



Brookline PAX Recommendations

Annual Town Meeting, May 28, 2013

Article 2 – Approve AFSCME collective bargaining agreements

OPPOSE

The AFSCME contracts awaiting Town Meeting’s approval institute a two-tier system of benefits, distinguishing between current employees and new hires by reducing the rate at which new employees accrue vacation days and reducing their maximum number accruable from year to year.

Two-tier pay and benefit systems are a highly significant contributor to the progressive national weakening of our unions, and thereby to the decline of the middle class. Undermining union solidarity by opening a gulf between generations, they advantage current employees by disadvantaging future ones, in a manner reminiscent of replacing decently paid union-member employees with outsourced minimum-wage workers. In so doing, they encourage new employees to look with greater skepticism on the desirability of joining the union. Since unions are under constant pressure to make concessions nowadays, and this is one way to partially protect their current members, no constituency other than Town Meeting remains to watch out for our more vulnerable newcomers.

Town Meeting is between a rock and a hard place. On all future occasions as on this one, we will not learn of any further two-tier proposals, widening the gulf, until another contract has again been ratified and the Combined Reports are published. We all know that Town Meeting would not wish to see a two-tier system that created a major wage disparity between generations, substantially driving down the economic well-being of all the Town’s future employees.

The question then becomes: At what point do we step in? We’re well aware that this particular arrangement is a much less onerous example than the giant wage differential instituted at GM. But we’re also distinctly uncomfortable that nationally, these gaps have grown progressively wider.

PAX, with great reluctance, therefore recommends stepping in at the top of the slippery slope to avoid having to later pick an arbitrary point mid-slide. We urge the Selectmen to guide the Personnel Department, now and in the future, away from two-tier systems that drive a wedge into our employees’ unions.

Art. 6 – Increase property tax exemption for veterans, disabled and elderly

SUPPORT

PAX wishes to highlight this annually renewed article, which provides property tax exemptions for a very small number of people who are veterans, disabled or elderly and deserving of financial assistance. The categories, base amounts, and allowable doubling for these property tax exemptions are mandated by state law. Town Meeting has annually approved doubling the exemptions since FY1989.

Art. 9 – Reorganize Human Relations-Youth Resources Department

SUPPORT

Since Town Administrator Mel Kleckner has recently declared his commitment to providing the Town’s new affirmative action officer (Lloyd Gelineau) routine direct access to the Selectmen, who have also added a “sunset clause,” the petitioners of Article 10 have withdrawn their objection to the (sunsetting) reorganization and are now supporting this article. We join them (and the BoS, the AC and CTO&S).

Art. 10 – Reaffirm Human Relations Commission’s primary role in developing Town’s affirmative action policy, and reorient its diversity policy toward stronger affirmative action

Greater diversity? Yes, but how?

PAX has long advocated for greater diversity—in town and in our government and schools. Several of our board members have been actively engaged in the recent community-wide discussion about the under-representation of minorities in our workforce and about the need for greater receptivity of Town agencies to complaints of discrimination. It’s a multi-faceted issue, however, and our board was divided as to whether Article 10 should be passed as is or would likely be improved by recommendations from the Selectmen’s diversity committee. Regarding referral, we are concerned that three members of the 7-member committee have publicly voiced strong opposition to Article 10, and none have publicly supported it.

Art. 12 – Require prominent posting of a Living Wage By-law fact sheet on Town website

SUPPORT

Effective implementation of the Living Wage By-law will clearly be facilitated by widespread knowledge of its existence and its details. Readily locatable website posting of a hot-link icon will help in this regard, and amendment of the grievance clause provides desirable clarification.

Art. 14 – Amend definition, and permit non-criminal treatment, of disorderly behavior by-law

SUPPORT, with concerns

This article allows the police to treat disorderly conduct with a \$100 fine rather than as a misdemeanor infraction that would leave the violator with a criminal record. We have frequent problems with late night noise-making on public ways, especially in residential areas with a lot of students, and the Police Chief believes that this additional option will help “keep the peace” while limiting the use of criminal charges to more serious cases.

