

## **Observer Corps Report Town of Plymouth Charter Commission Meeting of September 30, 2021**

Attendees: William Abbott, David Peck, Wrestling Brewster, Betsy Hall, David Malaguti, Larry Pizer, William Keohane, Scott Vecchi.

All the Charter Commissioners are reviewing the Charters of other towns in the Commonwealth. The reports are posted as they are completed and can be viewed on the Charter Commission's website at: <https://www.plymouth-ma.gov/charter-commission/pages/charters-reviewed>. The Observer Corps will attempt to summarize the reports in some table or chart when they are all submitted.

Betsy Hall gave her report on the towns of Dartmouth, Winchester and Fall River. See website above.

David Malaguti chose to report on Chelsea, Weymouth, and Framingham. His report has not yet been posted, but highlights are:

- Framingham: has a very strong mayor and City Councilor. The mayor can hold up to three 4-year terms.
- Weymouth has a strong mayor model and a council. The mayor serves a 4-year term; the councilors serve a two year term and are salaried. The council determines the mayor's salary and also elects the town auditor, the town clerk, and the clerk of the council. Appointments by the mayor can be overridden by a two-thirds vote of the town council.
- Chelsea, with a population of 40,000 and an annual budget of \$305 million, has an 11-person city council. Three are elected at-large and the remaining eight are elected, one from each of the City's eight districts. The council appoints the city manager who has the administrative powers. Councilors are elected for 2-year terms and meet every other month except during July and August. Mr. Malaguti noted that, unlike Framingham and Weymouth, there was little mention of ethics in the Charter.

Larry Pizer gave a very brief report on Natick, so please look on the website for fuller details once the report is posted.

Bill Abbott reported on Billerica and Shrewsbury. His report on Billerica has been posted but the one on Shrewsbury has not. Highlights are:

- Shrewsbury, with a population of 36,000, has no town charter but, instead, is governed by two special acts from the state legislature and 83 pages of by-laws. There are 240 town meeting members, a board of selectmen and a town manager. The finance committee, unlike Plymouth, just deals with articles that involve finances. Redistricting rules are spelled out. Police and fire personnel must either live in the town or within 15 miles of its borders.

Bill Keohane reported on Falmouth - not yet posted, but highlights are:

- Falmouth has about half the population of Plymouth. There are a “couple hundred” town meeting members. The Select Board must meet with the planning board several times a year, and they both together come up with a strategic plan every five years. The 15-member finance committee is elected by town meeting members. A strong town manager handles day-to-day operations and much of the hiring and firing. The town clerk and town moderator are elected as are members of the housing authority. Open appointed positions receive plenty of public notice in an effort to attract highly qualified candidates.

Scott Vecchi reported on Franklin, Newburyport and Braintree. His report has not been posted, but highlights are:

- Franklin, with a population of 30,000 and a budget of \$138 million, is governed by a nine-member town council and a town administrator. These entities must meet at least once a month.
- Newburyport is a city with a population of 18,000 and a budget of \$85 million. It is governed by a mayor and city council. Town elections are in November in off-years for national elections. A CPA conducts an outside audit.
- Braintree, with a population of 37,000 and a budget of \$146 million, is governed by a town council and a mayor. The council reviews all major appointments. Braintree also operates its own utility (power) company.

Many residents spoke during the public comments section:

**Steve Bolliton** – Mr. Bolliton stated that he wanted a bigger change and a charter that would best be able to achieve the goals of the town. Businesses want decisions within a reasonable time; residents want to know expenses in detail. He suggested that the town get a vote on the form of government it wants (but mayoral should not be one of the options). After strong pushback from Chairman Abbott, Mr. Brewster said that Mr. Bolliton’s comments should be taken under advisement. Mr. Peck also voiced a preference for choice, and Mr. Vecchi observed that issues make voters turn out.

**Gail Butler**, member of Advisory and Finance Committee, also wants choice and pushed back on comments made by some of the commissioners.

**Gene Winer** felt that town meeting should meet more than two times a year. He also asked commissioners to look into what happened when towns moved away from the town meeting format.

**Al DiNardo** has lived in Plymouth for a year and was a 30-year town meeting member in Saugus before moving here. He felt town meeting should meet until its business is concluded. A vote to reconsider an article should, in his view, take place within 30 minutes after an article is first decided. He agreed that town meetings are cumbersome but are that way on purpose given their considerable power.

**Bill Delafield**, Town Meeting Member from Precinct 12, cautioned on putting too much power in the hands of too few people. He is against giving the voters a choice of government form because they won't know all the background and input.

**Ed Russell**, Town Meeting Member from Precinct 12, was also against what he termed "multiple choice." Since any new Charter would need greater than 50% of the population to approve it, three choices would seem doomed to failure.

**Kevin Lynch** once again repeated his call for the commissioners to make progress reports as the process goes on.

**Betty Cavacco** once again stated she wants choices.