

Q1: Pressing Land-Use and Development Issues

Developers are trying to come in and take away all of our beautiful homes in the area. I would like the preservation or historical society to help maintain some of what is left of the old Brookline. – ***Felina Silver Robinson, Precinct 3***

Our town is facing a lot of pressure to grow. While I believe we need to grow, I feel strongly that we should do this in a smart and thoughtful manner. We also need to increase affordable housing and ensure that we have an appropriate mix of housing in all of our neighborhoods. However, we should not be doing this indiscriminately or randomly, which is what it looks like today, with the destruction of historical assets to add a few luxury condos, like we have seen in my neighborhood on Kent Street. We also need to invest in commercial districts to increase revenue for our town, and make certain we provide adequate parking, outdoor dining spaces and open space and services that ensure its vitality and pedestrian appeal. We should be growing thoughtfully in such a way that maintains the quality of life in the town and considers the impact it may have with our schools, services, and infrastructure needs so that we can successfully manage our growth. –***Joanne Liataud, P3***

The push to eliminate single family zoning (I oppose this), the weakening of historical preservation (I oppose this), encroachment upon open green space (I oppose this, including where Article 97 may not offer protection), deregulation of condominium development under the guise of increasing affordable housing (I oppose this because more housing units do not on their own translate to greater affordability), urbanizing parts of Brookline without walkable mass transit accessibility (I oppose this), ignoring the environmental costs of tree cutting and embodied carbon to erect new structures instead of renovating existing ones (more should be done to preserve and refurbish where appropriate), spot zoning in lieu of a comprehensive strategic plan (development should be coherent from a townwide, strategic long-term perspective, not a series of one-off arrangements). – ***David Pearlman, P15***

Land use and development are haphazard. Whoever moves first and is most determined is able to dictate Brookline's future. Too many Town Meeting members are single issue voters, and the largest bloc seems to be in favor of more building everywhere regardless of other considerations. We need comprehensive planning where all voices can be heard. Giving neighbors a voice in designing the future development of their neighborhood has an added benefit. It can create a shared vision of Brookline and what it means to live here. –***Don Leka, P3***

Piecemeal zoning and lack of a comprehensive long-term development plan to meaningfully balance the need for new housing with preservation and recycling of existing structures, green space and other public goods (such as access to recreational facilities and schools) throughout Town, as well as the creation of affordable housing. Developer overreach. –***Bettina Neufeind, P1***

As my TM colleague Gina Hahn once said, it's not just important that we grow, but how we grow. Housing affordability is vital, but it is a fantasy that we can build our way to housing affordability. We must find ways to grow our commercial base in Brookline's limited commercial areas, and that favors mixed-use expansion. We must plot a path to residential growth that takes into account already congested streets, neighborhood cohesion and patterns, and the financial ability of the Town to sustain services (including our public schools) at a level that preserves high quality, supportive public spaces for all. –***Rebecca Stone, P3***

Density as well as displacement of characteristics. Legacy neighborhood, street, residential and commercial characteristics being lost. Not all change and modernization is bad, but it should all be thoughtful. – **Jerry Navarette, P7**

Lack of a strategic vision for Brookline's desired growth; the delegation of development initiatives to investors who are not very interested in preserving community values, ensuring economic diversity or making progress towards providing truly affordable housing. Balancing the budget, ensuring adequate funding for town services and schools to support increased density. – **Bob Schram, Precinct 1**

We are plunking buildings down haphazardly & thoughtlessly. It's irresponsible. We need a plan. –**Jane Gilman, P3**

1) Lack of overall coherence in zoning regulations. 2) Relatedly, the understandable attempts to remedy that incoherence through the application of new zoning bylaws that are tactical and not strategic and add to the confusion (and to attenuated TM floor fights). 3) There's also the great profit to be made by replacing our apartments with lavish condos and homes with McMansions, and the resultant depletion of affordable housing.

Bottom line, we need a coherent, town-wide, strategic, consultative study and projection of what we want Brookline to look like and feel like and be taxed like over the next decades. Otherwise incoherence will prevail, with the usual results. – **Ben Birnbaum, P9**

Land use and development is one of my highest priority concerns – and one that I hear the most about from my immediate neighbors. Recognizing that our region is in the midst of a housing crisis and considering that Brookline needs to be a part of the solution, there is immense pressure to change zoning laws – but we need to be careful that we protect the characteristics of our neighborhoods that attracted us all to Brookline. This is a quality of life issue and one that requires thoughtful planning that respects resident input.

