

**TOWN OF RYE – BOARD OF SELECTMEN**  
**Wednesday, June 13, 2018**  
**3:00 p.m. – Rye Public Library**

*Selectmen Present: Acting Chair Phil Winslow and Keriann Roman*

*Plan N.H. Representative: Robin LeBlanc*

*Others Present: Resident Steven Borne (presented the warrant article for Plan NH at town meeting), School Board Member Paula Tsatsilas (working with S. Borne on Plan NH project), Rye Library Trustee Victor Azzi, ZBA Chair Patricia Weathersby, Recreation Commission Chair/ZBA Alternate Gregg Mikolaities, Rye Library Trustee Karen Oliver, Historic District Commission Member John Loftus, Energy Committee Member Tom Pfau, Budget Committee Member Peter Crawford, Budget Committee Chair/Conservation Commission Member Jaci Grote, and Historic District Chair/Budget Committee Member/Heritage Commission Member Mae Bradshaw.*

**I. CALL TO ORDER**

Acting Chair Winslow called the meeting to order at 3:05 p.m. and turned the meeting over to Steven Borne, resident, who introduced Robin LeBlanc of Plan NH.

**II. WORK SESSION WITH PLAN NH**

**Robin LeBlanc, Plan NH**, gave a presentation regarding the work of Plan NH, which is a non-profit organization that was formed in 1989. Plan NH is a member organization of planners, designers, developers and architects of the built environment, who support a vision of healthy and vibrant communities in N.H. Awareness and education, as to ideas and traits that are happening throughout the State and around the country, are shared through the organization's newsletters and educational workshops. The members advocate for things such as; choices on where to live, choices in how to get around, mixed uses, walkable neighborhoods, preserving open space, historic preservation and other ideas that support RSA 9-B, Smart Growth Initiative.

One of Plan NH's programs is the design charrette program. Plan NH has conducted sixty-four charrettes throughout the State since 1996. This is a brainstorming session primarily for communities that have neighborhoods or town centers they do not know what to do with and want to make more user friendly. Plan NH looks at the community design and built environment to make recommendations to the community about how to make it more appealing for economic development. The organization does not look at specific properties and buildings in and of itself. They look at properties in a context, and consider the vision and goals of the community, to help in their recommendations; however, recommendations on particular buildings or properties may be made that help to support the overall vision.

### **Charrette Program**

- There is an application process.
  - Details are given about Rye.
  - Support is needed from the Board of Selectmen and Planning Board in order to move forward with the charrette.
- Fee - \$6,000 – *(At this time, a group of citizens are looking to fundraise the cost of the charrette, as a warrant article for the idea was defeated at town vote in March 2018, which prohibits the town from spending taxpayers' money on this project during this budget season.)*
- A committee from Plan NH reviews and votes on the applications received.
- The person or group who is responsible for preparing the application is interviewed.
  - An application may be 'tweaked' for clarification.
- Once the application is accepted, a team is formed based on the components of the request. A team consists of 12 to 15 volunteers from the industry.

### **What is the challenge?**

- Defining exact wants and needs is key.
  - Revitalizing the town center?
  - Safety concerns?
  - Economic or efficiencies?

### **What is a charrette?**

- Brainstorming Session
- Volunteers that come together from Plan NH's membership who look at the target area(s) and listen to the citizens and town leaders to develop recommendations.

### **Time of discovery:**

- The team would discover who Rye is and what the values are of the community.
- Why is the project important to the community?
- What changes are going on within the community? (Changes that are going on that are beyond the community's control such as; demographic, economic and weather.)
- What does the community want for its future? How can this project support that vision?

### **Charrette Process:**

- A site walk or drive around is conducted with the team.
- The team sits over lunch, (after the site walk), and discusses expectations and what they are hearing.
- The first meeting is held with the town leaders and department heads. The details and data about the project are discussed.
- Listening sessions are held where the citizens are invited to participate. (Two sessions are held with the same format. Held after the meeting with town leaders.)
  - People are broken out into groups with a team member who asks questions about the town and the community's vision.
  - Through these discussions, the values and what is important to the citizens begins to form.

- The day after the listening sessions, the team meets to discuss ideas and recommendations for the town. The brainstorming sessions run from 8:30 a.m. to 3:00 p.m.
- At the end of the day, the team gives a PowerPoint presentation of their recommendations with pictures and key points. This provides key information so the town can get started.
- A book would be completed and sent to the town 8 to 10 weeks after the charrette.

### **Questions:**

#### Selectman Winslow:

What percentage of charrettes that have been completed have resulted in actual projects?

#### Robin LeBlanc:

It has changed through the years. Out of the charrettes that have been done over the last eight to ten years, only one town did not do anything with the recommendations. Things do not happen overnight. It may take some time for the town to implement their plan. The recommendations may be a "springboard" for more. It depends on the will, the talent and the follow through of the people to make it happen.

#### Karen Oliver:

Who participates and at what point in the process?

#### Robin LeBlanc:

The first walk-about (drive-about) is the team and any of the stakeholders who want to participate. Usually, two or three people will lead the walk-about. The team will then sit down with the stakeholders.

