



May 19, 2020

Chair Greene and the Select Board:

Thank you for your work over the challenging past several months to chart and refine courses of action to guide Brookline through Covid-19.

We are writing to you now to urge new focus on, and expansion of, efforts to refine the Town's management of Brookline's public ways and public parks in response to the changed circumstances in, and demands on, these public spaces posed by the ongoing health and economic emergency.

Current public health guidance calling for people to keep six or more feet of distance from those who are not members of one's family (or cohabitation group), if at all possible, highlights that Covid-19 demands a shift in how public space is viewed and apportioned.

This alters the safe capacity of both developed public outdoor spaces, such as park paths and street sidewalks, cycle lanes, and trolley and bus lanes and waiting areas, and of shared indoor spaces, such as within mass-transit vehicles and within stores, restaurants, schools, and places of worship.

*If* we are to safely sustain the substantial and growing share of essential Brookline trips that are made via foot, cycle, and similar (inexpensive, often physically active, space- and energy-efficient, low-pollution) means, both for work/school and errands and for personal well-being—

*If* we are to preserve the ability for public mass-transit and private car travel and parking in Brookline to serve those who most need them, safely and sustainably (spatially)—

*If* we are to preserve the ability for public parks in Brookline to welcome visitors, safely and sustainably (ecologically), by augmenting and better connecting them—

*If* we are to renew the ability for Brookline businesses and civic institutions to serve and engage the public, safely and sustainably (fiscally), by expanding and dispersing activities outdoors—

***Brookline would be wise to devote more priority, space, and protection for people to walk, run, scoot, and cycle, and to stand and sit, in the town's streets.***

Given the largely non-grid form of Brookline's existing street network and the town's many compact neighborhoods, several major streets are not just key routes for utilitarian trips, but are also principal, focal open spaces for their surrounding neighborhoods and/or connectors to off-street parks.

These essential streets merit particular additional attention.

We believe that further action is important now, as Brookline and Massachusetts strive to continue to curtail community transmission of the novel coronavirus while also moving beyond strict, universal "stay at home" guidance (issued by the Governor on March 24 and relaxed starting May 18) as the prime infection mitigation strategy.

As we understand, in this next, near- and medium-term period, prophylactic measures outside of home—such as keeping interpersonal physical distance, wearing mouth/nose coverings, and cleaning hands and high-contact common surfaces—will be ever more important for health and (hopefully cautiously) renewed forms of in-person business and civic activity.

Now, more than ever, it is important for the Town to make a particular effort to view and manage Brookline's streets and parks together, as an interconnected system of public open spaces.

It is important to recognize and strive to take full advantage of the health, access, economic, education, and cultural value that can derive from connected networks of space for people moving via foot, cycle, and the like, and pausing beside, in ways that are both safe from fast-moving motor-vehicle traffic and sheltered by greenery.

And these measures will contribute significantly to Brookline's commitment to face the impending climate crisis, by reducing air pollution, mitigating heat island effect, and augmenting carbon sequestration through a robust tree canopy.

Thank you for your consideration, and for all that you do on behalf of Brookline,

*Arlene Mattison, Jules Milner-Brage, and Marilyn Ray Smith*

(for the Brookline GreenSpace Alliance Board of Directors)