**Brookline Together**

**Community Meeting Minutes**

**September 13, 2021**

**Board Officers:**

President: Caitlin McNulty Finance Co-Chair: Mark Hopkinson

Vice-President: Blake Plavchak Community & Business Engagement Chair: Melissa Kilmer

Secretary: Ally Bove Community & Business Engagement Co-Chair: Sami Melhorn

Treasurer: Bill Kim Beautification Chair: Lisa Wilson

Beautification Co-Chair: Blake Plavchak

**Attendance:** 43 individuals on Zoom:Caitlin McNulty, Blake Plavchak, Ally Bove, Bill Kim, Melissa Kilmer, Sami Melhorn, Mark Hopkinson, State Senator Wayne Fontana, Moira Kaleida (Chief of Staff to State Rep. Jessica Benham), Councilman Anthony Coghill, Gisele Betances (City of Pittsburgh), Lois McCafferty, Chris Recker (Juvenile Probation), Cristyn Zett, Ken McNulty, Eileen Papale, John Tokarski (Pittsburgh Public Safety), Josh Fleitman (CeaseFirePA), Maria Joseph, Jamie Hudzik, Amber Deemer (Foster Love Project), Pastor Lance Rhoades, Bill Caye, Jamie Krieger (Brookline Teen Outreach), Joshua Stinebaugh, Jim, Donna Katz, Judy Sippey, Lynne, Matthew May, Pitaland, Mary Miller, Kris Rhoades, Kimberly Booth, Lisa Fabus (Juvenile Probation), Kelly Goodrich, Megan Zirkel, David Lott, Lisa, Meghan Black, plus approximately 38 individuals watching live via the Facebook Live.

**Excused:** Lisa Wilson

Caitlin McNulty called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m.

