

# Overview of Town Charter Changes

February 14, 2023



*How we got here ...*

## An Ongoing Theme in Plymouth Politics

• 1999 ... 2002 ... 2005 ... 2018

• 2023!

*Form of  
Government?*

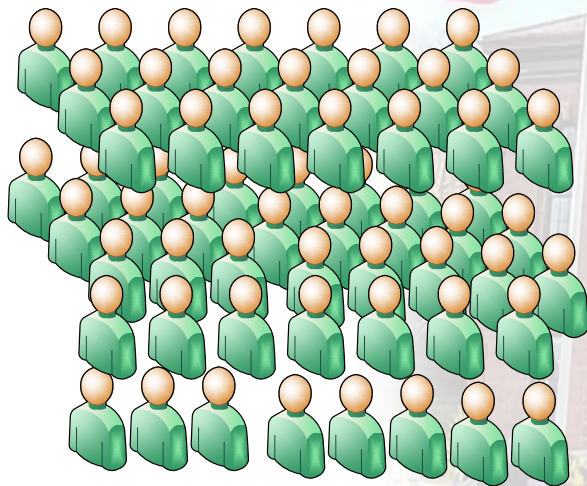
*Town or City?*



# How We got Here...

## The May 2021 Election Ballot

PLYMOUTH VOTERS



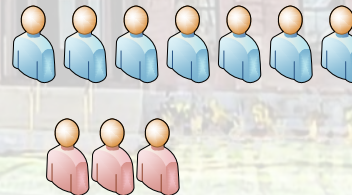
Ballot  
Questions



Charter



Nine  
Commissioners

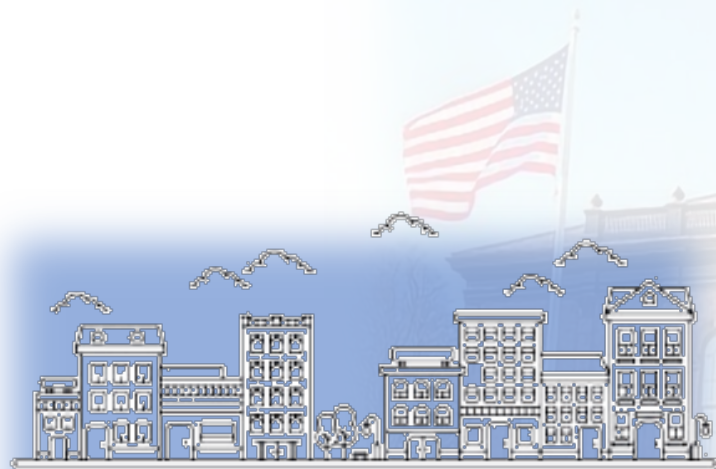


*Examine the Form  
of Government  
And Propose  
Improvements*



## *The Choice:*

# Current Charter or Proposed Charter?



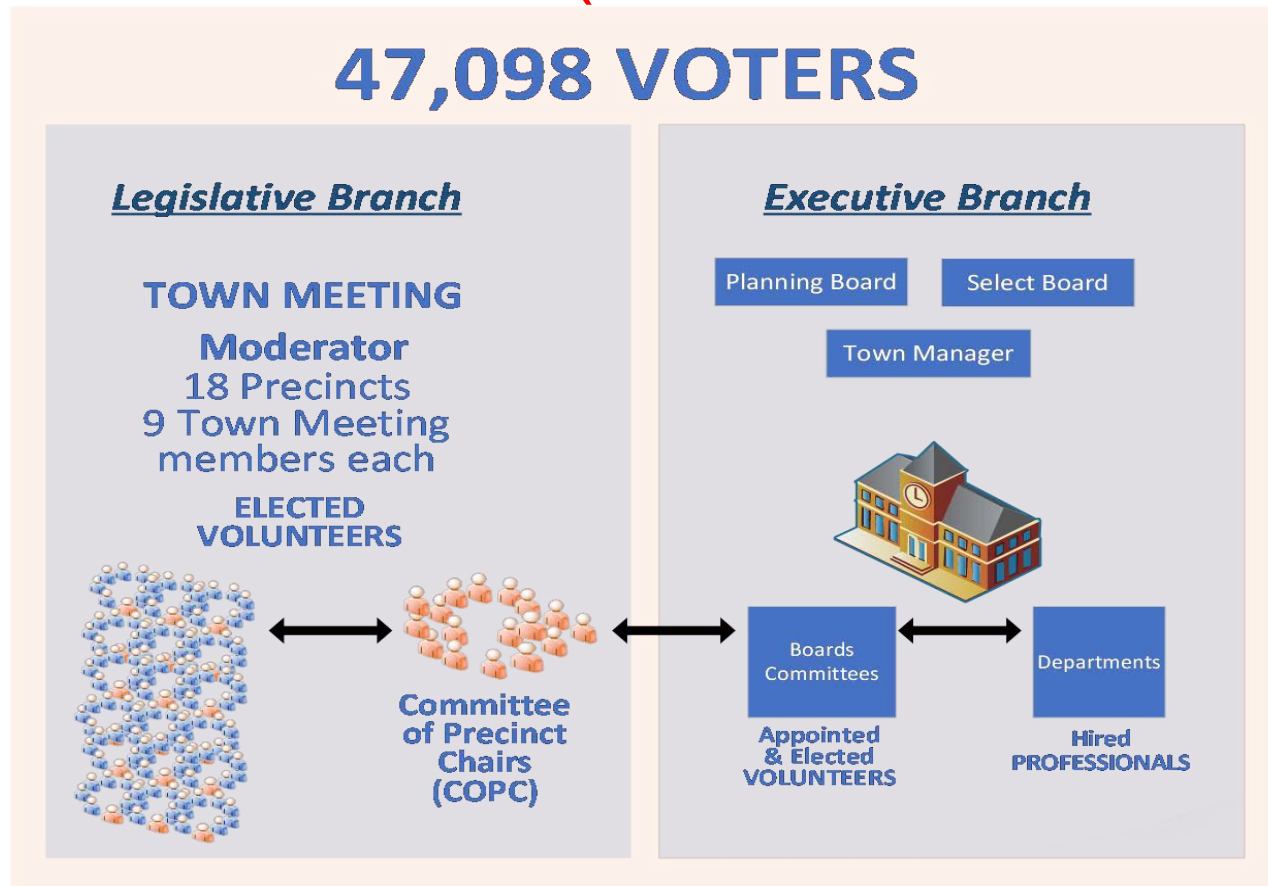
