

Observer Corps Report
Town of Plymouth Charter Commission
Meeting of June 27, 2022 (Hybrid – In-Person and Via Zoom)

Commissioners in Attendance: Peck, Brewster, Hall, Malaguti, Abbott, Keohan, Vecchi.
On Zoom: Pizer
From the Collins Center: Michael Ward, Elizabeth “Libby” Corbo

The Select Board:

Mr. Abbott announced that tonight’s meeting would concentrate on Chapter Three of the Charter - The Executive Branch: The Select Board, the Town Manager and Planning Board. With regard to the Select Board (SB), he asked “how many and how elected?” Mr. Malaguti feels strongly that SB members need to represent the whole town and is unaware of any Massachusetts town that has district SB members. He also thinks the number of members should be limited to five. Ms. Hall indicated a preference for seven members and some form of district representation. On the other hand, Mr. Pizer believes that district representation could result in a lower voter count; he wants all SB members to be at large. A vote on these two issues will be taken at the next meeting.

Currently, the SB is the licensing authority for the town. The Commission is looking to remove that responsibility from the SB, and set up a separate Licensing Board, but perhaps giving the SB appellate review powers. Also, the Commission will be looking into who would handle disciplinary action if there is some violation of a license.

Planning Board:

The Commission wants to strengthen requirements for the Master Plan to be utilized in planning and review. Mr. Peck questioned whether planning and development should be in the same department since he felt these two functions could be in conflict, but Ms. Hall stated that the job of the Planning Board is to oversee the Master Plan so planning and development needs to be one group. Mr. Keohan also likes planning and development together. He proposed an additional group, a Preservation Committee, and does not believe it will increase staffing. Mr. Ward, from the Collins Center, suggested that a study of a separate preservation committee could be a transition provision, as could a separate facilities department. In fact, Mr. Ward said, all planning could be in a completely separate section.

Legal Counsel:

Ms. Hall inquired about an in-house town counsel, and how the office could be available for those who need it. She further proposed a report from Town Counsel in the town’s Annual Report. (League member Ginny Davis added in the Zoom chat that Saugus has an in-house counsel,)

Public Comment:

Tom Pinto: Mr. Pinto said he had strong feelings that town employees should be allowed to participate in town government and did not want any provision that town employees could not serve as Town Meeting Members (TMMs).

Brian Baragwanath: Mr. Baragwanath, representing the Plymouth firefighter’s union also said that he felt like a right is being taken away from town employees.

Dale Webber: Mr. Webber is a TMM and Chair of Precinct 3. He sees the issue with town employees serving as TMMs is a conflict of interest; however, he contends that TMMs who are also town employees are very involved and interested people. A conflict of interest statute is already written into state law, and that should suffice.

Joe Hutchinson: Mr. Hutchinson suggested that the Master Plan needs to be written into the SB's job description so that they can be held accountable. He also said that he would like to see some language around the role of the Committee of Precinct Chairs in town meetings.

Ken Cristofori: Mr. Cristofori stated that he favored seven SB members and regional representation. He also thought that there should be term limits for SB members – two consecutive three-year terms. SB members could run again after sitting out for at least a year.

Conflict of Interest (COI):

Mr. Abbott stated that the Town of Plymouth's COI provisions apply independently of the state's COI law, go back at least twenty years and are a higher standard. However, he noted that there has been no enforcement of COI in Plymouth. Ms. Hall remarked that everyone, other than TMMs, is supposed to complete a COI statement. Those statements need to be checked and enforced. She also pointed out that training is available for all.

Respectfully submitted,
Lyle Lawrence