* Approve August Minutes – available on Brookline Together webpage under “Resources”. Minutes were approved (motion: Bill Kim, second: Blake Plavchak, all in favor, 0 opposed, 0 abstentions.)
* Treasurer Report – Budget Report (Bill Kim)
	+ Current bank account balance $23,560 which includes $4,000 in grants that are earmarked for specific projects
	+ Budget drafts are due to Bill by 9/30, with final drafts due 10/18. The Finance committee will review on 10/25, and we will vote to approve at the 11/8 meeting.
* New Business: Summary of messages from guest speakers
	+ Local Elected Officials
		- Councilman Anthony Coghill:
			* thanked everyone for attending this important meeting.
			* He and his staff are in frequent communication with other local elected representatives, police officers and Zone commanders, and the Chief of Police.
			* He is concerned at the recent murders on Creedmoor Ave in Brookline and in Beechview as well as a serious crime against a teenager on Brookline Blvd who was sent to the hospital.
			* He is available to answer questions from constituents, and he is working diligently to pursue justice in these cases.
		- State Senator Wayne Fontana: wfontana@pasenate.com 412-344-2551
			* It is important to support and fund local organizations that provide support to families, fight crime, and fight the opioid epidemic.
			* His office was recently able to direct $2.6 million to groups in the Senator’s district that perform these important functions, including the South Pittsburgh Opioid Action Coalition (SPOAC). Brookline may not qualify for some of these funds as a neighborhood because we are still one of the safest communities in Pittsburgh.
			* We need to work to maintain this: families love Brookline because we have a safe community with great resources like Brookline Teen Outreach. We need to encourage our teenagers to join organizations like BTO and help direct them into job and trade training programs.
			* He is happy to answer any questions from constituents and will continue to advocate for Brookline at the state level.
		- Moira Kaleida, Chief of Staff to State Representative Jessica Benham: (412)881-4208 or mkaleida@pahouse.net
			* Moira lives in Brookline and has two young children, so these issues are relevant and important to her. Her office will work diligently to help keep Brookline a safe and vibrant community.
		- State Representative Dan Miller: RepMiller@pahouse.net 412-343-3870
			* Basic safety is one of the most important elements of a strong community.
			* Recent violence has occurred across Rep. Miller’s district (both Brookline and Mount Lebanon).
			* In the past several years, multiple bills regarding community safety, gun violence, etc. have come before the State House in the years since the school shooting in Parkland, Florida, but unfortunately most of them have failed to pass the legislature. Too many legislators only deal with these issues when something awful happens and do not pass meaningful legislation that communities need.
			* Most people with mental health diagnoses pose no danger to anyone, but in some cases (including a recent case in Mount Lebanon), there are clear links between mental health challenges and violent events. But even on this issue, the legislature has been unable to pass any significant bills.
			* Our community needs to continue to have difficult conversations, and find ways to protect individuals’ rights but address risks to others.
	+ Public Safety Officials
		- City of Pittsburgh, Zone 6
			* Officer Stinebaugh, Community Resource Officer in Zone 6: Joshua.stinebaugh@pittsburghpa.gov
				+ Zone 6 is thankful to Pitaland for assistance with a recent situation of young individuals causing an issue on the Blvd.
				+ August Zone 6 statistics: 0 homicides, 1 rape (in Brookline, by a known former intimate partner), 3 robberies (1 in Brookline), 7 burglaries (4 in Brookline), 6 aggravated assaults (0 in Brookline), 35 thefts (several in Brookline, mostly thefts from unlocked vehicles)
				+ Officers are routinely on Brookline Blvd, and their response time has been improving, and many people committing crimes have been caught quickly
			* Commander Zett, Zone 6 Commander:
				+ Officers have been increasing enforcement of speed limits on Pioneer Ave, including 30-40 stops in the past few weeks. A few of these stops have resulted in arrests on unrelated charges and tickets.
				+ Officers are also increasing enforcement of stop signs on Fordham Ave.
				+ The Homicide unit has received many leads from Brookliners regarding the homicide on Creedmoor Ave over the summer, but unfortunately none have led to an arrest yet. They are continuing to work the case and appreciate receiving relevant information from residents.
				+ Over the past 1-2 years, there has been an uptick in complaints regarding juvenile activity – some is lower-level criminal mischief, but much may not rise to the level of a crime. For this, Commander Zett asked Meghan Black from the District Attorney’s office to join the meeting and share more information.
			* Meghan Black, Juvenile Unit, Office of the District Attorney: mblack@alleghenycountyda.us.
				+ Juvenile delinquency proceedings are guided by the Juvenile Act. When police respond to an incident and allegations are submitted to the Juvenile court, individuals are first screened by the Juvenile Probation department. These officers can connect kids to community-based resources and help to avoid formal court intervention in some cases. It helps to have programs/resources like Brookline Teen Outreach available as a support to kids.
				+ When cases are filed in Juvenile Court, there are often concerns when the victims are also juveniles – both parents and children are often hesitant to testify or formally complain for fear of retribution from peers.