The choice for voters in the upcoming May election is between:

- ☐ **The proposed Charter**
- or
- ☐ **The current Charter**

**THE LWV OF THE PLYMOUTH AREA HAS NOT TAKEN A POSITION ON THE PROPOSED CHARTER – WE ARE NEUTRAL**

# Context:

## Current Structure (Form of Government)

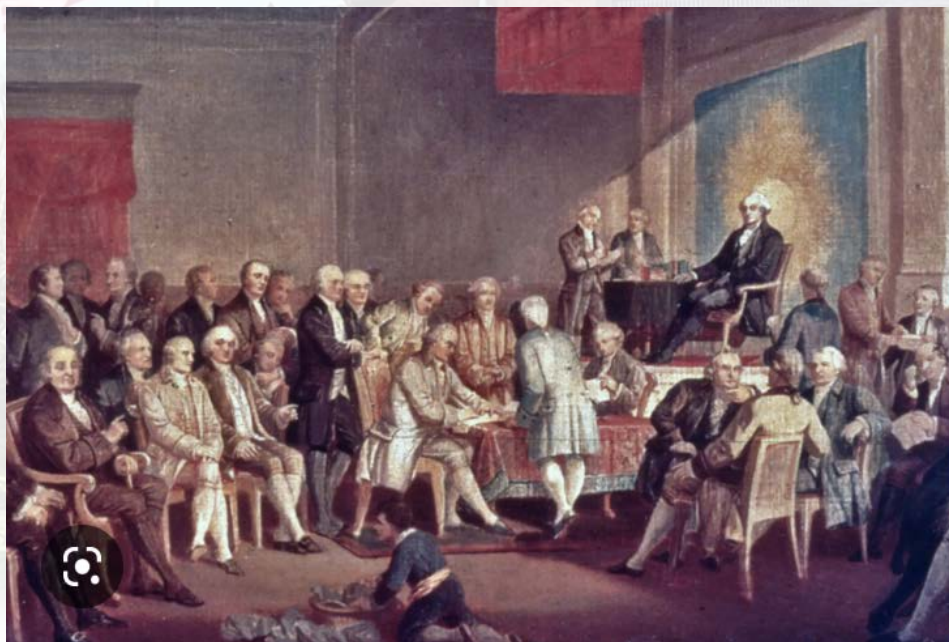


**The Form of Government Remains the Same:  
The Town Meeting Form of Government**

# Why Does it Matter ?:

## *Charters Distribute Power and Checks on Those Powers*

- Taxation
- Pulpit
- Agenda (goal setting)
- Budget
- Hiring/Firing
- Appointment
- Structure
- Process
- Policy



