

Charter Commission Members:

Thank you for taking the time to consider my perspective. I listened to your recent discussion on the Advisory & Finance Committee and decided to submit my written comments.

I served on the Advisory & Finance Committee for 4 years until stepping down in April 2021 as Second Vice Chair. I stepped down from FinCom because I cultivated the opinion that FinCom makes a very negligible impact. Given the hours of effort I put in over four years, I did not find my efforts (or the efforts of the Committee as a whole) to make a significant difference in the operations of the Town of Plymouth. The ineffectiveness of the Committee is no fault of any single member of the Committee, but the overall construct and process that FinCom engages in renders it less than effective. I am going to outline several places where I believe FinCom is lacking:

Role within the Budget process

After serving two Spring Town Meeting cycles on Fincom I began to wonder if Plymouth's processes were the same as other towns. I reviewed the Mass Municipal Association website and became aware of a Massachusetts association of town Finance Committees. The **Association of Town Finance Committees (ATFC)** is a municipal organization that engages to identify and promote best practices for town Finance Committees to follow:

<https://www.mma.org/members/finance-committees/>

I had never heard of ATFC in the two-year period I had already been on the Board. I highly recommend you peruse the website. I discovered ATFC offers annual in-person training opportunities for town Finance Committee members (and others) to attend. In October that year I attended a day-long training on municipal budgetary concepts and best practices.

At that training I learned that many Finance Committees are very engaged in the earliest states of the annual budget process. Some FinComs work directly with the Town Manager and Finance Director each year to create the budget guidelines that drive the annual budget process. This stands **in stark contrast to Plymouth**, which only reviews the output of the budgetary guidelines after being incorporated into departmental budgets and other capital requests.

Furthermore, when Plymouth Fincom Subcommittees delve into departmental budgets each winter (Schools, Public Safety, etc), significant changes are rarely made to the proposed departmental budgets. Where changes are made, FinCom is often **recommending additional spending**. It is my experience and opinion that FinCom has rarely acted to decrease to the budget, but has sometimes acted to make generally slight increases to departmental budgets.

In its defense, FinCom often receives very incremental information from the Town Manager and Finance Director and lacks a wholistic picture of the town's fiscal climate and forecast. This fiscal myopia is exacerbated by a constant turnover by members of the Finance Committee.

Finance Committee Turnover:

Shortly after joining FinCom, I noticed there was a significant turn-over. Upon joining, some new members appeared surprised at the role and the time commitment, and many resigned within months. After about a year of witnessing this dynamic I proposed that FinCom do a better job working with the Town Moderator to set expectations on what the role requires. Then Chair Harry Salerno created a Fact Sheet that the Town Moderator can share with applicants, so they understand the commitment and role before they proceed. I am not sure if and how the Town Moderator utilizes this information. I know that turnover has continued, with many newer members not completing a full year. Very recently a member served on the Board for one month and then stepped down. This is not good for Plymouth.

Finance Committee Appointment Process:

When I was in my first 2 years on FinCom, Dennis Begley led a periodic Charter Review Committee, and I was fortunate enough to be involved in the process as a member of FinCom. We reviewed the proposed Charter changes and voted on them. One of the changes proposed by the Charter Review Committee was to **reduce the unilateral authority of the Town Moderator in appointing FinCom Members**. At that time, it was discussed whether FinCom itself and/or members of the Select Board should review applicants. Based on my experience on FinCom, I thought it was a good idea. However, I voted in the minority and no changes were made to the process of appointing members to FinCom by the Town Moderator.

Today, there are no criteria for appointment to FinCom other than what the Town Moderator deems appropriate. When I applied for FinCom, I sent my letter of interest and resume to the Town Moderator. I then found a friend who was a Town Meeting Member and a well-known business owner in town. I asked this person to call the Town Moderator on my behalf and put in a good word. I have no idea to this day whether my resume, my friend's recommendation, the precinct I resided in, or other factors contributed to my appointment.

Finance Committee Composition & Diversity:

Because the Moderator has unilateral authority, it is unclear on what criteria he uses to appoint members. As someone who has worked for large corporations for 30 years, it concerns me that there is no understanding of (1) how many applicants there are for a given position, (2) the criteria to select applicants when there are multiple people applying for one open position, (3) any proof that efforts are being made to mitigate possible adverse impact in the selection of candidates.

I do believe (without confirmation) that the Moderator wants to have different precincts represented on FinCom. Beyond that, I do not know whether precinct diversity is the sole aspect of diversity considered. Currently we have a FinCom that is comprised of 11 men and 4 women. It is possible that simply reflects the applicant pool. Nonetheless, implicit bias in hiring is a very real issue, and therefore, many public and private organizations take steps to actively avoid implicit bias. I would encourage the town of Plymouth (and the Charter Commission Members) to emphasize transparency in the process of appointing any position that is designated as an 'appointed' position within the Town Charter.

Some recommendations:

Based on what I have described above I have a few recommendations as the Charter Commission reviews the role of an entity that is intended to optimize Plymouth's budgetary process:

1) This entity should be proactive and budget-focused

- a. It should engage with the Town Manager and Finance Director to discuss the budgetary factors, constraints and to help create guidelines for UPCOMING budget cycles, not simply focus on specific line items after guidelines have been set and distributed.
- b. It should engage with the state-wide ATFC to promote the use of vetted best practices and pursue continuous learning opportunities offered

2) The members of this entity should be qualified

- a. There should be some recommended guidelines/criteria for participation on this entity
- b. No single town official should have the unilateral authority to receive resumes, review resumes and appoint members to this entity.
- c. The members of this entity should prove an understanding of the commitment of the role PRIOR to being placed in the position
- d. As much as possible, the members of the entity should reflect the makeup and future interests of community they serve in

3) This entity should be accountable for demonstrating commitment to its purpose

- a. Statistics such as longevity and turnover should be monitored
- b. The Chair of this entity should be accountable to report to residents (via the Select Board or COPC) on the activities of the entity, including pursuit of training or engagement with other Boards and Town Administration regarding the budget.

Thanks for your time in reading my comments.

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