
A Report on Town Meeting of August, 10, 11, 13 & 18, 2020 deferred from the original APRIL SPRING ANNUAL TOWN MEETING

This meeting was held virtually through ZOOM & PACTV.

During the five changed dates for town meeting, the Covid-19 pandemic was in full swing, the state retrenching and usual support payments by the state were unavailable and the town was working on a budget prepared for a celebratory 2020 year.

During the preliminary meetings and caucuses, there was a focus by many on finding things to cut after the select board was so unsuccessful in doing so. During two painful select board meetings of 4.5 hours each, selectwoman Joyce had volunteered to go thru the 3page list at that time \$9 million of capital requests. The board cut very little, if memory serves me right about \$300,000. This was after the town manager and Fin & Advisory group had reduced the original \$47 MILLION to the \$ 9,052 million figure.

Select board member Flaherty had forced a vote at one of the earlier board meetings to only consider those items that are on a 3,5-,10- or 20-year replacement plan for the capital outlay committee to consider. This differs substantially from the “visit to Santa Claus” approach previously used, where every dept sent a representative with their wish list and the committee had to whittle those down by posting sticky notes on a blackboard.

There were two sections of town meeting the “Special Town Meeting” consisted of some 20 voting articles, which some were divided into “consent articles” voted together as mostly non- controversial, majority vote items, The main Article 1 employee compensation, of town employees consisted of 2% raises with many retroactive to 2017 after the police unions went to arbitration [JLMC board] totaled some \$ 3.8 Million.

There were no close votes on all 5 retroactive pay raises with vote totals of 93 yes to between 28 and 31 no’s with exemptions [conflict of interest laws] only 1-5 on these articles.

The TMMS voted 120-2-with 3 abstentions for a management asbestos plan for all buildings [\$80,000] but defeated a motion for a new communication tower [\$500,000] at exit 5, with many unanswered questions.

The TMMS voted no on the Brook Rd bridge construction but gave approval for \$500,000 for schematic design of renovating station 1,2,4,and 5. With a 99-23 vote .They also approved \$3 million to have ready funds, when the above report on each station is provided. The big article was to provide \$30 MILLION to provide a new station 1 on a site at exit 5, that the town had three times put up for sale with no interest from any buyers. The motion to amend to prevent borrowing this sum outside the towns budget restrictions was defeated, but the original motion with interest totaling additional millions of borrowed money was soundly defeated after many TMMS weighed in pro and con.

Four articles sponsored by the Community Preservation Fund [a 1.5% tax on each of your tax bills] were then included in a “consent agenda “and voted as a package and approved. These funds do not effect your new tax bill.

Other miscellaneous items were ‘consented together” such as revoking unused funds from previous town meetings and authorization of public ways.

[THIS CONCLUDED THE SPECIAL TOWN MEETING]

Building a Brighter Future - TOGETHER!



THE SPRING ANNUAL TOWN MEETING

The annual town meeting “consented together” 6 articles of mainly housekeeping articles including the selectmen’s and moderator’s salaries.

There was also Article 7A the General Fund Operating Budget of \$234 Million dollars that was contested on many fronts after the Advisory and Finance committee had pared down most budgets {but in many members thinking not nearly enough} facing the situation with declining town revenues and unknown reimbursements from the state.

Article 7A, the general fund totaling \$234,110,205 was broken down into seven categories and voted individually with few cuts, after the Finance and Advisory committee made reductions from \$86,000 to \$ 1.2M in certain budget categories reducing the amount to be raised to \$230, 479,848.

Articles 7B were authorized with no changes for the six enterprise funds that raise their own funds mostly by collection such as the water, sewer, cable tv, airport and solid waste funds. These votes totaled \$20,781,000

Article 9A the capital Outlay request consisted of 57 requests totaling approximately \$9 million dollars. The town had 9 requests under their repair program, the school building program had 12 requests from \$45 thousand to Three hundred thousand which all passed. The school capital projects totaled \$1,435,954 the town vehicle and equipment program had 11 requests from \$47 000 for a harbor master truck to a \$239,000 bucket truck for the parks group all soundly approved with testimony from dept representatives that every vehicle is needed every day.

The Fire Dept had 3 requests from updating their radio system for \$90,000 to all new firefighting suits for \$155,000 because after 10 years it is recommended that equipment be changed out, but all at once for 51 sets? They also purchased 9 full sets of forest fire protective suits to get ready for the next forest fire, the last one was in 1957. It was mentioned to the assembly, that the fire department had also purchased \$38,000 of bullet proof vests by transferring funds from the payroll account after the chief saw people in LA shooting at the firemen, certainly nothing like that happened in Plymouth in 400 years. They also raided the towns emergency fund of \$150,000 under the A&F Committee for \$66,000 to replace garage doors at station 2 and \$37,000 for a temporary rental communication tower because the fire chief was nervous we would have a hurricane and the 40 year old tower would come down. All these acquisitions were out of the TMM hands and never voted on by town meeting members.