- Oversight
- Accountability
- Compliance
- Enforcement
- Veto

## Powers

# Major Changes Proposed: Preamble

|          | Preamble   |
|----------|--|
| Preamble | This is an expanded preamble that states the mission of the Town of Plymouth                 |
|          | 1. Promote direct and inclusive democracy  |
|          | 2. Recognize our natural environment   |
|          | 3. Look to create infrastructure to support quality of life                                  |
|          | 4. Speak to the importance of long-range planning to accomplish the three goals stated above |
|          |  |

# Major Changes Proposed: Chapter 2 – The Legislative Branch

|       | Chapter 2 – The Legislative Branch  |
|-------|---|
| 2-1-1 | Precinct Advisory Committee (A New Committee)   |
|       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Builds on the 2020 process</li> </ul>  |
| 2-2-8 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Town Meeting attendance and voting records to be published on the town website</li> </ul>  |
| 2-4-1 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>There is now a scheduled third Town Meeting in January</li> <li>It can be waived by joint majority vote of the Select Board and the Committee of Precinct Chairs (COPC)</li> </ul> |
| 2-7-1 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The legislative branch now is recognized as a co-equal branch of government</li> </ul>   |
| 2-7-3 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>COPC has a <b>new power</b>, formerly belonging to the Advisory and Finance Committee, to make recommendation to Town Meeting on <b>non-financial</b> Articles</li> </ul>          |



# Major Changes Proposed: Chapter 2 – The Legislative Branch

|        | Chapter 2 – The Legislative Branch (cont.)   |
|--------|--|
| 2-8-1  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Town Moderator is now elected by Town Meeting members rather than by the voters</li> </ul>  |
| 2-12-1 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ten members of the Finance Committee are now appointed by the COPC and five are appointed by the Town Moderator</li> </ul>              |
| 2-13-1 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A new committee, the Legislative Oversight Committee, is charged with tracking the status of Articles passed by Town Meeting</li> </ul> |
|        |  |
|        |  |
|        |  |



# Major Changes Proposed: Chapter 3 – The Executive Branch

|       | Chapter 3- The Executive Branch  |
|-------|--|
| 3-1-1 | Select Board changes in number and composition   |
|       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Number of Select Board members changed from five to seven</li> <li>Four Select Board members to be elected at-large and three to be elected from districts</li> </ul> |
| 9-6-1 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Note: Districts will be determined by a District Implementation Committee (Initially, the 18 precincts will be divided into 3 districts of 6 precincts)</li> </ul>    |
| 3-2-1 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Select Board powers more specifically defined and explicitly exclude those powers granted to the Town Manager under the Proposed Charter</li> </ul>                   |
|       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Emphasis on Select Board's role as chief goal setting, policy-making, and long-range planning agency of the Town</li> </ul>   |
|       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Town Manager responsible for the implementation of Select Board policy directives and guidelines</li> </ul>   |

# Major Changes Proposed: Chapter 3 – The Executive Branch

|        | Chapter 3- The Executive Branch (cont.)  |
|--------|--|
| 3-12-4 | Elevation of the importance of the Master Plan   |
|        | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Director of Planning responsible for compliance with Master Plan</li> </ul>   |
|        | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Town Meeting Articles reviewed before Town Meeting by the Director of Planning for compliance with the Master Plan</li> </ul>   |
|        | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Director of Planning (or designee) must comment on all projects under Department of Planning and Development's purview regarding project's alignment with the Master Plan.</li> </ul>   |
| 3-17-1 | New Appointments Advisory Committee  |
|        | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Appointed by Town Manager</li> <li>▪ Seeks out and recruits individuals to fill multi-member bodies</li> <li>▪ Requires Committee to appoint qualified individuals</li> <li>▪ Does not apply to Legislative branch</li> </ul> |

## *Voting on Change*

The Vote on the Proposed Charter is  
**YES or NO**

- But each element in each Article is a variable, many representing significant change!
- So how do you decide?



## Voting on Change

# Think about Categories of Impact

- **Priorities**

Revenue sources, water capacity, housing costs, and many more!  
Choose your own most important issue.

- **Political Power**

The ability to make decisions on the disposition of resources, rights, or policies.

- **Capacity**

The ability to successfully apply assets, talent, and resources to accomplish stated goals and satisfy voter expectations...it's the ability to perform.

