

**TOWN OF RYE – BOARD OF SELECTMEN**  
**Friday, March 27, 2020**  
**4:00 p.m.**

*Present: Chair Phil Winslow, Vice-Chair Keriann Roman, and Selectman Bill Epperson*

*Others Present: Town Administrator Becky Bergeron*

**I. CALL TO ORDER AND PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE**

Chair Winslow called the meeting to order at 4:00 p.m. and led the Pledge of Allegiance.

**II. ANNOUNCEMENTS**

*None*

**III. PUBLIC COMMENT – The public is strongly encouraged to stay home. You can either watch the Live Stream or participate via Zoom. The ZOOM ID is 490-867-9230. Public Comment will still be limited to 5 minutes per person.**

**Sharon Lohnes, 1493 Ocean Blvd,** noted that she lives across the street from the beach and walks it every day. Having the beach closed would be a disservice to her personally, but she realizes she is not the only person in Rye.

**IV. DISCUSSION ITEMS**

**A. Closure of State and Town Beaches**

Chair Winslow stated the purpose of the meeting is to discuss the potential closure of the beaches. The State of Maine has closed a number of beaches in Kittery, York and Wells. Kennebunkport and Ogunquit are also in the process of closing their beaches. In addition, several beaches in Massachusetts have closed. With the order from the Governor, New Hampshire State beaches are closed. This means that Hampton, North Hampton, Jenness, Wallis Sands and Odiorne are closed. Also, the chair of the New Castle Board of Selectmen has confirmed that parking to the beaches is closed in New Castle and the beach itself will also be closed shortly. The concern is that with the warm weather coming, people are going to gravitate to any beach that remains open. If Rye does leave the beaches open, it will be inviting a substantial number of people to the area who will not be able to social distance and could result in the sharing of COVID-19. Chair Winslow stated they are looking at this from a health standpoint. He understands the mental health issues and that people would like to be able to go onto the beach. However, if it is going to pose a health risk, it is something that has to be addressed.

Selectman Epperson stated he was pretty vocal about keeping the beaches open. He and his wife visit the beach everyday and at this time, it is the only place they can go. However, the Governor has decided to close the State beaches so Rye does not really have a choice but to close their beaches. As hard of a decision as this is, the point is to mitigate the spread of this virus as quickly as possible so the beaches can be reopened.

Vice-Chair Roman stated that she agrees. She reiterated that this would just be temporary. The sooner all towns act cohesively in conjunction with the Governor's order regarding State beaches, the sooner the beaches will be able to reopen. If it is piecemealed, it may drag on and make it a longer process. She pointed out that if it is determined that it is not needed, the beaches can always be reopened. She commented that she would like them open as soon as possible also, as having two small children and not being able to walk on the beach is a problem for her family as well.

Police Chief Kevin Walsh noted that the sidewalk from Central Road to the causeway and the Beach Club can be accessed by pedestrians, as it is not walking on the beach. Pedestrians can also walk on the side roads, such as Cable and Perkins Road. The issue is that the beach has been a venue place and attracting large crowds. With beaches in Maine and Massachusetts closing, people are going to come to Rye's beaches. This will provide an opportunity for COVID-19 to come up Route 1 and Route 1A corridor. People will be coming in to town and will be stopping at stores in Rye and other towns. The concern he has is with community transmission happening in these stores. The mission of the Rye police officers would be to make people aware the beaches are closed. It is important to educate the people on the beaches being closed and why. There would also be an enforcement component. Chief Walsh noted that the surrounding town's police chiefs had a meeting recently. It was decided that along the Ocean Boulevard corridor the communities are going to be using message boards and social media to get word out to the public to make people aware. The chiefs all agreed that an enforcement component would be parking. In order to get on the beach, people need to park. If there are parking restrictions, those will be strictly enforced to help reduce and stop people from going on the beaches. Maine, New Hampshire and Massachusetts are asking people to stay at home and practice social distancing to help prevent the spread of COVID-19.

