

Observer Corps Report

Town of Plymouth Charter Commission

Meeting of February 7, 2022

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

Guest Mark Sylvia, Moderator Fairhaven (former Town Manager Plymouth 1998-2009 followed by a variety of state MA government positions)

Fairhaven has 459 TMM, 6 precincts, all SB members are TMM. Currently has Charter Commission.

He believes 1) Plymouth has a highly efficient, accountable, transparent government with clear structure of how TMM get their information and clear roles for precinct chairs, who provide a helpful forum for Town Manager and 2) It's government sets a Gold Standard for other MA towns.

Mr. Sylvia answered many questions from and engaged in discussion with all Commissioners present for almost an hour, at one point, when asked, agreeing to review the CC draft, as it is being prepared.

His answers included the following comments:

He never saw a time when Plymouth could not act in a thorough and timely manner, for example during the PILOT negotiations with the Nuclear Power Plant, achieving an agreement that was complimented by other communities.

Plymouth's new Charter may need to be more specific about SB role regarding their relationship with Town Manager and other appointed town personnel.

Ply. Planning Board is progressive and busy, related to many Plymouth land and development issues. Having an elected Board may allow for more transparency and for more elected officials tending to planning issues.

Expanded role for COPC could be an additional forum for discussion of issues, a good sounding board for T. Manger, and could involve taking over advising TMM about non-financial warrant articles.

There may be a need for Plymouth charter to be more specific about Citizen Petition Warrant Articles.

T. Moderator and TMM/COPC could have websites for communication with all citizens.

He stated that during his time in state government he never knew of an instance where a state official did not 'take a call from a SB member', in fact he was always impressed with how equally state officials took calls regardless of form of government.

Guest Bernie Lynch Community Paradigm Associates (former T. Manager Chelmsford 20 yrs. and Lowell Mayor 8 yrs.)

He sees Council Mayor and Council Manager forms of government working together better to make things happen, compared to Manager SB where sometimes there is tension that isn't good for the town.

During discussion a point was made by B. Abbott that if there is tension between a Council and T. Manager there is no recourse since there is no Town Meeting.

Discussion proceeded, w/o resolution, 1. about the need for separate legislative and executive branches of government vs other forms where the duties and responsibilities are blurred, and 2. about whether a smaller number of elected officials in council form would more easily allow conservation land to be taken out of article 97 protection, than under TMM form.

Mr. Lynch, who was hired to conduct the search for Plymouth's new Town Manager, thinks that now is a very tough time to be hiring a Town Manager related to decreased number of applicants. Plymouth is additionally impacted being a very large geographic town, and unfortunately now it has an unfavorable 'political' situation between SB and former T. Manager, plus currently has unknowns related to on-going CC work.

He thinks the optimal Council size is 9 – 13 with a mix of at-large and precinct members, and TMeeting size is 100 – 170 TMM.

Public Comment:

Mr. Al Di Nardo agreed with suggestions to have Fin Com only advise about financial articles.

Mr. Zuckerman reviewed his civic contributions in Plymouth and made some Charter recommendations, which will be available on the CC web site.

New business:

Calendar of meetings until mid-September is available on web site, as is D. Peck's historical list of number of Town Meetings as well as two different proposals for council form of government for Plymouth.

Respectfully submitted,

Martha Vautrain