \$1,340,667, which is \$255,093 less than its FY22 budget request. The reason for this decrease is because of an increase of \$344,635 in salary offsets provided primarily by Host Community Agreement (HCA) funds. In actuality, the department's FY23 operating budget is 5.7% higher than its FY22 operating budget. Two tables are provided below, one including HCA-funded salaries in the total Salaries and Total budget request amounts and one excluding these.

Salaries comprise about 77% of the department's total budget, and approximately 30% of this line item is funded by HCA and other grants. The nearly 33% increase in Services (\$72,639) is due primarily to a new planned marijuana impact study that is being funded by the HCA. Nearly 64% of the Services category (\$187,876) is the town's annual payment to the Brookline Community Mental Health Center that Town Meeting some years ago obligated the town to provide to it each year (using the Health Department as a pass-through), and this amount has increased by 2% in FY23. Most of the other budget categories (supplies, other, budgeted capital) have also increased somewhat (all except utilities) in the FY23 budget, due largely to the increased educational, training, and supply needs necessitated by departmental turnover.

For further details on the Public Health and Human Services FY23 budget, see the Brookline FY-2021 Financial Plan, Section 4O, pp. 117-129, and the opengov link:

<https://stories.opengov.com/4sagrSLIs/published/undefined>

	FY21 Actuals	FY22 Budget	FY23 Budget	Variance
SALARIES*	\$1,209,073	\$1,282,613	\$944,214	-\$338,399
SERVICES	208,102	221,514	294,153	72,639
SUPPLIES	16,288	35,100	37,900	2,800
OTHER	2,397	4,120	10,720	6,600
UTILITIES	34,089	47,629	47,865	236
BUDGETED CAPITAL	4,780	4,785	5,816	1,031
Total	\$1,474,730	\$1,595,761	\$1,340,667	-\$255,093
*HCA-funded Salaries are excluded from Salaries				

	FY21 Actuals	FY22 Budget	FY23 Budget	Variance
SALARIES+	\$1,209,073	\$1,307,352	\$1,316,588	\$9,236
SERVICES	208,102	221,514	294,153	72,639
SUPPLIES	16,288	35,100	37,900	2,800
OTHER	2,397	4,120	10,720	6,600
UTILITIES	34,089	47,629	47,865	236
BUDGETED CAPITAL	4,780	4,785	5,816	1,031
Total	\$1,474,730	\$1,620,500	\$1,713,041	\$92,542
+HCA-funded Salaries are included in Salaries				

	FY21 Actuals	FY22 Budget	FY23 Budget	Variance
REVENUES	\$153,020	\$106,750	\$106,750	\$0
Revenues Less Expenses	\$153,020	\$106,750	\$106,750	\$0

Public Hearing Discussion

The Brookline Public Health and Human Services Department consists of six subprograms: (1) Administration, (2) Environmental Health, (3) Community Health Services, (4) Public Health Nursing and Epidemiology, (5) Mental Health, and (6) Substance Abuse and Violence Prevention for Youth. An extensive list of the subprograms' goals and accomplishments appear on pp. 117-126 of the Brookline FY-2021 Financial Plan.

The department's new director, Sigalle Reiss, arrived on February 28, 2022. Prior to that, she was director of Norwood's public health department (2006-2022). She has also served over 12 years on the executive committee of the Massachusetts Health Officers Association, and was

the organization's president from 2020-21. She took over from Interim Director Pat Maloney, who replaced Dr. Swanee Jett in September 2021.

Departmental Goals of New Director

In her comments at the March 21 public hearing, Director Reiss said that Brookline's Public Health Department will continue to focus on Covid control and mitigation efforts in the coming year but will also prioritize the areas of mental health, youth substance abuse prevention, environmental health, and health equity.

One of her key goals in the next year will be to work on data collection, evaluation, and accountability. She hopes to create more measurable objectives for each of the department's six divisions, a process that will require more robust data gathering and analysis.

She will also be working to develop collaborative relationships with the directors of the public health departments in neighboring communities and has already begun to do so with Newton's new health department director. She would also like to explore developing working relationships with Brookline's local pharmacies.

Another key goal will be seeking out additional grants and funding streams, so as to build up her department and more effectively implement its policy goals. To date, her department has submitted six requests for ARPA funding (including a joint one with the Council on Aging), totaling nearly \$4 million (\$3,983,885). They are:

- \$200,000 to conduct a community health assessment and develop a health improvement plan with special focus on groups most negatively impacted by Covid
- \$30,000 for a public health nursing vehicle to replace a 2003 Prius that keeps breaking down
- \$240,000 to continue for another four years a year-old Farmers' Market voucher program for low-income Brookline residents
- \$142,085 to update software and hardware to improve the department's data analysis and disease surveillance capabilities and to host more accessible meetings
- \$310,000 to develop (with the Council on Aging/Senior Center) a Clutter and Hoarding Evaluation and Supportive Services (CHESS) program
- \$3,061,800 to transform Brookline's public health infrastructure to address the immediate and long-term impact of Covid on our community

Impact of Covid-19 on the Department of Public Health During Past Two Years

Among the topics discussed at length during the public hearing was the department's response to Covid, how Covid affected the department's ability to deliver services to the town, and what the department has learned about dealing with future pandemics.