The Police dept replaced all the existing shotguns for \$35,000 and a motion to wait until TMMs know more about the states help this year was soundly defeated.

The DPW admin and Cemetery division had 7 requests from \$20,000 to \$75,000 mostly for cemetery work and crematory repairs.

The other requests were mostly satisfied by various enterprise funds.

The attempt to request motions reducing any of these items were answered by having various town officials testify how every truck is needed every day or they need repairs so often. One motion to cut was accepted to buy 1 special zero turn mower instead of 3 and reducing the cost from \$43,000 to \$15,000.

Article 12 through 14 were consent agendas to accept as public ways various roads and transferring of funds out of the town promotional fund to other uses.

Article 16 A -F were majority votes were votes to shift funds from present and future community preservation funds to pay down debt on the 1820mcourt house, National Memorial Meeting House, reducing debt on renovation of Stevens Field and to pay for improvements to comply with ADA requirements to a number of playgrounds, and add pickleball courts for \$170,000 at Stephens field.

Article 20 establishment of new bylaws for demolition and movement of large-scale industrial projects [i.e., nuclear power plant] and establishment of a review committee for noise, danger etc. Passed easily.



Article 21 amended the general by-laws with a new section called the “Stretch Energy Code” to regulate the design and building of new construction under the latest for effective energy use. This qualifies the town for substantial grants joining most other surrounding towns and easily passed on a majority vote.

IN SUMMARY, this town meeting like no other, showed why all towns over 30,000 population [with 1 exception] no longer operate under the representative town government form.

It took 5 changes to have a town meeting date while some of the nearest comparable towns like Weymouth, Braintree and Framingham, when covid-19 became evident they had a meeting between Mayor and the council and issued a statement of where all the cuts would take place and when any layoffs would start. This was done in early April while Plymouth flailed away at deciding how to have a meeting.

The moderator was very proud and excited because the attendance which he announced as 130 members were there for most sessions. The actual voting numbers as written down by this author never exceeded 116 in most cases.

To add to this equation, there are 25 TMMS who are current employees of the town or retired, receiving income from the town, voting or where you might see as some abstaining. This conflict of interest law is not enforced in Plymouth and the moderator would discuss it no further when pointed out by present TMMS.

It should also be noted that some others have reviewed the names and addresses of the 135 town meeting members and there are at least another 30 members that are related to current employees or elected officials.

The main achievement of this meeting was that the NO VOTES reached into the 30's on a few occasions, the exception was the new fire station and the siting of the communication tower, which had more negative votes.

The actual count as scribbled down by the author, there were some 20 people that notified the moderator that their vote was incorrectly posted or not recorded, and these people were mostly never heard from again. There were up to 35-40 who articulated for or against an article, but there are some 50 members, a solid block that never say anything but vote mostly YES.

This form of democracy does not work on this size government as shown on the state website of the various forms of government. It is based on a part-time select board, 28 elected officials [outside the 135 TMMS] and 380 non-paying appointments. This form of government is clung to by those loving the chance to participate, but not yet feeling the sting of mushrooming tax bills and unaware of the voting block of “family and Friends” yes votes to most requests.

The FALL ANNUAL TOWN MEETING will take place on October 17th for a repeat performance of the voting ritual.
Paul Cunningham, President PlymouthFirst

A Report on Town Meeting of October 17th, 2020

OCTOBER FALL ANNUAL TOWN MEETING

This meeting was held virtually through ZOOM.

A REQUIRED MINIMUM QUORUM OF 90 WAS ANNOUNCED AT THE OPENING 8: AM ceremony, but voting attendance averaged 116 and peaked at article 8 with a count of 130.

1. The initial vote was to authorize a consent article combining Articles 7 [plantings] with # 10 amended by-law and #13 a zoning change. It was defeated with a vote of 33 for, to 81 against for the primary reason to not set a president for other meetings, where time is important and volume of articles long.

[Any article numbers not mentioned were printed as NO MOTION.NO ACTION]



2. Art 2A; Appropriation of \$15,000 for the Fire Dept from 2021 tax levy to pay rent for 5 months for a temp communication tower on a trailer because the fire chief was nervous about potential hurricanes with the 40 yr. old tower. Previously this year the town spent \$66,000 to bring this trailer from Oklahoma and set it up at fire station 1 on Sandwich St..

