

Town Meeting – Spring 2026

Good morning, Town Meeting members, officials, staff, and members of the community.

With the adoption of our new Comprehensive Plan, titled Charting Our Future Together, Plymouth has taken a significant step forward in planning for our next decade. I encourage everyone to read this document – it is currently available on the Town website and printed copies will be available through the Planning Department.

The genesis of this plan goes back to 2021, when the Planning Board established a Master Plan Task Force to review our existing Master Plan.

- That committee found that a new plan was necessary in order to address the changes Plymouth had undergone over the last 20 years as they had created a need to look at planning differently; as a whole Town rather than area by area and issue by issue as we had done in the past.

In 2023, this body approved funding for the creation of a new fact based, implementable plan driven by the greatest amount public input reasonably obtainable.

- The Planning Board feels that our new Comprehensive Plan meets those goals.

Through the work of the Master Plan Committee, Town staff, and a consulting team consisting of a variety of disciplines, we have assembled the most information about Plymouth's physical environment, economy, and demographics than we have ever had.

To accomplish the residents' goals, the Comprehensive Plan contains a 27 page implementation matrix identifying short, medium, and long term projects and programs, including who is responsible for leading them and how implementing them may impact other aspects of the community.

And to learn what the residents wanted, we undertook the largest public outreach in Plymouth history, obtaining input from over 10,000 people, some 15% of the population.

- And of particular note, we were frequently told by people attending events or responding to surveys that this was the first time that they had engaged with the Town, meaning that along with those who regularly participate in Town government we were hearing from new voices.

From that public outreach we learned that there are many things our residents like about our community:

- They enjoy our ponds, beaches and forests; and are proud of the fact that we have permanently preserved some 38% of the Town as open space, more than almost any other community.
- They support our revitalized downtown businesses blended with our history.
- And they are encouraged by the advancement of Plymouth as a cultural center.

But this enthusiasm is tempered by a single, overriding concern; one that was raised in every engagement with the residents:

Plymouth is becoming increasingly unaffordable

- We heard it from young people who can't afford to locate here;
- We heard it from families who can't afford to raise children here; and
- We heard it from seniors can't afford to age in place here.

We know this isn't just anecdotal because it is supported by all the data we have gathered.

For almost everyone, affordability is based on three challenges

The first of these is housing.

It will come as no surprise to anyone that the cost of housing in Plymouth has almost doubled since the adoption of our last community plan

- Part of that is simply market factors – more people are now recognizing that Plymouth is a desirable place to live.
- But another part is in the type of housing we have.

I hear many people complain that Plymouth is overrun with apartments

That may be what we see from the major roads, but the facts show differently:

- 78% of our housing units are single family detached dwellings
- 81% of our housing units are owner occupied, well above the state's 62% average.
- And around half of the remaining 19% is used for seasonal rentals.

This combination of factors means that for most wishing to come to or stay in Plymouth they need to own a single family home

- And since 71% of the land in Plymouth is zoned rural residential, that means that most of the single family housing in Plymouth is on large lots, making them more expensive to purchase, own, and maintain.

To address this issue, the residents have asked the Town to work on encouraging different types of housing that meet the needs of all segments of our community.

The second concern, particularly for young people and families, is Plymouth's economy.

A statistic you may have heard before:

- 7,400 people live and work in Plymouth – a large number are “work from home”
- 16,000 people commute into Plymouth.
- 23,000 people commute out of Plymouth.

Put simply, to live in Plymouth you need to work elsewhere, to work in Plymouth you need to live elsewhere.

Why?

Because despite efforts to lure manufacturing back to Plymouth the vast majority of jobs in Town are lower wage service jobs.

To change this dynamic, the residents have asked the Town to focus on land use and other programs to encourage the types of businesses better suited to Plymouth that would allow employees to both live and work in our community.

Third, the residents, particularly our seniors, are concerned about the local tax burden.

- Addressing this issue will be a true challenge for Plymouth
- It's a matter of numbers

Even when inflation is low it costs the Town about 3% more each year to meet its fixed costs.

However, Plymouth's new growth, meaning money from new sources, has only been increasing by about 1% each year.

The remaining 2% has been made by through increased property taxes

- 14% of those taxes come from commercial and industrial properties
- The remaining 86% come from residential properties

But that number is about to get even bigger

- That is because almost half of our new growth has been coming from new homes being built in Pinehills and Redbrook
- And in 4 to 5 years both of those developments will reach buildout, meaning we will have an immediate drop-off in both new and ongoing revenue growth

This is the fiscal cliff that has been talked about so much recently

And the reason it will impact our residents so significantly is because absent a generational change in the economy, like the one that occurred when the power plant was built, Plymouth can't make up that loss through new commercial growth.

- In fact, through the Comprehensive Plan process we have learned that there are only around 350 acres total of undeveloped land zoned for commercial use left in all of Plymouth, which is not enough to make even a modest dent in that loss.

What the residents have asked the Town to do is to be more fiscally conservative while we look for ways to address this forthcoming shortfall.

- This concern was expressed so many times by the residents that the Master Plan Committee felt it necessary to specifically include a reference to fiscal responsibility in the Town's mission statement

Now that we understand the facts and what the residents want, the real work begins.

The Planning Board and Planning Department have already started.

- To address the wishes expressed by the residents in multiple housing surveys the Planning Director has obtained a grant for assistance in looking at options for smaller homes on smaller lots, particularly in areas where there is existing infrastructure.
- To address the economic concerns of the residents, the Planning Department is working with a consultant to review the limited commercial land left in Plymouth and identify ways to make it more attractive to the uses that best suit Plymouth.
- And on a longer term track, we are starting the process of a more comprehensive review of our zoning bylaw. This will be a multi-phase process beginning with Article 22 before you today, the codification of the Zoning bylaw which will identify instances where Plymouth is out of step with state law or best practices.

In addition, the Master Plan Committee is continuing to meet to discuss a recommendation as to the creation and scope of an ongoing Comprehensive Plan Implementation Committee to monitor and report on the Town's progress.

On behalf of the other members of the Planning Board, Tim Grandy, Carl Donaldson, Tim Bennett, Frank Mand, and Chris Smith, we look forward to working with all of you on these and other initiatives to help achieve our community's vision.