- **Cost/Benefit**

Will a given article cost the town; does the benefit reciprocate the cost?

# *Voting on Change*

## **Vote your values**

**How does the Proposed Charter measure up on the following values or other values important to you?**

**Democracy:**

**Many vs fewer voices**

**Quality of Leadership**

**Transparency/Openness**

**Broad Communications**

**Responsiveness**

**Simplicity vs Complexity**

**Flexibility/Adaptiveness**

**Expertise/Best decision-making practices**

**Oversight**

**Enforcement**

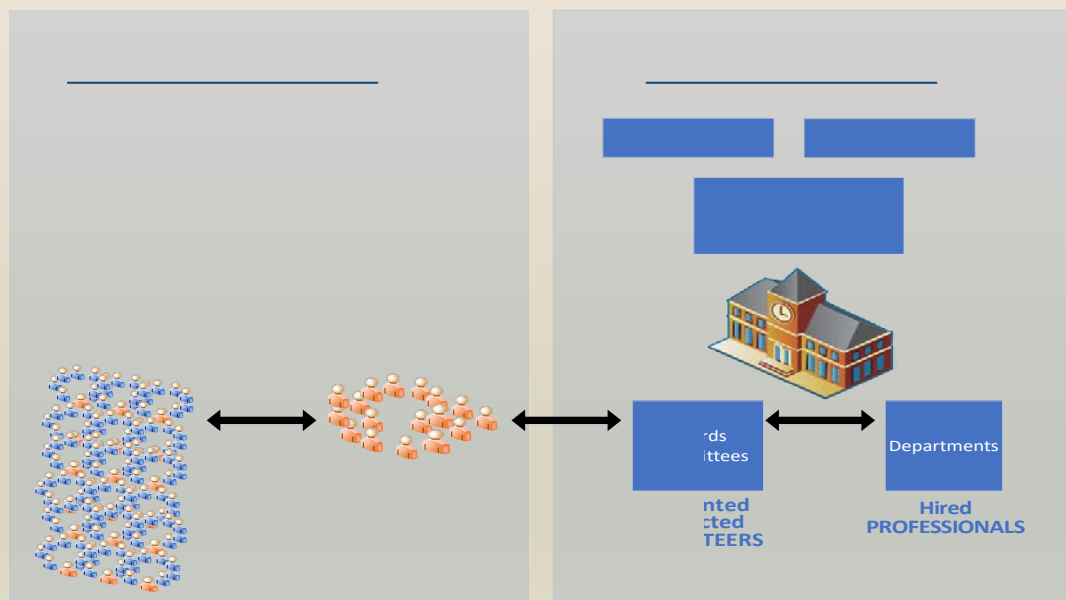
**Compliance**

**Accountability**

# Form of Government

*Context:*

## Current Structure (Form of Government)



Joe Hutchinson | Overview of Charter Changes

5

## Post Election Scenarios...

### ■ If Charter Question Succeeds

- Transition to new form of government via Chapter 9 of Proposal

### ■ If Charter Question Fails // Scenario A

- Massachusetts General Laws Part I Title VII Chapter 43B  
Section 12A: Resubmission of charter which failed of approval  
// edited for clarity //

- A charter which has failed of approval at a city or town election,
- but which has received the **affirmative votes of at least 35%** of those voting on the question,
- shall be considered an **optional charter** for such city or town.
- Upon the petition of **10% of the registered voters**,
- said optional charter shall be once resubmitted to the voters
- no later than the second year following the original submission of such charter to the voters.



# Post Election Scenarios...

## ■ Charter Question Fails // Scenario B

- **At least once every 5 years**, a Charter Review Committee shall review this Charter and make a report, with recommendations, to the Town Meeting concerning any proposed amendments which the Committee may determine to be necessary or desirable. The members of the Charter Review Committee shall be appointed by a special committee consisting of the Moderator, who will serve as Chairman, one member of the Select Board and one (1) member of the Committee of Precinct Chairs.

*// Current Charter **7-6-1** //*

- **However**, the Charter Review Committee does not have the power to propose any change “relating in any way to the composition, mode of election or appointment, or terms of office of the legislative body...or the board of selectmen or town manager.” (MGL, 43B, Section 10)
- **Current COPC Powers,**

# Scenarios Outline

- Massachusetts General Laws Part I Title VII Chapter 43B  
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Vote on  
Proposed  
Charter

**YES**

Transition to new form of government via Chapter 9 of Proposal

**NO**

**BUT...**

• // Current Charter **7-6-1** //

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