Motion to amend to take from free cash [balance \$10M] approved by vote of 97/20

Original motion to approve passed 115 yes/1 no.

3. Art 4A; \$500,000 for a new communications tower for the Fire dept.

Heavily debated, for more info and research, use of carrier companies but voted 90 yes/ 24 no. An insurance company settlement included for \$240,160.

4. Art 4B; \$55,00 for a vehicle lift system for the Fire dept [again]. Used to service the fire eqpt and blew a leak. Approved after identifying the known cleanup costs so far of \$14,700, not included, but voted 113 yes /2 no.

Art 4 C; Herring Pond Watershed Study \$71,924 paid out of Environmental Affairs Fund. Performed by UMASS/Dartmouth, used previously on other studies as most cost effective. The Environmental Affairs Fund is created with 50% of all Payments in lieu of taxes [PILOT] paid by solar installations, nuclear plant etc.

Art 4D; Jenny Pond dam bypass \$75,000 paid from Environmental Affairs fund passed 116 yes/1 no

Art 4E Manomet zone pipe upgrades \$5,100,000 to redo 100 yr old piping affecting flows between zones from north zone to south zone. This major project is usually bonded but will be paid by the water users. This received heavy comments to defer until the spring mtg but received a 2/3rds vote of approval 95 yes/22 no.

Art 4F; Airport Echo Extension capital improvement project to eliminate excessive taxing before takeoff. This \$100,000 project paid partially from transfers of earlier completed projects and the balance paid out of Airport retained earnings by the airport user fees.

Art 4G; an airport article for \$ 40,000 to purchase an existing privately owned building to store seasonal snow and landscaping equipment and its condition as a storage facility is expected to be 20 years. All airport requests for funds are seldom questioned because the airport is well managed, and their airport fees generally require no town subsidy.

Art 5; to acquire 18 acres of still active cranberry bogs, to allow Plymouth to utilize the full capacity of the area in vicinity of a town well, where the water rights are shared with the bog owner. This was heavily questioned due to the land valuation by an outside agency of \$390,000 and the negotiated sale price of \$800,000. The clause to allow a "leasehold interest until 2023 by the current owner was not negotiable as he needed the water to feed a new bog location, outside the zone 2 of the well for that time period.

Funding came from many sources of closed out water activity dating as far back as 2010 thru 2018 and passed 93 yes / 23 no. A prior motion to reduce the price by \$125,000 was defeated 26 yes /93 no. on a 2/3 voting article.

Art 6; to appropriate \$17,500 to pay for water testing for Cyanobacteria sampling as 10 ponds this year were closed due to this contamination and there are 351 ponds in Plymouth. Each test is \$150, and this should cover 3 years or so of tests. The article passed 116/2 and is paid from the Environmental Affairs Fund.

Art 7; To approve \$45,800 to purchase and install plantings in the Foothills Preserve Stream and Wetlands Restoration Project. Paid for out of Env. Affairs Fund, no effect on taxes.

Art 8; to pay \$10,000 to purchase and equip an educational trailer for the dept of Marine & Env. Affairs and to allow this mobile presentation to be shown all over town. Vote was 113/17.



Art 9A; to correct the funding sources for 5 different articles paid for under the Community Preservation Act and had no effect on a tax levy. The Community Preservation Fund receives it's money from a 1.5% tax on each residential and commercial tax bill and its bylaws require it to set aside the majority of funds for open space, historic resources and community housing after its administrative costs. The vote was 119/0.

Art 9B; town to acquire 34 acres for open space and recreation under the Community Preservation Program for \$117,000 with a conservation restriction on the land. This landlocked land was acquired by a vote of 119 yes/0 no.

Art 9C; the town to acquire .45 acres from 3 parcels on or near Sandwich street by fire station #1. The price was \$390,00 paid under the CPC program, which will expand Stevens Field and allow for moving tennis courts and other activities away from the coastline, due to rising seas and also allow extra parking for town events and open the field to full ocean vistas from the street. Vote was 102 yes/16 no

Art 10; To amend the town by-laws to designate outlays for departmental equipment of \$600 or more but less than the requirements for capital outlays, be identified but not individually voted on. Vote was 110 yes/4 no/ 3 abstentions.

[Very seldom do we see abstentions even when voting on employee pay and benefits as it is not enforced under this form of government]

Art 13; a revision of the ZONING BYLAW for the section 206-1 applicable to the Forges field well area. Vote was 110/0/1

THIS MEETING WAS DISSOLVED AT 12:13pm ON Saturday October 17th, 2020.

PlymouthFirst, Inc. is a community organization that encourages the informed and active participation of Plymouth citizens in local government, works to increase understanding of municipal public policy issues and promotes these ideals through education and advocacy.