If we do this right, thoughtful and intentional development can address critical issues without losing so much of what makes Brookline special. The most pressing issues include: (1) affordability – living here is becoming more and more out-of-reach for many current residents and others; (2) the need to diversify new development to include more commercial properties to increase the tax base without increasing the resident tax burden; (3) transportation and traffic - with plans that prioritize bike and pedestrian infrastructure; (4) climate impact – with provisions to create incentives for heat pumps, electric vehicle infrastructure, low impact construction, etc.; & (5) preservation. – **Kevin Allen England, P5**

We need a long-term strategic plan - created with robust civic engagement along with expert voices. This plan should rethink how we use our commercial spaces. We have decent public transit, but our commercial spaces don't take advantage of this. Then housing should be added, to create dense, racially diverse, vibrant neighborhoods with a good mix of ages and incomes within walking or biking distance of our transportation. I'd prioritize green space, adding trees, parklets and bioswales. I'd like to see seating along main corridors to support our aging population and people with disabilities. I'd work hard to increase the walkability of our schools - bike or walk to bus where possible. Finally I'm concerned about food availability - I'd like to see better markets spaced closer together and better access to affordable and locally grown food. Pedestrian and bike safety needs to be improved. None of these things will happen accidentally. Brookline will need to be disciplined and intentional about this. But other places are working towards this, and we can be too. – **Katherine Florio, P10**

A comprehensive plan for development and land use will guide the Town in retaining its desirability as both a coveted residential area and a place where small businesses can thrive. Absent a comprehensive plan, "smart" development can be hampered by piecemeal actions driven by political favoritism. A narrowness of focus is anathema to a holistic model that looks out for the interests of all of the Town. A comprehensive plan promotes fairness, engages neighbors and preserves the Town's quality of life for future generations.

The Town must closely monitor compliance with 40B so as to avoid situations where developers--not residents--determine the Town's future.

Skyline Park is a wonderful example of how an environmental hazard can become a treasure. I support Warrant Article 10 as necessary to implement a comprehensive plan.

Building commercial and residential buildings without adequate parking facilities is not as environmentally friendly a policy as it first appears. I note the difficulty in the Longwood area of finding a space for necessary visitors, including those providing services to seniors.

The Waldorf parcel needs to be monitored to prevent the area from being overwhelmed by a much larger building than the parcel can handle. – **Bruce Levin, P17**

I'll address land use first and development second.

I'm loathe to isolate "the most pressing land use" issue since I think there are many and they are interdependent. Unprotected open space (much of it in private hands), green corridors and greenways, wetlands, small habitats, our urban forest, and strained parks and recreation space are all at stake, and there are very real budgetary and legal limits that challenge the Town's ability to protect and manage them. As a member on the last Open Space Strategic plan committee in 2017, it was clear to me that open space available for recreation (and schools) was already overtaxed.

As to development, my concern is echoed by many of my constituents: that beautiful homes (large and small) are being knocked down and are replaced by ultra-modern structures that are out of sync with the neighborhood around it both in price and esthetic.

Naturally development in our highly desirable community will continue; the most pressing concern for me overall is that we have a plan in place to preserve and protect open space (public and private) and structures (when possible) so that Brookline continues to be an appealing, green place to live. – **Amy Hummel, P12**

Residential development in Brookline has been overly aggressive. One reason for this, until recently, is not having satisfied the state's Chapter 40B 10% subsidized housing requirement, which, when not met allows and often encourages development that violates town zoning laws for setback, height and floor-area ratios (FARs). Another is simple economics: It's more lucrative for developers to replace open space and dignified old structures with larger, often boxy buildings that can house more units for sale or rent. A prime example that comes to mind is 54 Auburn Street.

Although development is inevitable, it should proceed according to a well-designed comprehensive plan that retains or improves the character and livability of Brookline, and sizes population density to ensure adequate police, fire, schooling, public works, parks and open space, and the tax base to support it all. Allowing poorly planned aggressive development will make our town less livable, not more. –**John Hebert, P7**

The main issue is that there is not an overall growth plan, which means that development decisions are made one by one. We have overdevelopment in North Brookline and underdevelopment elsewhere as a result. Ideally, each part of town would have a variety of housing styles from which residents could walk to a commercial area, to schools and parks, and to access public transportation to other communities. It's a misconception that a dense area should become more dense. North Brookline might have more T access but residents end up driving anyway. Apart from needing to optimize and balance development, other considerations are sustainability and aesthetics. I put them together since the exterior design of buildings and their landscaping has a big impact on quality of life. Shade trees and awnings mitigate heat islands in the summer. Setbacks with plantings help prevent storm runoff and flooding. Homes and apartment buildings with porches and outdoor seating encourage community and are preferable to sterile boxy buildings. Finally, we need to be concerned with offering a diversity of housing units. Developers tend towards luxury units at a high price point. We should encourage new housing at below-median prices.—**Brenda Hochberg, P2**

PLANNING Should Be MORE THOUGHTFUL & TOWNWIDE. Current unplanned development occurs mostly by developers of luxury residential units utilizing our zoning code to max out FAR. The result has been increased density in the most dense parts of town (mostly North Brookline). This increases the imbalance between our inadequate commercial development (which would bring additional tax revenue with less need for services) vs increased residential (with need for public services - schools, safety, open space) thus negatively impacting the Town budget and residents' personal budgets, as well as overall quality of life. —**Diana Spiegel, P8**

The question of how to grow is a pressing issue given our proximity to Boston and increasing density. Our Zoning law needs work and zoning/building code enforcement needs improvement. --- **Steve Laduzinski, P12**

We are seeing too many tear downs which actually eliminate affordable rentals and replace them with luxury housing....

