

Brookline Election Glossary for Families

ballot — the document on which a voter selects his or her choice of candidate(s) for elected positions and selects “yes” or “no” on ballot questions; voters may apply for absentee or Vote By Mail ballots that allow voters to vote distantly

ballot box — a sealed box, at a designated polling location, into which voters put their ballots

ballot question — a proposal brought before voters in an election, requiring a “yes” or “no” response

candidate — a person running for office in an election

constituency — a body of voters in a specified area who elect a representative to a legislative body; in Brookline, for example, a Town Meeting Member’s constituency is the people in their precinct

democracy — a representative democracy is a system of government where citizens elect those who represent them in making decisions about laws, taxes, budgets, and other issues

election — an organized opportunity for voters to make choices about the people they wish to have represent them

government — the people responsible for making and enforcing laws, collecting taxes, and providing services for the town

incumbent — a person who is currently holding an elected position

polling location — the physical place where people in a precinct vote, most often a school, library, or other public building

poll worker — a person at a polling location acting officially, in a non-partisan fashion, to assist in conducting an orderly election

precinct — the district of a town, based on street addresses, designating where residents vote for their representatives

register — to register to vote is to sign an official Massachusetts state document indicating you are a U. S. citizen and a resident of the town. People age 16 may pre-register, obtaining full voting rights at age 18.

representative — a person elected to an official position (such as Town Meeting Member, Select Board, Library Trustee, or School Committee) who acts, speaks, and votes on behalf of his, her, or their constituency

term — the period of time an elected official serves in a position, usually a year or more

Town Clerk — the public official responsible for administering elections and maintaining the town’s public records—the census, complete voting information and voter lists, proceedings of Town Meetings, vital records, licenses and permits, and more

Town Hall — the building and offices where the business and governmental functions of the town take place; the Brookline Town Hall is located at 333 Washington Street, Brookline MA 02445

Town Meeting — the meeting of 255 elected Brookline Town Meeting Members (15 from each of the town’s 17 precincts), the members of the Select Board, any state representative or state senator who resides in Brookline, the Town Clerk, and the Moderator, who gather at least twice yearly to pass the town’s budget and enact town by-laws

vote — to vote is to indicate one’s choice among candidates or proposals

voter — a person who registers as part of a community and participates in elections

“As you progress in interest from local questions to national problems and international situations each step deepens your interest and increases your knowledge. You will discover, to your astonishment, that within a few years time you will have made yourself a discriminating citizen, able to know what you have a right to expect from a candidate, at whatever level.”

Eleanor Roosevelt -- *When You Grow Up to Vote: How Our Government Works for You*, first published in 1932, reprinted in 2018 with Michelle Markel