

Brookline for Everyone Statement on Candidates for Commissioner of Brookline Housing Authority Spring Town Election 2023

Because we did not have consensus on our Board, B4E is not making an endorsement in the contest for Housing Authority Commissioner. The 5-member board oversees Brookline's nearly 1,000 units of public housing, including approving policy decisions, contract awards and budgets. There are two terrific candidates, who we've listed in alphabetical order: [Susan Cohen](#) and [Kimberly Richardson](#). Susan, the incumbent, is a lawyer who currently represents the Cambridge Housing Authority, and previously had her own firm specializing in public housing. She brings a wealth of experience and technical expertise to the BHA. Kimberly is BHA resident, a licensed social worker, and judicial secretary at the Boston Municipal Court in Roxbury. She believes the BHA needs better representation from those with lived experience as BHA residents.

We think both are excellent choices, for different reasons, and hope that whoever does not prevail decides to run again next year. We asked each of them to answer a few short questions, and you can find their statements below.

Here are the questions we asked:

1. Please provide a short statement of your qualifications and why you are running for Housing Authority Commissioner, including any specific issues relating to the Housing Authority you want to comment on.
2. In 2021, the legislature passed a law requiring 175 cities and towns with MBTA stations, including Brookline, to establish a zoning district in which multifamily housing is permitted as-of-right—that is, without needing any variances or special permits. The Brookline Planning Department is working on a plan that would bring Brookline into compliance with this new law. Town Meeting will be debating their proposal in November, ahead of our compliance deadline of December 31, 2023. Do you generally support the direction that the Planning Department is taking toward leveraging Harvard Street as a key "Main Street" to bring us toward compliance? ([Click here for more info on MBTA Communities Act and the Town's efforts toward compliance.](#))
3. Would you like to add anything else?

Response of Susan Cohen

Qualifications to Serve as Commissioner of BHA

- Current Commissioner of the Brookline Housing Authority
- General Counsel, Cambridge Housing Authority
- Actively participating in the Greater Boston Interfaith Organization's Housing Justice Campaign, for its focus on the urgent needs for funding for public housing.
- Served as general counsel and legal advisor to many Massachusetts housing authorities including Brookline Housing Authority.
- Board member and past president of Housing and Development Law Institute, the only national organization solely addressing the legal issues facing public housing agencies.
- Former Town Meeting Member from Precinct 9 and former member and chairperson of the Brookline Rent Board.
- Former legal services attorney representing low-income tenants.

Priorities as a Commissioner at BHA

- I am committed to diversity and opportunity for people of all backgrounds to live in Brookline regardless of income.
- I will lead new initiatives at the BHA to preserve, improve, and expand the quality and supply of affordable housing in Brookline.
- I will focus on pathways to the support and preservation of our funding-deprived state-assisted public housing.
- I will ensure that the BHA continues to expand and deepen its rich panoply of resident services for families, disabled, and elderly.

MBTA Communities Act

I do support the approach of the planning department to addressing the MBTA Communities Act. Increasing the supply of all types of housing is a critical need which will positively impact everyone. I am also very concerned about the negative impact of not complying, which would work to penalize the BHA by withholding of necessary funding. It will be important to navigate the balance between increasing the supply of housing while incentivizing affordable housing to the extent permissible and incentivizing continued commercial space in appropriate locations.

Other

I would like to thank Brookline for Everyone and also Kimberley Richardson for focusing the attention of the Town on the needs of and importance of support for public housing, and the ways that the Town can and should support the people who live in public housing and the buildings they live in.

Response of Kimberly Richardson

There are many areas in which I am qualified to serve as Brookline Housing Authority's next Commissioner. I have worked as an administrator for over 26 years for the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, within the Trial Court Department. I have a range of expertise in the field of human resources, benefits coordinator, payroll, and budgeting. Being a licensed social worker helps me understand how housing policy impacts Brookline Housing Authority (BHA) residents. My experience as a BHA resident allows me to bring the voice of the voiceless into the room, so that when decisions are made you hear the sound of residents speaking.

I more than generally support; I fully support the planning department with their plans for Harvard Street. There are many reasons why. **More Housing:** We need more housing throughout Brookline. **The Law:** We need to comply with the law because it's simply the right thing to do because it's the law. I don't believe it's fair to Brookline residents to be subjected to a potential lawsuit because we refused to comply. **BHA Residents:** If we are not in compliance with the law this will directly impact the lives of one of Brookline's most vulnerable populations—Brookline Housing Authority (BHA) residents. This is the community in Brookline who are the most underserved, which is one of the major reasons why I am running for Housing Authority Commissioner. BHA residents continue to be the most underserved and are often invisible. Making a decision that directly impacts BHA residents continues to prove how invisible they are. It is not fair to BHA residents to take this direct hit. BHA housing is already underfunded. I believe if the Brookline community truly cares about the most underserved residents, we will comply with the MBTA-CA act. If we comply, we will be doing our part to alleviate some of Brookline's and the region's housing shortage.

I am running for Housing Authority Commissioner because I want to provide representation for people who are most underserved. I want to bring my voice to the table where often, the decisions are made for the people living in the housing but who are silent because their voices are not represented at the decision-making table. I want to bring a different perspective to the Commission—that of a single working mom, living in public housing, who wants changes and deserves for those changes to happen for all residents living in BHA housing.