				+ The goal is to avoid incarceration except in cases where it is very necessary and where the kid is in the highest risk category. Other methods of formal and informal supervision, such as juvenile probation, are possible.
				+ Around 70% of kids who are on juvenile probation successfully complete their program and do not re-offend.
				+ Their office can connect victims to the Center for Victims and other resources.
				+ Following through with making an allegation / filing a police report does not mean that a court case will definitely happen, but is necessary for the court to help ensure a good outcome and community protection.
			* John Tokarski, Pittsburgh Public Safety: john.tokarski@pittsburghpa.gov 412-432-8674
				+ Block Watches are a great resource – contact Brookline Block Watch for information on ours
				+ Public Safety can provide training on how to respond to situations of public safety and help you remain safe, training on what “restorative justice” means in relation to the juvenile courts, and other concepts to help educate the community on these issues.
				+ Local resources such as Brookline Teen Outreach are also very important in the community.
				+ The Zone 6 Public Safety Commission meets monthly and offers specialized presentations each month. The virtual meeting on 9/21 at 6:30 will feature a representative from the city’s Dept of Mobility and Infrastructure.
				+ The Citizens Police Academy and Student Police Academy offer average citizens the opportunity to learn what police training and everyday policing are like.
* Resources Available in Brookline
	+ Pastor Lance Rhoades, Tree of Life Church: lance@godlovesbrookline.com 412-531-0590
		- Brookline Food Pantry – 2 weeks of groceries provided free of charge
		- Summer Meals for students
		- State-licensed childcare facility and Head Start program (Brookline Sprouts)
		- State-licensed afterschool program for younger kids
		- Programs focusing on recovery from substance use disorders, including hosting 12-step program meetings, supporting South Pittsburgh Opioid Action Coalition, providing Narcan and training on how to use it
		- Emotional health classes, open to anyone in the community
		- Clothing distribution for those in need
		- Family events include the annual Festival of Trees and Breezefest-specific programming
	+ Jamie Krieger, Brookline Teen Outreach: jkrieger@brooklineteenoutreach.org, www.brooklineteenoutreach.org
		- Space for teens to participate in programming
		- All workers and volunteers have backgrounds in education
		- Frequent partnering with other nonprofits, including Compassionate Counseling
		- Free Food Pantry (“take what you need; give what you can”) open 24/7 in the locker outside of BTO
		- Monthly community meetups on the 1st Saturday of each month, including free food and art activities for attendees
		- Community service opportunities for teens
	+ Jamie Hudzik, Elizabeth Seton Center: Jamie@setoncenter.com, www.setoncenter.com
		- Childcare center serving children 6 weeks to 12 years old, including before- and after-school care during the school year
		- Music lessons to children and adults of any age (guitar, violin, viola, cello, and piano)
		- Programs for older adults
		- Intergenerational program that brings the children from the childcare center together with the older adults in the senior center
		- Seton Center also hosts other organizations including Heritage Players (theater), 12-step recovery programs, suicide support group
		- Seton Center is hiring for a number of different positions – more information available on their website
	+ Maria Joseph, Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh – Brookline Branch: 412-561-1003 josephm@carnegielibrary.org www.carnegielibrary.org
		- As of mid-July, the library is fully open with most services except programming (limited programming is opening at some CLP branches beginning in October)
		- Brookline CLP will be offering a Kids Club every other Wednesday afternoon at 4:30 beginning October 20th, 2021
		- Brookline CLP will also be offering an Adult Book Club soon
		- Researching how/when to reopen meeting room space
		- Teen space in the library has been recently expanded
		- CLP is also hiring! Check out their website for details.
	+ Amber Deemer, Foster Love Project: adeemer@fosterloveproject.org www.fosterloveproject.org
		- Supports both foster families and birth families
		- 1 in 4 kids in foster care won’t graduate high school; 3% will earn a college degree; 60% of boys in foster care will be convinced of a crime; 70% of girls in foster care will become pregnant before age 21
		- Free shopping center @ their center on Potomac for clothes, shoes, hygiene items, etc. for any kid who is in foster care or transitioning
		- Transition bags (full of new clothing, hygiene items, etc.) are available for any kid transitioning into foster care, to support those who do not have what they need
		- Teen Connections Program was started during the pandemic. For kids 12-18 all throughout western PA. This includes regular meetings for foster teens to share their stories with similar teens and support each other. Adults who have been impacted by foster care and adoption serve as mentors to the teens in the program.
	+ Matthew May, Assistant Principal and Sara Lewis, Family and Community Engagement Coordinator at Brookline Elementary School: Ssikora1@pghschools.org
		- Glad to have kids back in school in-person!
		- Schedule is in session from 8:00 – 3:10.
		- Throughout the year, the kids will be participating in lessons focused on creating a positive culture at school
		- The school has an active Student Assistance Program, whereby teachers help connect kids and their families to resources they may need
		- Sara Lewis runs the school’s Discover Page (website housing important documents) and the school’s Facebook page