#### Karen Oliver:

The team is from Plan NH. The stakeholders who show up then become part of the team?

#### Robin LeBlanc:

Sometimes they do but usually the team is just Plan NH. Sometimes the stakeholders are just used as resources.

#### Karen Oliver:

The team is making the recommendations at the end, not anybody else.

#### Robin LeBlanc:

Yes. Plan NH likes to have the team primarily work on the recommendations because then there is an objective viewpoint. If there are a lot of stakeholders on the team, how objective would those recommendations be? The team comes in and makes recommendations, with consultations from everyone in town throughout the process. This gives the recommendations more credibility that they are objective. We try to encourage the town's people to tell us what the situation is and not give us a solution. The solutions are what the professionals are there for. The job of the

town's people is to tell us what the situation is, what they see and what the obstacles are. The professionals are the ones that solve that.

Paula Tsetsilas:

Do you think it would help in the way it is promoted to set up expectations so that people do not think they are coming in to solve the problems of the town hall? A visioning session for the town center with explanations so that expectations are established up front.

Robin LeBlanc:

Yes. A lot of that will be framed and shaped by the application too.

Jaci Grote:

The town hall is a part of the town center but also the Parsonage. There are a lot of things in town that could be a part of this charrette. Who would write the application and how would we get our input into it?

Steven Borne:

Paula (Tsetsilas) and I have been talking about how we can divide and conquer. Raising the money, organization, planning and coordinating the dinners, would be something Paula will take care of. I volunteered to help guide and work on getting the application done. Once the application is accepted, I would help get everything ready so Plan NH will have everything they need to conduct the charrette. My idea is to get residents and members of boards to work together on drafting the application. The application isn't defining solutions. It's setting the boundaries and giving some guidance to Plan NH. The actual outcome and recommendations will come from Plan NH. The other part I am really enthusiastic about is putting together all the information we have, such as, the Master Plan and the work of all the Town Hall Committees. If all that work is put together and organized, no matter what happens, at least all the information will be in one place and be easy for people to find. When the experts from Plan NH sit down to work, they will need that information. The town will then get all that information organized and what the experts recommend as well.

Selectman Winslow:

Who will sign the actual application?

Robin LeBlanc:

The person who will be the point person or whoever is authorized to sign something like this. It is really up to the town. As long as it is someone that could take responsibility for this and is authorized to say yes.

Mae Bradshaw:

So many properties that are involved are owned by the town. Wouldn't the application fall to the selectmen?

Robin LeBlanc:

We have to have their support. They do not necessarily have to sign the application but we do have to have a letter of support from the select board and the planning board.

Jaci Grote:

I just want to make sure that whoever signs the application is looked upon by the town as somebody who has the authority and is considered neutral. This is a vehicle that the town could use for a fresh start. It's difficult to have a fresh start after two years of a lot of discussions, strong opinions and strong feelings about how things have gone. I think we should keep that in mind. Everything that we do may seem like a little insignificant thing but that might sit under someone's skin and turn into a huge problem. This is human nature. I think we need to be careful about everything we do. It may sound over cautious but I think we should take this as an opportunity to start fresh.

Selectman Roman:

Besides the "no means no", which means no money being spent, if the select board is in support of this, the selectmen should be on the application. I cannot speak for the rest of the board but that is my opinion. If the selectmen are not on the application, people are going to pick up on that. Either the selectmen are in it or not.

Victor Azzi:

In this kind of work, there is such a thing as an owner's representative. In this particular case, it would be someone who is delegated by the selectmen to be the owner's representative. He, or she, would need to check back to those that delegated this power and to the committee who is representing the town in general. This person has to be seen by all people as upstanding and that they are doing their job, as a singular person, and as delegated by the selectmen. It would need to be someone who has the time, commitment and understands how to deal with the issues and get information as it is needed.

Selectman Winslow:

We have been talking about the town hall as the "white elephant" in the room but there are more issues in town. The library wants to expand and that should be considered. There is the Parsonage and the old police station. There is the Rye Junior High School that has falling enrollment and possibly the building could be used for something else. There is also the Congregational Church in which the town owns the parking lot of that church. Is that properly being used? There are a lot of issues in town for its buildings. It is not only about the vision but the physical buildings in town as well.

Robin LeBlanc:

We would probably give you a five thousand foot view. To get more specific with a building, the town would need to bring in an architect. In North Hampton, we looked at their town campus and made recommendations based on looking at the bigger vision for that whole area. Keep in mind, we are only here for a day to listen and develop recommendations. In regards to the application, if the scope is way too big that might be a reason to pull it in and refine the request. As big an issue that the town hall is, it is really a catalyst for a new beginning and to look at the bigger picture.

Jaci Grote:

I view this as something that the town itself can use as a platform of conversation after Plan NH leaves. This is establishing a level playing field in order for the town to have a conversation. It

is a place for the town to start working. The smaller the task we have in hand, the better chance we have of accomplishing something. If it is too big, the citizens are going to get confused and the town is going to lose the vision. The smaller the area is, the better chance we have of capturing that vision.

