

Plymouth First is new activist group

By Emily Clark

eclark@wickedlocal.com

[@emilyOCM](https://twitter.com/emilyOCM)

Posted Feb 21, 2018 at 10:00 AM

A new activist organization has formed to address what it says are glaring problems with Plymouth, from tax increases and education to the government structure itself.

PLYMOUTH – A new activist organization has formed to address what it says are glaring problems with Plymouth, from tax increases and education to the government structure itself. Plymouth First members say it's time Plymouth controlled spending, attracted more positive economic growth and switched to a full-time government in the form of a mayor or town council.

“We don't think enough information is getting out to the people,” Plymouth First Vice President Belinda Brewster, a former selectman, said. “We want to be an informational and advocacy group willing to take on and tackle some of the issues, do the research and present the information. Our goal is that by educating and having a resource to go to that people will get more engaged in town government.”

Plymouth First members also include the organization's President and Precinct 15 Rep. Rick Caproni, Secretary Paul Cunningham, Precinct 10 Rep. Alan Costello, David Ahearn, Precinct 15 Rep. Michael Hanlon, Gene Weiner and Precinct 15 Rep. Peter Svahn. Plymouth First is encouraging membership from across the town's 15 precincts, Brewster said.

“Governments have taken on lives of their own across America,” Caproni said. “The people who work for and govern are not accountable to anyone except to each other. We have to take back our government from these professional politicians.”

Brewster, who is a Precinct 5 Town Meeting member, noted that the 135-member Town Meeting is the legislative branch of the largest town in Massachusetts, with 103 square miles and approximately 60,000 citizens, but meets only twice a year. Meanwhile, she noted that only about 12 percent of the electorate tends to vote in town elections. The town needs a full-time government with a mayor or a town council to make government more efficient and more accountable, Caproni and Brewster said.

The town's budget has increased by \$50 million in the past five years, Brewster added, and she hears from more and more seniors who say they can no longer afford to live in town.

Cutting the budget and preparing the way for economic development is crucial to offset this trend, she added. Brewster said she urged the town to set aside \$100,000 annually to resolve title issues on portions of the thousand-acre property in South Plymouth, but that request was ignored. Told it would take \$1 million and 10 years to complete this task, she noted that Plymouth would have nearly cleared all the titles by now if this plan had been implemented.

Brewster referenced tax title problems with the hundreds of tiny camp sites on the thousand-acre land that have effectively locked it out of development. Brewster noted that, of the town's total tax pool, 80 percent is residential property taxes, with only 20 percent businesses. That needs to change.

Plymouth First also takes issue with the town's poor rating from Great!Schools, a nonprofit organization that looks at test scores, academic progress and college readiness. In a Plymouth First report, the organization noted that Great!Schools rates Plymouth South High School's performance as average and Plymouth North High School's performance as below average. Plymouth First noted that both scores are lower than most high schools in the state and below almost all of the neighboring schools' ratings. The organization also notes that, according to Schooldigger, the Plymouth high schools rank in the 54th and 40th percentile.

"And we have a 9:1 student/teacher ratio, possibly one of the lowest in the state," Caproni said.

"We have a brand new school and no improvement outcomes for students," Brewster added.

This information isn't readily available, Caproni and Brewster said, and it needs to be disseminated so citizens can make informed decisions when they vote.

The bottom line is Plymouth citizens need to get informed and get out and vote, Caproni and Brewster said.

"We're non-partisan, and one of the things that unites us all is our love of Plymouth," Brewster said. "We just don't believe Plymouth is run in the most effective and efficient way possible."

Plymouth First's website features five reports the organization urges readers to review, including data on Pilgrim Nuclear Power Station's pending decommissioning, education and economic development.

"We want to present the full story, not dribs and drabs," Brewster said. "We want to blow the lid off a lack of transparency."

"Our success will be measured by 50 percent of the electorate turning out to vote in a local election," Caproni said.

Plymouth First is looking for more members and is hoping residents will visit plymouthfirst.org to learn more and get up to speed on the issues that impact taxpayers.