

## **Expenditure & Revenue Committee**

Futures Subcommittee Meeting of 11.17.25

DRAFT MINUTES

By S. Modigliani

### **Roll Call and Attendance**

The meeting began with Sergio taking a roll call, confirming the presence of subcommittee members:

Bernard Greene

Val Frias

Sergio Modigliani, Chair

Cliff Brown, Sadaf Kazmi - Absent

and Chas Carey, Town Administrator, Lincoln Heineman, Town Director of Finance, invited guests Alexandra Vecchio, Director of the Sustainability Division, Vikram Aggarwal of ZEAB and energy professional, and several members of the public in attendance.

### **Quick recap**

The Futures subcommittee began with an update from Bernard Greene on his Draft Memo concerning improving Town responses to opportunities for additional development revenues. Recent changes to the Memo led to a postponement of further consideration until the next meeting. The subcommittee then devoted the balance of the meeting focused on the Solar Working Group's (SWG) solar energy initiative as part of Brookline's 10-year climate action plan, with a Working Draft presentation introduced by Alexandra Vecchio outlining the town's existing solar arrays and then led by Vikram Aggarwal with a financial analysis for installing new systems. The group explored various aspects of the proposed solar project, including its potential benefits, financing options, and political feasibility, while also discussing borrowing options. The conversation ended with discussions about aligning the solar power program with broader sustainability efforts and the need to provide recommendations to the Select Board, perhaps by as early as December to become part of the FY 27 Budget considerations.

### **Next steps**

- Bernard to send updated memo to Nicole for posting to subcommittee members
- Solar Working Group (SWG) to advise on more detailed feasibility assessment of solar installation sites and identify consultant capable of conducting town-wide solar assessment a Fee estimate
- SWG to present findings back to subcommittee within 2 few weeks
- SWG to investigate added SMART program benefits for municipal solar

installations

- SWG to consider a more phased implementation approach and consider political buy-ins on sites involving trade-offs around tree canopy or similar concerns
  - SWG to prepare potential budget request for FY26 for subcommittee review
  - SWG to prepare summary of solar power initiative for incorporation into expenditure/revenue report
  - Sergio to ask Nicole to send out poll regarding meeting on the 21st
  - Sergio to work on inflation-related items and drafting of report outline
  - Lincoln to follow up with bond counsel regarding tax exempt status concerns for solar equipment
  - Bernard/Expenditure and Revenue Study Committee to determine how solar initiative impacts future finances and voter relevance for 2026 override
  - Sergio to discuss with Bernard whether next Solar presentation should be to the E & RSC Town subcommittee or joint meeting with Futures
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### **Futures Subcommittee Prior Minutes**

The Futures Subcommittee of the Expenditure and Revenue Study Committee held a meeting on [November 17th](#), with Sergio chairing and Chas handling the recording. The meeting began with a roll call, noting the absence of Cliff Brown and Sadaf Kazmi, but with a quorum confirmed then approved Minutes from [November 12rd](#) by rollcall (3-0 and 2 absent).

### **Development and Revenue Enhancement Memo**

Bernard led an update on his Draft Memo for which he again proposed to include just the Conclusion to the full committee, with the rest of the material moved to an appendix. Bernard noted he received valuable edits from Kara Brewton, a review by Ted Costigan and had also discussed and verified several aspects previously with Ken Lewis of EDAB, and Lincoln Heineman. As Val had as yet not reviewed the Memo, and some changes were yet to be integrated, Bernard agreed that discussion of the revised Memo would be at the next meeting.

### **Brookline Solar Energy Initiative Plan**

The meeting proceeded to a preliminary discussion (Working Draft) for a Town-Owned Solar PV initiative as part of Brookline's 10-year Climate Action and Resiliency Plan (CARP), with a target completion for the final document in late winter 2025 or early spring 2026. Working from a Power Point slide deck, Alexandra first provided an overview of the Town's existing solar arrays and outlined the CARP's goals, including maximizing renewable electricity and reducing greenhouse gas emissions by 60% by 2036.

Vikram then presented a Working Draft financial and technical analysis, highlighting that Brookline is scheduled to spend \$3.7 million on electricity in FY26, consuming in excess of 13,000,000 kWh, with recommendations to install solar photovoltaic systems and batteries across municipal buildings and open spaces to achieve significant financial savings and meet carbon reduction targets. He noted that the Town's commitment to electrification (e.g., heat pumps) is estimated to add 50% to the current kWh usage over the next 10 years.

