

Brookline's Path to Irrelevance: An Open Letter to the Town Of Brookline

Dear Friends, Neighbors, and Colleagues,

Brookline is at a critical inflection point. If we want Brookline to be a place where people can live and work—not just afford to visit—we need to make more intentional, forward-thinking decisions now.

For generations, Brookline has long been a place defined by our strong schools, vibrant neighborhoods, and a deep commitment to community life. But for many, that is no longer the lived experience. The economic reality of Brookline has fundamentally shifted—and the way we make decisions about growth, housing, and spending, has not kept pace.

Brookline's [Expenditures & Revenues Committee](#) spent years analyzing the Town's long-term fiscal outlook. Their conclusion is clear: costs are rising faster than allowed revenue, and the gap is widening.

We are already feeling the effects:

It's showing up in our [budgets](#);

It's showing up in our [schools](#);

And it's showing up in who can—and cannot—continue to live here.


This isn't just about spending; it's also about how, and whether, [we are planning for the future](#) at all.

What it takes to live in Brookline—let alone put down roots—no longer matches the assumptions behind many of our past decisions. Yet much of our decision-making still reflects an earlier era, when those pathways into stable housing, strong schools, and community life were far more accessible.

That disconnect has real, and compounding [consequences](#).

As things currently stand, Brookline is not financially self-sustaining. We rely on [periodic overrides](#) to maintain core services, without addressing underlying imbalance:

Rising costs — Revenue growth = Brookline's path to steady and gradual decline.

Looking further ahead, if no structural changes are made, these gaps are expected to grow—reaching approximately \$5.8 million for the Town and \$30.5 million for our schools by fiscal year 2030. 

These are not abstract numbers. They reflect an accumulation of choices and a *distinct pattern*.

A Pattern We Should Recognize

1. Service Erosion & Deferred Maintenance

When budgets are tight, municipalities delay:

- road reconstruction
- sewer upgrades

- building maintenance
- fleet replacement
- school modernization

But, [infrastructure](#) does not disappear—it [accumulates liability](#).

This is what economists call a [deferred maintenance spiral](#). As backlogs grow, repair costs multiply, emergency fixes replace planning, and borrowing increases. Future taxpayers [pay far more for problems that were postponed](#)—costs that now shape what it takes to live here, and who can afford to put down roots.

2. Demographic Fiscal Spiral

Our schools are one of the main drivers of Brookline’s economic stability. Families move to Brookline because of our schools, and make real sacrifices to have access to them.

When we cut staff, reduce programs, and scale back supports such as early literacy specialists, [school quality declines](#). In time, housing demand among families begins to disproportionately shift. Those who can afford to leave do. Others opt out of the public system altogether.

Economists describe these shifts as a [demographic fiscal spiral](#): the gradual shift away from family-centered, economically diverse households toward a less dynamic, less inclusive community.

Brookline is at this inflection point.

3. Economic Stagnation & The Cost of Delay

When communities resist even modest zoning changes, particularly for commercial and mixed-use [development](#), the tax base [stalls](#).

Historically, this leads to:

- fewer small and local businesses
- declining commercial districts
- less daytime economic activity

At the same time, something has to give: [taxes go up, and/or services go down](#).

The result is what economists call a [fiscal monoculture](#): a community overly reliant on a single, constrained source of revenue. In Brookline, roughly 73% comes from residential [property taxes](#).

That level of dependence makes us more vulnerable—not less—to the pressures we’re already facing.

4. Structural Inequity (A “Closed Access” Community)

As these pressures build, [inequity becomes structurally embedded](#).

When housing remains scarce and costs are high, access to the community narrows to those who can absorb both:

- [extremely high housing costs](#), and
- [rising taxes for declining services](#)

This creates what is often called a “[closed access community](#).” Not intentionally exclusionary, but [structurally](#) so.

Teachers, firefighters, municipal staff, young families, seniors, and people of color are disproportionately affected. Over time, Brookline’s over-reliance on residential property taxes will reinforce that [inequity](#), with [far-reaching implications](#).

5. Political Polarization

As resources become more constrained, [decision-making shifts](#).

Instead of shared growth, debates become about tradeoffs:

- schools vs. municipal services
- seniors vs. families
- renters vs. homeowners
- preservation vs. housing

These tensions intensify when there is no new revenue to relieve the pressure.

We are already seeing this dynamic play out locally.

6. Cultural Shift: From Community & Sense of Place, to Location

All of these factors reshape something less visible, but equally important: *belonging*.

Place is what anchors a community—it’s what ties together institutions, relationships, and civic life. But when delay becomes the default, when process replaces decision, and when [inaction](#) is framed as cautious leadership, what remains is not community. It is a high-cost, exclusionary enclave, where access is determined by wealth, and in this country, wealth is not distributed evenly. The outcome, then, is not neutral: it disproportionately excludes people of color, while concentrating access and wealth among those who are already advantaged.

If we do not change course, this is how communities begin to slip into irrelevance—not all at once, but gradually, until the place people once recognized as home loses its core identity.

A Pattern, Not a Prediction

This is the path we’re on.

But it is not inevitable—we have agency here.

The historical lesson is not complicated. Communities that remain vibrant over time tend to do some combination of the following:

- expand their tax base through commercial and mixed-use development
- allow for more housing across a range of income levels
- invest in infrastructure, schools, and long-term economic development

Communities that resist all three tend to experience slow institutional decline.

Brookline is not locked into that outcome.

A Path Forward

Brookline's future will be defined by the decisions we make now. The question is no longer what Brookline used to be—it's what we choose for it to become.

Choosing a more sustainable, inclusive path will require clear, intentional, decisions from all of us.

Right now, that means:

- Voting for [Amanda Zimmerman](#) and Anthony Buono for Select Board
- Voting [YES](#) on the override
- Voting for [Faiza Khan](#) and [Suzanne Federspiel](#) for School Committee
- Electing Town Meeting Members who have [consistently supported policies aligned with our community's professed goals](#) of diversity and inclusion

We need your participation.

The question before us this May is not whether change will happen. **It is whether we will shape it—intentionally, thoughtfully, and *together*.**



TMM, P2 | Advisory Committee
2026 Delegate, Massachusetts Democratic State Convention