

## Observer Corps Report Town of Plymouth Charter Commission Meeting of January 3, 2022

Present: B. Abbott, B. Keohan, F. Mand, D. Peck, W. Brewster, D. Malaguti, L. Pizer, B. Hall, S. Vecchi

1. Opening Remarks by Abbott- Review of the many remarks about Committee of Precinct Chairs made during past CC meetings, that included more responsibility and stipends for COPC members.
2. Guest Speakers – Chairs of COPC-past and present. Continued Discussion: role of COPC and possible expansion of powers.

Kathryn Holmes – present chair of COPC, spoke of her past living in VT with Town Meeting (TM) and Mayor (Bernie Sanders) forms of government, and of her support of TM here in Plymouth with its long history of this form of government, but she agrees with need to improve it. She mentioned that it is not uncommon for Town Meeting Members (TMM) to vote down warrant articles that have survived the approval process to appear on the warrant, recently such as Waterfront Promenade and Brook Rd/Bridge articles. Her suggestions for improvement of our TM form of government included

- increase SB to minimum of 9 to correspond with the increase population town wide and insure representation of all areas of Ply.
- decrease number of TMM per precinct from 9 to 7 or 5 to increase competition for seats.
- hold TM 3 times yearly and call special TM as necessary.
- perhaps Fin Com(FC) members could be chosen by precinct chairs..
- have FC review finance articles and Planning Board review planning articles.
- place all articles in one book for TMMs.
- sign 2 year only contracts with Superintendent and Town Manager.
- new positions should go through Town Meeting.

Christine Pratt spoke in support of the COPC addressing legislative oversight and reporting to TMM how monies that were approved at TM are actually being spent (or not), and having the power to ensure that Department Heads would appear at COPC meetings and share information, in the name of transparency. Also consider adopting the Dartmouth, MA Website that informs citizens of the status of Town projects/how their tax dollars are being spent.

Discussion continued about possibility of COPC acting like a Town Council, competitiveness of COPC seats, concern of COPC power versus number of citizens they represent, possible need of electing another group from TM for some responsibilities/power, role of COPC in grooming their chair, reviewing some petitioned articles for the warrant, addressing TM like State Reps do, how expanded COPC duties/responsibilities/power compare to Town Council form of government, how the numbers of legislative members are different: COPC/TMM at 135 and Council at 15-21, how increased COPC power may lead to better balance of power between legislative and executive branches, should COPC have the power to form subcommittees including other citizen membership, should COPC have a pool of money to spend on projects that come in over

budget? need to improve procurement process including a recent independent cost estimate? and COPC acting as a good committee for public to interact with.

3. Guest speaker from Sharon, MA Moderator Andy Nebenzahl, who was involved in their Charter Commission a few years ago that brought a complete change of government form to the citizens: an unusual form used by 2 towns in ME, that did not pass. However, a number of the changes promoted at that time have since been instituted in their Open Town Meeting form of government. The speaker did advise Plymouth CC not to recommend too much of a change in government to the citizens.  
Discussion included concern about the SB role, importance of it being a policy-setting Board, that the duties need to be specific in the Charter and that the SB needs to perform those duties, with consequences if not followed. Discussion also included number of TMs per year and importance of what can be done between meetings, as well as role of TMM challenging rulings of Moderator at TM.  
Speaker spoke highly of the town of Plymouth, it's geographic beauty, and the great work being done by the town, even if some citizens do not appreciate it.
4. Public Comment (see CC web site for details of Public Comments): Anatol Zuckerman stated that our form of government is a dictatorship in disguise as the SB is not accountable to the citizens who pay them, for example the firing of our recent T. Manager and the SB not responding to his report to them of his poor treatment by the Energy committee, of which he is a member. He asked the CC to recommend a form of government that is democratic. CC Chair Abbott asked him to send his recommendations in writing to CC.  
Ken Christofori – precinct 13 talked about SB not working as the population increases and how the SB is over-stepping their bounds and pressuring the CC with their/SB effort to place a Charter Question on May 22 ballot. And he stated that he is sending a letter to CC describing his government reform recommendations that include strong T Manager, Council and TM.  
He asked that CC outline the strengths and weakness of the 4 types of government as defined by MA Municipal Association.  
Peter Neville asked CC to find language that carefully defines roles and qualifications of SB, TManager, Moderator and Planning Board, and stated that he was stunned by SB hubris to fire TManager. CC Pizer stated that our Charter states clearly that SB has power to hire and fire TManager.  
Paul Cunningham precinct 8 stated that his review of the consultant searching for TManager and other Plymouth consultants reveals that they are not qualified professionals, and that CC agendas do not include other forms of government.
5. Minutes approved of Nov. 29 and Dec 13 meetings.
6. New business: Guests scheduled for next meeting are from three different Town Council municipalities.  
B. Hall commented that a Town Meeting is needed to address Zoning changes and that in Mayor- Council form of government the executive-legislative communication happens more often than now in Plymouth, which has limited dialog between the 2 branches.

Next meeting Jan. 24, 2022.

Reported by Martha Vautrain, CC Observer

(See CC web site Minutes for complete meeting details.)