

Observer Corps Report  
Town of Plymouth Charter Commission  
Meeting of July 18, 2022 (Hybrid – In-Person and Via Zoom)

Commissioners in Attendance: Peck, Brewster, Hall, Malaguti, Pizer, Abbott, Keohan, Mand, Vecchi.

From the Collins Center: Elizabeth “Libby” Corbo, Patricia Lloyd

**BIG NEWS:** A draft of the proposed Charter is now available on the website at:

[https://www.plymouth-ma.gov/sites/g/files/vyhlf3691/f/pages/07\\_11\\_22\\_master\\_working\\_charter\\_plymouth.pdf](https://www.plymouth-ma.gov/sites/g/files/vyhlf3691/f/pages/07_11_22_master_working_charter_plymouth.pdf).

If you are unfamiliar with reading “red-lined” documents, know that the red lines denote changes. There is a lot of red in the beginning because sections were renumbered due to the addition of new sections. Changes are shown from the existing charter, and the draft will be updated as decisions are made. Commissioners have often revisited previous decisions so no draft provisions are final. The initial draft is due on September 15<sup>th</sup>. A public comment period will follow, and the final draft is due November 15<sup>th</sup>. After then, it will go to the Attorney General’s office to be sure that it is in compliance with state statutes.

**The Select Board:**

The commissioners had a lengthy discussion as to how many Select Board (SB) members Plymouth should have and whether they should be elected at-large or by geographic area. Mr. Pizer thought the existing situation – five SB members elected at-large – did not need to be changed. Mr. Keohan stated his preference for seven members; five at-large, one from the north section of Plymouth and one from the south. The eighteen precincts could be divided into nine north and nine south. Ms. Hall said that she leaned toward seven members elected at large stating that geographic representation looked like a step in the direction of a Town Council form of government which she opposes strongly. Mr. Malaguti wanted five members. Mr. Mand felt that more SB members with some geographic representation taken into account might help address citizens feeling disconnected from their government and not turning out for elections. Mr. Brewster indicated that he favored a larger number of SB members but wasn’t decided on whether they should all be at-large or have some geographic representation. Mr. Peck felt that citizens expected more change when they elected the commission and not just “nibbling at the edges.” He likes some regionality and a larger SB (seven) as a step to the Town Council form in the future, but Mr. Abbott pushed back on that saying he does not consider this Charter “transitional.” Ms. Hall suggested seven at-large with a move to regional representation. Mr. Mand applauded the differences because it shows the Commission is not just status-quo as some have charged. *The vote to have seven SB members passed five to four.*

Following that vote Mr. Mand suggested that four members be at-large and three regional. Mr. Pizer reminded fellow commissioners that they had to be careful tying regions to specific precincts because precincts may change in number and area and the Charter should live longer than the 2030 census. Mr. Vecchi thought that North South is the historic division with the Pine Hills (not Pinehills) in the middle as the dividing line. Mr. Mand observed that the Reprecincting Committee could address how reprecincting would affect any regional aspect of the SB election. Mr. Peck made a motion to have 5 SB members at-large and two regional. The commissioners voted five to four to affirm Mr. Peck’s motion. After further discussion of the mechanics, Mr. Abbott asked the Collins Center folks to look

into how a Transition Committee for the new Charter might handle the divisions for regional SB members.

The next topic addressed vacancies in the SB addressed in Section 3-1-2. When Ms. Joyce resigned in May 2021, a number of citizens asked why the expense of a special election; why not just choose the next highest vote-getter from the previous election. Mr. Pizer said the special election cost around \$40,000, but it's what you do in a democracy. Commissioners agreed that a SB vacancy will require a special election.

**Town Counsel:**

Section 3-17-1 addresses Town Counsel and now reads "Not less than every three years, the Select Board shall review the appointment of outside independent legal counsel and/or the employment of one or more attorneys as employee(s) of the town." The review process shall include at a minimum an opportunity for public comment. Ms. Lloyd suggested that the Charter should clarify that Town Counsel is chosen by the Town Manager (TM), and the ultimate decision rests with the TM.

**Conservation Commission:**

Ms. Hall raised the issue as to whether the Conservation Commission should be elected or appointed. Mr. Pizer noted that state law says that in towns with TMs, the TM makes the appointment. Currently the SB appoints the Conservation Commission. The Observer Corp will clarify what decision is made.

**Planning Board:**

Mr. Peck suggested that the Planning Board have one alternate with full voting power. There were a few differences of opinion, and a reconsideration of a previous motion that mentioned two alternatives. This topic will be addressed in a subsequent meeting along with clarification of Zoning Board of Appeals alternate(s) voting powers.

**Public Comment:**

**Kevin Lynch** gave his compliments to the Charter Commission stating that he is hearing good comments about their work in the community. He asked further questions regarding the process including opportunities to make changes. Mr. Abbott responded that the public comment period (see Big News above) was when citizens could suggest changes, but that it would be hard to make any changes after November 15<sup>th</sup>.

Respectfully submitted,  
Lyle Lawrence