Like everyone else I would advocate for increased commercial/tax paying development which doesn't put added disproportional pressure on town resources.

I think more could/should be done to encourage/finance affordable elder housing. **Bob Schram, Precinct 1**

The balance between the population of our town and our limited space constraints presents a wide array of challenges. However, the most pressing need that I believe we need is a comprehensive zoning plan that takes into consideration the following:

1. What is the greatest use of our town's spaces that maximizes the most value for all residents
2. Protection of our parks and green spaces as places for all to enjoy
3. Impacts to the environment of new and adapted buildings
4. The incremental long-term costs to maintain new structures and keep them in good working order
5. Ensure that where incremental new housing is added, it is in areas that have the ability to consume the increased density, e.g., impacts schools, parks, traffic, etc.

Brookline is a wonderful place to live. It is vital that we protect our historic structures while ensuring space for our residents to breathe and live. The pandemic has changed the way we all live and space has become more important than ever. That said, we must continue to offer low/moderate-income housing. Ideally, we will consider options that spread out the density of our living throughout all of Brookline. — **Richard Snyder, P2**

I am very concerned about the uncontrolled growth which is putting a strain in the public school system and increasing traffic.

I think Brookline can develop in a careful way so it maintains the quality of schools, public spaces, pedestrian safety and local businesses. —**Ana Otero, P6**

Developing a coordinated long-range (15-year) pro-active town-wide development agenda, vs responding piecemeal and reactively to independent developer projects, historical district initiatives, etc. with the long-range plan to focus on affordable housing supply and distribution and energy use/environmental concerns, including efficient home construction/remodeling and transportation. --**Tom Marton, P9**

Growth in already dense areas.

Loss of older buildings to denser development.

Dispersing new increased density.

Keeping local stores which means access by cars and adequate parking.

Impulses to uncritically accept new and dense commercial development for tax reasons.

Public open space, especially in North Brookline where there is little private open space.

Preserving pedestrian access while managing commuter traffic.

Affordable housing.

Limiting residential growth which may again stress our schools and in any case costs more than it pays in taxes. —**John Bassett, P6**

Brookline must continue to be Brookline and not be Boston, even though Boston surrounds us on 3 sides. That is a fundamental point, and that is where we need to start. It is the essence of the basic development struggle which has been going on since at least the early 1870's when the town voted against annexation by Boston by an overwhelming margin. Imagine if the vote had gone the other way. Brookline is a great place to live in large part because we still have some green, and buildings on most residential streets do not block out the sky and cast shadows over their neighbors. That's what the zoning by-laws are currently written to accomplish. We could easily lose these benefits if the by-laws were substantially changed, and there is no shortage of developers who would be glad to help accelerate the process. That being said, Brookline does have an urban flavor which distinguishes us from towns like Lincoln and Dover. It's a tricky balance to maintain, but that is the most pressing issue facing Brookline today. —**Ernie Adams, P9**

The most critical need I see is an integrated long-term development plan for the town, that balances the sometimes conflicting needs of residential, commercial, open space, infrastructure, and schools in one master plan. For too long these different constituencies seem to have operated almost independently, more like squabbling siblings than members of one family. As Somerville's experience with SomerVision has shown, this is a lengthy, complex, and expensive undertaking, but I feel it is very important for our future.

In particular, we need to preserve and maintain parks/open space, particularly in North Brookline. With the endless pressure for residential development we must protect our open space and set some controls in our housing policies. A developer's only real concern is profit; since we have other concerns for the town, we must hold developers in some check, particularly after the Partnerships for Growth Act made zoning changes easier. Balance is critical. — **Stuart Rubinow, P2**

Affordable housing. We need more of it. We have several new developments going up which make it extremely difficult for average hard working people, especially minorities to afford.—***Karen Ambrose, P4***

We need to stop the piecemeal approach to land use and development that has become prevalent in this town. Too often, each new building proposal seems to be considered in a vacuum without consideration of the overall impact of all the proposals being made. That's why Brookline needs a new comprehensive land-use plan to create a thoughtful template for Brookline's future development.

Additionally, we need to stop equating the building of more housing with increasing the affordability of Brookline's housing. Brookline clearly needs more affordable housing, but I don't believe that simply building more and denser housing will achieve that. When left to a free market, as long as there are many people in the Boston area who continue to want to live in Brookline and who are willing and able to pay for luxury-priced housing, that's what developers will choose to build -- unless they are given incentives to do otherwise.

Brookline also needs to expand the commercial use of its property. The reason that municipalities such as Cambridge can afford to have such low residential property taxes and to pay their municipal employees much higher salaries than Brookline is because of their large and thriving commercial property segment. —***Susan Granoff, P7***

I believe that the most pressing land use and development issues that Brookline faces with today are the following: rapid growth for residential, recreational, and commercial use; infrastructure congestion; demand to build more affordable housing units, historic land preservation, preservation of each neighborhood character; and climate change. —***Wadner Oge, P15***