
Sana Hafeez

Candidate for Brookline Select Board

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My name is Sana Hafeez, and I'm running for Brookline Select Board.

Brookline has long regarded itself as a haven of progressive values and diversity. However, this is not reality. Ignoring the truth that Brookline is in fact not progressive and that we are approaching a fiscal cliff is a recipe for disaster. We must face the facts sooner rather than later if we want to make progress. The good news is that the most effective solution to both these issues is the same. We must re-evaluate the effectiveness of our budget allocations. And we must employ strategies with proven track records of success & community buy-in. Communities know best what issues they face AND the solutions that will be most effective. By empowering communities to become self-reliant, we create long-term solutions that both reduce financial burdens on taxpayers but also generate much needed commercial revenue for the Town. What's good for the goose is good for the gander. Brookline has failed to embrace community-based solutions to the detriment of all Brookline residents. With tax rates rising yearly, and quality of life decreasing simultaneously, we must change course immediately.

When I moved to Precinct 4, I looked to the community for wisdom on what the longstanding issues are and what hasn't worked. The message was resoundingly clear. They felt very little to no impact from the millions spent on supposed outreach to low-income black and brown communities. This was reinforced when our communities felt no impact from the \$42M in ARPA funds that were given to the Town to help its most marginalized communities recover from the devastating effects of the pandemic. The ARPA Review process was inaccessible, secretive, ineffective, and alienated everyday residents. An ARPA Review Committee member came and spoke on public record at a Select Board Meeting stating that he was given blank papers and told to sign off on hundreds of thousands of dollars with no clue what the intended use was, and he did as he was told. This is unacceptable.

As a community organizer and local nonprofit program director, I have worked to build equity in several core areas, including affordable housing, affordable childcare, job creation & workforce development, environmental sustainability, and others, with the support and guidance of our community. Thanks to their wisdom and experience, I am a part of the team that was granted a \$1M federal grant to create the first voucher-accepting childcare center in Brookline's history. I have worked alongside the community to create affordable housing proposals such as HEEP (Housing Economic Equity Plan) that aims to address the dire need for affordable housing as well as promote equitable homeownership for low-income residents by creating affordable multifamily housing units on existing properties with feasible rent to own options. I am also a part of the team that created the only workforce development program in Brookline to successfully train residents & help them earn federal licenses to work. These residents now have a foundation to not only find living wage employment in a top 3 expanding industry but also footing in a green industry that will change the face of environmental sustainability across the country. I want to see Brookline take advantage of solutions like these that foster small business growth, keep Brookline at the forefront of climate-friendly developments, and work to bridge the gap in socioeconomic mobility for marginalized residents. I graduated from the program myself and earned my FAA Part 107 Rating or Commercial Drone Pilot License. An ARPA Review Committee Member stated that they couldn't see the public benefit of this program, yet it accomplished more than any of the funded programs.

As an active Brookline resident, I was a petitioner on Warrant Article 19 to create a Black and Brown Commission due to governance's inability to address rampant issues, such as children being called the N-word at BHS. This warrant article brought out historic numbers of underrepresented and marginalized residents, young and old, to participate civically. From speaking in support of the commission at Town meetings across departments to speaking at the Annual Town Meeting, Warrant Article 19 signaled that our communities are hungry for change and are pleading to do the work themselves. Despite WA19 being modeled after the Women's Commission, it faced undue pushback and relentless efforts to stifle momentum from Town officials. I was doxxed, threatened, and harassed by Town officials for advocating for my community. There are countless examples that reaffirm good governance in Brookline is a privilege only afforded to those who do not expose its dark underbelly. Alas, governance is making the same mistakes that led to the Gerald Alston settlement.

Brookline witnessed not only the inability of our elected officials to grasp the realities we face daily but also their inability to be accountable and transparent regarding their unwise choices. We cannot and will not see change if we continue to repeat the same mistakes. We cannot let governance continue to promote "progressive" efforts to garner eye-catching headlines instead of implementing policies and practices that would actually make a measurable difference in people's lives. "Diverse" *appearing* representation is not the benchmark. Diverse governance that truly represents the needs and interests of marginalized communities *is* the benchmark. Governance that empowers community-based solutions with transparency and a commitment to true community outreach and buy-in *is* the benchmark.

Those who want a more equitable Brookline are not outnumbered, we are simply out organized. I need your help. Every single vote matters in this tight race. If we can put up a united front on **Election Day, May 7th, 2024**, inshallah, we have a chance to make change. I don't promise I can fix Brookline's issues overnight as one person on a board of five. However, I do vow that if elected, I will work to fix them with the urgency and passion one would have to help their family. Your village is your family, and without you, none of this would have been possible. Please contact our campaign via the email listed above for information on how to cast your vote in person or by mail.

In solidarity *always*,

Sana Hafeez