### **Initial Investment Analysis**

Installing 9 megawatts of solar panels across town buildings, parking lots, and open spaces could generate an estimated 90% of the town's current electricity usage. He estimated a \$25 million upfront investment cost with annual savings of \$3 million, resulting in lifetime net savings of \$41 million over 25 years (i.e., in addition to the initial investment). The Town would need to decide how to fund the capital investment (CIP or possibly a Capital Override).

### **Social, Health and Economic Assessment**

The Town's proposed solar project could reduce annual carbon emissions by 4,500 metric tons, equivalent to planting 20,000 trees or removing 1,000 cars from the road every year. Vikram suggested the economic benefits of aggregating projects to achieve better economics was in the order of 10%-15%, but also noting uncertainties such as public perception and site-specific challenges like those at Skyline Park. Sergio highlighted the Town's unique ability to borrow at low interest rates, while Alexandra emphasized the need to address public concerns about open space and operational areas.

### **Federal Investment Tax Credit Considerations**

The group discussed the advantage and limited time available for qualifying for the 30% federal Investment Tax Credits (ITC), which would require systems to be completed and commissioned by December 31, 2027. This is further complicated by the current high demand for services in the solar industry. Vikram made clear that the Investment analysis did not include any additional benefit that might be gained from the ITC.

### **Financing Considerations**

The group discussed the feasibility and financing of a Town solar project, with Sergio pointing to the current debt service load and other priorities now in the CIP funding queue. Charles explained that while debt service is currently very high at 12-13% of the budget, the Town could consider a Capital Override if the project provided economic returns. It was also noted that highly favorable capital investments might be advanced in the CIP. Sergio noted that Vikram's preliminary analyses suggested that some of the solar projects appeared to be revenue positive in their first year of

operation, meaning that the required debt service was exceeded by the annual savings stream they produce once on line. To that end, the Working Group was asked to continue with an updated assessment of individual solar sites for feasibility and scope, to identify likely community concerns, and the CARP benefits, before making recommendations to the subcommittee within a few weeks.

### **Strategy Discussion**

The group discussed strategy considerations, with Charles emphasizing the importance of building political support and momentum through a more phased implementation rather than trying to solve everything at once. Vikram raised concerns about political feasibility and the need for support for the concepts presented from power centers, while Bernard suggested focusing on achievable solutions rather than waiting for perfect ones. The discussion concluded with Charles recommending consideration of a Town-wide assessment by an external consultant, similar to the MBTA Communities Act process, and Sergio suggesting that Alexandra and Vikram could present this idea to the Select Board along with a proposed consulting fee.

### **Solar Power Initiative Planning**

A Solar Power initiative could start up relatively quickly, with Vikram noting that implementation could begin as early as [July 2026](#), and seeking to target completion by the end of 2027. Charles emphasized that the project should be integrated into the Climate Action Resiliency Plan to secure political support and access to limited resources, highlighting the importance of considering opportunity costs even when projects promise good financial returns. Sergio and Charles agreed on the need to align the solar power program with broader sustainability and resilience efforts, recommending it be presented as part of the CARP comprehensive 10-year plan to the Select Board.

### **Solar Bond Financing Discussion**

The group discussed borrowing options for a solar equipment project, with Lincoln explaining that the maximum borrowing period would be 20 years for solar equipment, and Bond Counsel projecting a 3.5% interest rate in July, 2026 for a 20-year bond. Sergio noted that if the project timeline needed to extend beyond two years (arbitrage rules), several smaller bond issues could be necessary, which would increase bond placement costs. Sergio suggested issuance of bonds for this purpose was not a new issue, as other Massachusetts communities have already done so. The conversation ended with Alexandra clarifying that the subcommittee would need to provide recommendations to the Select Board by early December, with Sergio indicating the Working Group would meet again to discuss this further.

### **Financial Initiative Progress and Strategy**

The group discussed a financial initiative with potential near-term and long-term

impacts, focusing on a consultant's role and cost savings. Sergio emphasized that Vikram's work, supported by Alexandra and Town staff, has progressed significantly, and shows the possibility of immediate financial returns through reduced electricity purchases. This would free up some funds from the Operating Budget to be available to support other Operating needs. This raised the question of whether further discussion of this initiative should lie with the Town subcommittee (1-3 year time horizon) or with the Futures subcommittee (4-10 year time horizon). Bernard clarified the Expenditure and Revenue Study Committee's role in identifying future financial impacts, while Sergio sought to also align the initiative's potential relevance to voters when considering a possible 2026 override. Bernard suggested further discussion on this matter.