		- No Bully program allows students to approach trained teachers with concerns about bullying, and the teachers help kids to resolve issues and move forward in a productive manner
	+ David Lott, Principal of Pioneer Educational Center 412-529-7405, email dlott1@pghschools.org
		- Serves students aged 5-21 with multiple disabilities and medical fragility, who have unique needs
		- Accept students from Pittsburgh Public Schools and other districts whose educational plan requires a more comprehensive educational environment than their neighborhood schools
		- The school offers rehabilitation therapies (vision, hearing, occupational, physical, and speech therapies) to students
	+ Josh Fleitman, Western PA Manager for CeaseFirePA: josh.fleitman@ceasefirepa.org or 412-426-5148.
		- CeaseFirePA is a statewide organization decreasing gun violence through education and advocacy
		- Cosponsoring an event on 10/14 to specifically discuss youth violence with local elected and public safety officials. Registration is available at: https://secure.everyaction.com/-X8Az87w2EWYYdJcPVFi9A2
		- In PA, there is no law that requires individuals to report if their gun is lost or stolen. Legislation to make such reporting mandatory could help with keeping illegal guns off the streets. You may support this effort here: <https://ceasefirepa.salsalabs.org/lostandstolenaction/index.html>
		- “Ghost guns” are do-it-yourself make-at-home firearms, whereby people can quickly assemble the parts into a fully-functioning firearm. These are not subject to federal regulations – background checks are not required for purchase, and they do not contain serial numbers to allow tracking. The federal government has created a new rule to correct these loopholes but it has not yet gone into effect.
	+ williamcaye@williamcayelaw.com 412.953.7022 Bill Caye Professional Consulting and Mentoring
* Questions from the Facebook Livestream:
	+ Are the young people currently causing issues from Brookline, or do they live elsewhere?
		- Commander Zett: young people coming into contact with the police have been a mix of Brookline residents and nonresidents.
	+ Can we turn an empty storefront on Brookline Blvd into a police substation?
		- Commander Zett: If there’s an empty storefront and the owner is willing, Commander Zett would be happy to make the connections to have that conversation.
		- Councilman Coghill: Likes this idea, though it would take money and resources – and we’re fortunate not to have many empty storefronts on the Boulevard.
	+ “I have a child who was assaulted a few years ago. The kid is still out on the street bothering people.” What is the follow-up procedure when things like this happen?
		- Commander Zett: It depends on the ages of the kids involved. Officers are instructed to take a report when a resident has a concern. The Zone 6 officers will coordinate with the Office of the District Attorney.
		- Meghan Black, Office of the District Attorney: The first step when an allegation is received is for the Juvenile Probation officers to get involved. Sometimes these is a perception or concern that, when a referral is made to Juvenile Court, that nothing happens to the juvenile. What happens when a decision is made not to file charges?
		- Chris Recker, Juvenile Probation: When an allegation is filed with the police, the Juvenile Probation office begins screening that includes looking into the juvenile’s background, prior court involvement, the nature of the charges, etc. Any felony gets automatically filed and appear before a judge. In lesser offenses, the juvenile probation officer helps to determine whether charges are filed with the court. If charges are not filed, the direct victim should have been contacted with the outcome, but other residents in the community often don’t see how these cases continue to progress through the system – things occur behind-the-scenes and are managed by the probation officers. It’s important for residents not to “give up” and assume that nothing will ever happen to a juvenile accused of a crime – please keep reporting your concerns and filing police reports when appropriate.
		- John Tokarski, Pittsburgh Public Safety: If you have a negative interaction with a Pittsburgh Police officer, please contact Commander Zett and she will absolutely hear your concern.
		- Councilman Anthony Coghill: You can also call his City Council office if you have a concern.
	+ Is there a regular schedule for officers to “walk the beat” on Brookline Blvd, or is it random?
		- Commander Zett: I assign a specific number of walks per day/week and it’s somewhat weather-dependent. We are currently at more than 600 patrols on Brookline Blvd in 2021. Our foot patrol officers on Brookline Blvd are most active when the kids are most active (after school, early evening), and tend to be in their cars during times that the kids are less active.
	+ What is being done to hold parents accountable for their children?
		- Caitlin McNulty: There is a lot of accountability when a complaint is filed and a juvenile case is in the system. But it is important that we, as a community, come together and hold people accountable – it can’t fall ONLY to the police or to one organization to handle the problem. If we want a great community, we need to BE a great community.
	+ What can be done at the magistrate level to handle parents who won’t take accountability for their child’s actions?
		- Councilman Coghill: Our district justice James Motznik lives in Brookline. He was unable to attend tonight, but he is well-informed on what goes on in the neighborhood and can be approached with concerns.