PAX believes, with the ACLU, that the existing by-law contains considerable vagueness and is overly broad and should be reviewed by Town Counsel for revision at a future Town Meeting. We also, as we have done before, urge the Police and Selectmen to develop guidelines and criteria to help officers decide when to proceed criminally or non-criminally in individual cases.

Art. 16 – Amend Zoning By-law to change definitions of “lodger” and “lodging house”

SUPPORT

This proposal will allow individual cooking facilities in lodging houses, but only if all the rooms are affordable. It provides a modest but welcome increase in affordable housing that will improve the quality of life for residents of affordable lodging houses and increase the number of units to be counted as affordable under 40B. It will have no impacts on single-family and two-family districts, because lodging houses are not permitted in those districts. Individual cooking facilities must comply with state and Brookline codes and will be regularly inspected.

Art. 17 – Amend Zoning By-law to add provisions for establishing medical marijuana treat centers

SUPPORT, with concerns

PAX finds the immediate moratorium reasonable, but not if it leads to excessive delay in implementing the initiative petition, “Law for the Humanitarian Medical Use of Marijuana,” approved by over 70% of Brookline voters. On May 8 the state regulations (105 CMR 725.000) were finalized, providing “nothing [herein] shall be construed so as to prohibit lawful local oversight and regulation, including fee requirements, that does not conflict or interfere with the operation of 105 CMR 725.000.” We hope the Planning Board and Department will respect the overwhelming will of the voters, who in turn respected the needs of suffering individuals, and bring a reasonable proposal to the fall Town Meeting.

Art. 23 – Resolution to oppose transportation of Canadian tar sands products through Massachusetts

SUPPORT

This resolution opposes reversing the flow of the Portland-Montreal Pipeline in order to carry oil derived from tar sands into Massachusetts; and opposes the transportation of such oil and its derivative products through the state. It also encourages the Commonwealth to develop and adopt policies to shift consumption away from transportation fueled by high-impact fuels such as those derived from Canadian tar sands.

Tar sands oil is bad for three reasons. (1) Removing it from the ground is horribly dirty and polluting, entailing strip mining the boreal forest and leaving behind huge tailing pits and polluted waterways. Tar sands oil is known as “the world's dirtiest oil” and is a major climate polluter. Just getting it out of the ground generates 3-5 times the climate pollution as extracting conventional crude. (2) Tar sands oil is also more likely to spill and harder to clean up when it does spill, and the potential New England tar sands pipeline passes over or near the Connecticut River, the Androscoggin River, and Sebago lake, to name just a few water bodies. (3) Lastly, if we do not stop using fossil fuels, global warming/climate change will soon be irreversible. Thus, for human life to survive on the planet, we cannot burn all the oil that is available for extraction. For these reason, PAX deems it wise to support Article 23.

Art. 22 – Resolution to fund a professional study of upgrading Beacon St signals to prioritize T cars

OPPOSE referral, & SUPPORT petitioners' motion

Transit signal prioritization, which uses “smart” traffic signals to reduce delays for transit vehicles, is a technology that holds great promise for residents of Brookline. Article 22 would put funding in the *FY2015* budget (which Town Meeting will vote on in spring 2014) for a study of the technical requirements and costs and benefits of transit signal prioritization for the C Line along Beacon Street. The Selectman and Advisory Committee favor referring this issue to the Transportation Board. However, since that Board has a long record of strong support for transit signal prioritization, including by a unanimous vote at its April meeting, we urge a NO vote on referral and YES on the petitioners’ (non-binding) motion/resolution.

Marty Rosenthal (TMM-9) and Frank Farlow (TMM-4), Co-chairs

PAX supports: Excellent public education and services, Respect for public employees and organized labor, and Advocacy for the environment, diversity and social justice.
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