Chief Walsh stated that in regards to enforcement, he would ask that the select board look at a couple of areas in town where there is permit parking. He asks the board to make those areas "no parking". With the help of the highway department, those areas will be blocked off with proper signage to let people know they cannot park there. He would ask the board to do this until May 1<sup>st</sup> or until the Governor lifts the order to close the beaches. Some of the side roads that are very close to the beach entrances, such as Old Beach Road, Perkins and Locke Road, should be "no parking" areas as well. He noted that the Board of Selectmen have the authority to put in an emergency "no parking" ordinance with a timeline. This would assist the Police Department greatly. A parking ticket would go a long way, rather than having the officers deal one-on-one and engaging with each individual, which opens up the exposure of COVID-19 to the officers and staff. Issuing parking tickets will help with making people aware that they are not supposed to be there and will reduce the one-on-one interactions. He noted that the Department will be sending out a press release about the beach closure. There will also be periodic messages that will go out to the public during the time that the beaches remain closed.

Vice-Chair Roman stated she agrees with the Chief's plan. She summarized that the permit parking areas will become "no parking". The town roads near access to the beach, where folks typically park, will be "no parking". This will be a temporary emergency parking ordinance, to be lifted May 1<sup>st</sup> or until the Governor lifts the closing of the State beaches.

There was some discussion about the areas that will be posted and barricaded as "no parking".

Vice-Chair Roman stated there is a lot more that goes into this other than allowing Rye's residents to walk the beach. She thinks that if there was a way to just allow the residents to walk the beach, they would abide by the six-foot social distancing. The problem is that at any moment on a nice day, the traffic to the beach is going to become quite substantial and there will not be social distancing from folks who are not living in Rye. She pointed out that Rye does not have the police force to send to the beaches. The Department does not have the capacity and the officers cannot be subjected to one-on-one interactions with people from all over. This is another big piece of this decision. Unfortunately, there is no way to do this half way. It has to be done all the way, in conjunction with the State, with the hope it can be lifted as soon as possible.

Chief Walsh agreed. He noted that Rye has a really good plan for the law enforcement. The Fire Department has laid out a plan as to how to keep the staff healthy over the next several months. It is important to keep Rye from being a venue for large gatherings, so the contact between the officers and the public is reduced. The police force has to stay healthy in order for them to be available for the residents.

Chair Winslow stated that one of the inherent responsibilities of the Selectmen is to ensure the safety of the residents of Rye. Part of that safety includes the paramedics, police force and fire department. If these people are put in jeopardy of coming down with the virus, the Town will be in a very difficult position to protect the people of Rye. This is a very critical issue for the Selectmen. If three paramedics came down with COVID-19 or were required to quarantine, the Town's response time for ambulance and 9-1-1 calls is going to be substantially reduced. The Selectmen cannot let that happen. This is a serious issue and action has to be taken. The quicker the beaches are closed to help preclude the transfer of the virus, the quicker they can be opened back up again.

**Motion by Keriann Roman to close the beaches in Rye, along with the State beaches per the Governor's order, and as part of this, for enforcement purposes, all permit parking areas will become 'No Parking', all town road parking areas, to be identified by Chief Walsh with regard to parking and access to the beach (such as, Perkins, Old Beach and Locke), will be "No Parking" and the beach access ways, identified by Chief Walsh, will be blocked off and signed. This will be in effect until May 1<sup>st</sup> or until the State lifts the closing of the State beaches, which ever occurs first, and is a temporary emergency order per the Selectmen.**

**Seconded by Bill Epperson.**

**Roll Call: Bill Epperson – Aye; Keriann Roman – Aye; Phil Winslow – Aye**

**All in favor. Motion passed.**

**V. OTHER BUSINESS**

Chair Winslow spoke to the Selectmen about the idea of posting signs throughout town encouraging people to stay at home and asking them to be mindful of their neighbors. The signs would be available to the residents to post on their lawns to show that the Town is taking this seriously with the community's support. Any resident who would like a sign may call the Selectmen's office and one will be brought to the property.

The Selectmen support the idea.

**ADJOURNMENT**

**Motion by Bill Epperson to adjourn at 4:30 p.m. Seconded by Phil Winslow.**

**Roll Call: Bill Epperson – Aye; Keriann Roman – Aye; Phil Winslow – Aye**

**All in favor. Motion passed.**

Respectfully Submitted,  
Dyana F. Ledger

Zoom Chat Transcript

00:04:35 Sharon: What is the plan to post no parking on both sides of Rt 1 A, F St, cable road extension, Old beach road, sunrise path, old beach path

00:05:17 frank.hwang@EF.com: Hope we could find a way to allow residents to still enjoy the outdoors.

00:05:46 Sharon: we can still walk on the streets

00:06:58 Sharon: will the town forest still be open?

00:28:17 Becky Bergeron: Yes Sharon the Town Forest will remain open at this time