		- Senator Fontana: The laws are a bit vague regarding the extent to which parents can be held responsible for their children’s actions. To correct this, the laws would need to be stronger. The Senator is open to working on this issue; perhaps a committee or task force should be created to look into the feasibility of promoting legislation to strengthen these laws. But positive ‘peer pressure’ is important here! We need to provide mentoring and support to parents.
		- Rep. Miller: Family supports such as CYF are also essential to make sure things are working well at home and the child is being supervised in the way that is needed.
		- Councilman Coghill: Parents may also be struggling with other challenges such as substance use disorders.
	+ “Kids who cause trouble don’t come to these kinds of programs [BTO, Tree of Life]”.
		- Caitlin McNulty, BTO: This is untrue; these kids do attend these types of programming. And when they’re there, the program leaders both hold them accountable and offer supports.
	+ “There aren’t enough free things to do here.”
		- Caitlin McNulty: BTO is free and offers a pool table, video games, etc. The local parks are also free.
	+ A suggestion was received by Kristin Doyle, to Councilman Coghill to add a skatepark or BMX riding area was made and acknowledged by the Councilman.
		- Caitlin McNulty: This is a great idea; please reach out to Councilman Coghill’s office to discuss this.
		- Councilman Coghill: I welcome this phone call! Please contact my office.
		- Senator Fontana: This project will require (1) finding a space and (2) raising the money
	+ Trespassing on vacant property at the corner of Creedmoor and Oakridge is a concern, and the trespassers have threatened the property’s caretaker with property harm. What actions are being taken?
		- Councilman Coghill: I spoke with the person who lives next door to this home. A gentleman recently moved out of a home, and some people wanted to make a memorial for the teen who was recently killed on the individual’s porch. The property owner was not comfortable with this, and the memorial was moved to the telephone pole. My office is happy to speak to Christian’s family about the memorial and help to facilitate a mutually-agreeable resolution.
		- Senator Fontana: I live near here, and I believe this issue has been resolved with the memorial being moved. All parties appear satisfied with the current arrangement.
		- Commander Zett: Unfortunately, some residents have backed down when contacted by officers in response to these concerns. If there is a direct threat of harm, charges should be filed. If the threat is indirect or vague, it may be a citation for harassment or something to that effect. Please call 9-1-1 when anything like this happens.
		- Councilman Coghill: Asked the resident expressing these concerns to please call his office tomorrow to speak in more detail directly.
		- Commander Zett: Asked the resident expressing these concerns to please follow up with her regarding follow-up to these issues so they can ensure a strong plan is in place to protect the residents of this part of the neighborhood. The fact that this crime has not been solved is certainly inflicting more trauma on the people who witnessed the crime and whose friend was killed, so we will continue to work on solving this crime.
		- Pastor Lance Rhoades: Thanked the resident for helping on the scene of the homicide and for advocating for her neighborhood.
		- Caitlin McNulty: This demonstrates the beauty of Brookline – you and your neighbors helped a child in their time of need and are doing your best to help the family and the neighborhood heal. Thank you for bringing these questions to light.
	+ Related to the prior question, what can residents do when they wish to join together for a memorial service or other demonstration?
		- Senator Fontana: They cannot go on private property, which unfortunately was occurring previously.
		- John Tokarski, Pittsburgh Public Safety: Sometimes other things like planting a memorial tree have been arranged.
	+ Do we have organized gangs operating in Brookline?
		- Commander Zett: Not in the traditional sense. There are groups of people who operate together and may commit crimes, but not “gangs” in the way that most people would be thinking.
	+ How can we manage violence and intimidation on Brookline Blvd?
		- Commander Zett: People need to report things and file police reports. I often hear about things from elected officials and community organizations after the fact, but people need to report the issues immediately so the police can respond and come up with a plan of action.
	+ The Creedmoor Ave house we’ve been discussing is run-down, and there are concerns about rodents. Is the owner going to do anything?
		- Senator Fontana: This house has indeed been run-down for years. I have reached out to the owner, but the owner does not seem interested in selling.
		- Councilman Coghill: One of my biggest challenges is privately-owned homes that are abandoned. There are dozens of them. We are approaching this issue aggressively. Unfortunately, inspections and fines usually go unnoticed / unpaid. I am pushing for more demolition money to condemn and demolish homes that deteriorate to the point of being unsafe. When this occurs, a lien will be placed on the property for the cost of the demolition. This particular home is not yet to the point of being condemned.
	+ What are some action items that will occur as a result of this meeting?
		- Brookline Together will post tonight’s minutes (and all resources shared in this meeting) on our website and social media.
		- When you have good ideas, contact our local elected officials! They are interested in hearing your suggestions.
* Other resources in the neighborhood that were unable to send representatives:
	+ Geekadrome – gaming and events
	+ LFG – gaming, coding workshops, meeting spaces
	+ Brookline Dek Hockey
	+ Brookline Youth Soccer
	+ Brookline Baseball &amp; Softball
	+ Brookline Recreation Center
	+ Boy Scouts
	+ Girl Scouts