We were told that because the department was required to re-allocate resources to respond to the great demands that Covid placed on it, the department lacked the capacity to do all the programs that it might otherwise have done. For example, the Environmental Health subprogram had to cut back on its rodent control task force and the Public Health Nursing subprogram had to use its limited resources for contact tracing and wasn't able to run as many flu and other vaccination clinics as usual. (Having to contract out vaccinations was also a lost revenue opportunity because administering vaccinations typically generates revenue for the department from insurance companies.) As for administering Covid vaccinations, the town had access to Covid vaccine doses but lacked sufficient staff to do the actual vaccinations.

One lesson the town learned is the importance of clear, consistent public messaging, and how challenging it can be for local public health departments to provide it in a fluid situation with the appearance and spread of new variants of Covid and rapidly changing information about best practices as scientific knowledge increases. Brookline's Health Department, like all local departments, often became aware of new and changing recommendations and advice from federal and state decision makers at the same time that the public did, and then was expected to immediately pivot and start implementing these changes and providing information about them to residents. One especially useful measure that improved the town's Covid messaging was the hiring of a public relations firm by the Town Administrator to help the Health Department and other town departments provide rapid and clear messaging about Covid to Brookline residents.

The department relied more heavily than usual on the town's volunteer Medical Reserve Corps, which grew in number to nearly 300, and whose members helped with contact tracing, distributed information in person to local businesses and restaurants at the start of the pandemic, fielded questions at the department's Covid call-in center, and helped distribute 10,000 at-home rapid Covid test kits at various locations in town.

Staffing Issues

There were a number of comments at the hearing concerning the need to increase the staffing of the Brookline Public Health Department, which is now serving a growing community of nearly 64,000 people. The director was asked to make increased staffing a priority. She noted that she will be studying her new department's staffing needs and that, in her prior position as Director of Norwood's Public Health Department, staffing significantly increased during her tenure.

The department has experienced much turnover and some lengthy vacancies during the past 12 months. Half of the current departmental staff of over 20 employees have been hired in

the past year. Current unfilled positions include the part time positions of emergency preparedness coordinator and congregant care auditor, as well as the full time position of epidemiologist. The part-time staff position of emergency preparedness coordinator, which is responsible for directing the nearly 300-person volunteer Medical Reserve Corps, has been vacant since September and needs to be filled for the Corps to continue to function effectively.

Director Reiss is going to explore whether it would be better to move away from one-task positions and have more staff positions that perform a variety of functions to provide greater workload flexibility. Both Director Reiss and former Interim Director Maloney said that part time positions were particularly difficult to fill.

Consensus on Need for Community Health Assessment

Both Director Reiss and former Interim Director Maloney agreed on the need for a new broad-based community health assessment and then the development of a strategic plan based on the data from this assessment. Key to doing this properly will be having a professional epidemiologist on staff. (When the department did health assessments of a more limited nature in the past, interns were used to do the data analysis needed.)

Analysis of Town's Organizational Structure for Delivering Expanded Social Services

In a follow up to questions first raised at the public hearing, the chair of the subcommittee was informed by the Town Administrator, Mel Kleckner, about the work of a new position – Senior Advisor to the Town Administrator on Social Services – that he had created in the fall of 2021. This position, which reported directly to him, was created in response to the Select Board's instruction to him to advance the work of the Police Reform Committee and the Task Force to Reimagine Policing around social service expansion.

In November 2021 Professor Harold Cox, an Associate Professor and former Associate Dean at the Boston University School of Public Health, was hired to fill this new position for up to 20 hours per week at an hourly rate of \$125 with no benefits. He was charged with conducting an overall analysis of the Town's social service needs and resources; evaluating models for crisis intervention, such as CAHOOTS (a national model for crisis intervention on mental health and substance abuse incidents); evaluating and coordinating existing social services and advising department heads on the effective delivery of social services; developing a long-term plan to reorganize, staff, manage, and deliver a comprehensive range of social services and working with the Town Administrator on its implementation; and advising the Town Administrator on recruiting and selection for the Director of Public Health position.

The Town Administrator recently learned that, unfortunately, due to unanticipated personal reasons, Professor Cox will be unable to continue this work for the town. Mr. Kleckner is in the process of developing alternate approaches to completing the projects assigned to this position. He is considering utilizing a combination of private consulting services, academic study, and internal management support, and is likely to ask Director Reiss to assist him.

Whenever the proposed long-term plan to reorganize the town's delivery of social services is completed and approved, it is likely to have a significant impact on the town's Public Health Department and on the other town departments that currently provide a significant amount of social services, such as the Council on Aging and the Veterans' Services Department.

Recommendation

The Human Services Subcommittee by a vote of 5-0-0 recommends favorable action on the Department of Public Health and Human Services FY23 budget request of \$1,340,667.

Meeting Recording:

https://brooklinema.zoomgov.com/rec/share/KbiN5Hd8H9ihv3T-c_ECiMpZ0KIp0POhAby-Kzc_rrk28o-oZs60TZVx5eTcLoA5.frqn-zDDar2C0rbn

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