Announcements

* 2022 Elections Call for Nominees: President, Secretary, & Beautification positions are up for election. All members may submit nominations. Nominees must be a Brookline Together member in good standing and have served on a Brookline Together committee. The candidate ballot will be approved at the November 2021 meeting, and the slate will be communicated to the Brookline Together membership in December. Voting will occur at the January 2022 meeting. Members must be present to vote.
* Membership renewals will be sent out in December 2021. New members can join at https://www.brooklinetogether.org/membership
* There will be no Brookline Together holiday party this year, but members should be on the lookout for something special in the mail.
* Kris Rhoades from Tree of Life Open Bible Church: the 2021 Festival of Trees is coming up December 2-5, 2021. This event is fun and free! You can sign up to decorate a tree, and decorate it however you’d like – for example, last year there was a COVID tree decorated with toilet paper and hand sanitizer. 😊 If decorating a tree isn’t for you, you can support the event financially with a donation or an ad in their program book. If you’d like to participate or donate, please contact Kris: kris@godlovesbrookline.com 412-531-0590 ext 208
* Gisele Betances, City of Pittsburgh:
	+ Garbage Olympics are this weekend. More info: https://www.facebook.com/events/pittsburgh/5th-annual-pittsburgh-garbage-olympics/2952419648418060/
	+ A street light equity survey re: transitioning to LED is being done. More info: https://engage.pittsburghpa.gov/streetlights
* Caitlin McNulty, Brookline Teen Outreach: BTO renovations are almost complete! An open house is being hosted on Saturday, November 6 from 10:00a.m. – 2:00 p.m. You can tour the new space, meet the staff and volunteers, and learn about what BTO does.
* Senator Fontana : Free flu vaccines on October 15 at Dormont Rec Center.
* Brookline Together Beautification announcements:
	+ Planter beds on Brookline Blvd are city-owned and maintained by Brookline Together. Because they’re city-owned, we are limited in what we can do.
	+ THANK YOU to Christopher from MJ Lawn Service for volunteering to maintain the beds and lawn along Brookline Blvd and the Cannon, as well as taking care of the Jacob/Whited site.

Note to all: If you have a question or concern that was not addressed tonight, please let us know! Please e-mail us at brooklinetogether@gmail.com and we will make sure your concern/question is forwarded to the correct person. We are here to serve Brookline residents and to help liaison between Brookliners and other officials who can help us accomplish our goals as a neighborhood.

Meeting adjourned at 9:26 p.m. (motion: A. Bove, 2nd: Caitlin McNulty, all in favor.)

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**Notes for upcoming community meetings:**

* November 8, 2021 Community Meeting Theme: Highlight of community services

**Mission:** To promote a vibrant and livable community through collaborative initiatives that unify Brookline’s business and residential interests.

**Goals for 2021:**

1. Increase membership
2. Increase revenue
3. Improve communications