Robin LeBlanc:

We talk about starting with something small that is doable right away so there is immediate success. The town can then start building on that with something that makes sense. I think the people who live in Rye know how to assess the situation, break it down into smaller components and come up with an action plan. That would be the next steps for moving forward after the recommendations.

Selectman Winslow:

What is the timeframe if the application was submitted by July 15<sup>th</sup>?

Robin LeBlanc:

It will take three to four weeks for the team to review the application and to conduct the interviews. Once the application is accepted, it is usually eight to ten weeks to pull a charrette together. If the town wants it by the end of the year, it would have to be fast tracked.

There was some discussion on a timeframe for the charrette.

Patricia Weathersby:

I would caution about having our scope too small because the buildings and their uses are interrelated. What happens with one building might affect another. We need to be mindful that the decision on uses of one building might affect another property.

John Loftus:

I agree with you Patty. I also agree with Jaci that smaller is better because you can focus. It seems like the scope of the project is the town in total. The other thing that interacts here is taxes and that should be considered in the planning.

There was more discussion on the timing for the application and charrette.

Steven Borne:

We need to hear from the select board that if this was to go forward the selectmen would be onboard with a letter of recommendation for the application. We would also need to get the same thing from the Planning Board Chair Bill Epperson. If we do get the support, we can start to move forward on organizing and getting people together. I think defining the boundaries of what is on that application is going to be difficult and Plan NH will come in with a big red pen. As long as we do something, whether it is big or little, it is a step together and that is worth the effort.

Patricia Weathersby:

What would be the next steps?

Selectman Roman:

The select board would need to have a conversation in public session with Selectman Priscilla Jenness present to see if we are in support.

Steven Borne:

If the select board comes back and they will write a letter of recommendation, Paula will kick in to fundraising mode and I will kick into working with others on drafting the application.

Paula Tsetsilas:

If the timing of this is going to be in November, I could fund raise but it is going to take a lot of time and energy. If it is a matter of ten weeks where it would be funded by taxpayers that would take some relief off on my part.

Patricia Weathersby:

Do we have to have the money when the application is submitted?

Robin LeBlanc:

You do not need the money before submitting the application. Some towns have used the application and the acceptance letter as leverage to get the funding.

Selectman Winslow:

Funding is one issue; however, getting town employee support is another important issue. If January 1<sup>st</sup> we can get town support, we would be amiss by not taking advantage of that.

Tom Pfau:

I've agreed with everything that has been said. I'm in favor of this happening sooner than later. I'd love to see it include the junior high but that might be a big asking. Keeping it small is a good idea.

Karen Oliver:

Does the application determine the scope?

Robin LeBlanc:

The application is what determines the scope of the charrette. The team will make recommendations if it should be made smaller or it may be that they can do a little bit more.

Patricia Weathersby:

Is this an independent organization that communicates with the town or is this a committee the selectmen set up but is independent rather than a band of citizens? I think the latter way to go would perhaps give it more legitimacy. At the same time, if the town can't do that yet then it would have to be independent. I don't know how this is being structured?

Selectman Winslow:

I am concerned about the same issue. I would think the letter of recommendation would not come until we had the actual application itself. To give a group carte blanche to say go do it, in my mind, is not the appropriate way to do it.

Steven Borne:

The strategy is to have someone from the select board in the group to help write the application, along with someone from planning and zoning. The board chairs have been asked because they have a little bit of influence on their boards and can communicate with them. When there is an application ready to go, there will already be boards that are on the same page.

Selectman Winslow:

The select board is a group of three people. All three will need to be totally committed. A person from the select board could be involved in the process but it has to be brought to the board first for support.

Paula Tssetsilas:

I think the way we are currently talking about this is as a private citizens' group that would collaborate with the select board and get their input to have the charrette. Part of the fundraising and communication proposals, which have been submitted to the select board, talked about who would be responsible from a fiduciary standpoint and that would be me. If I am collecting the money, I would be writing the checks to Plan NH, for food and any services needed. A separate account would be created for those funds. It would be a personal account, nothing too complicated, dedicated solely for collection of money. There could be two signatures needed on any check signing. I served on the PTA as the co-president so I have some experience with fundraising, donation and two signatures were needed in that process. That is something that could be established. All of the bank records would be made public.

Robin LeBlanc:

The team is a group of volunteers. They all work full-time and are at the top of their games. They tend to come in with a blank slate. They may have looked at the application. They may have looked at maps. Some of them may know a little bit about Rye and some of them don't. They try to come in with as much blank slate as they can so it really is objective in what they are hearing and seeing.

Karen Oliver:

They wouldn't get the timeline of the progress with the town hall?

Robin LeBlanc:

It really is not relevant. They may have questions about zoning but for the most part they don't have time to go through all that information.

Karen Oliver:

They are looking through the windshield not the rearview mirror.

Robin LeBlanc:

Absolutely. They are looking straight ahead.

Discussion and question period concluded.



### **III. OTHER BUSINESS**

- Paula Tsetsilas thanked everyone for attending and being open to the process. She knows this is a lot of information to consider.
- Ms. LeBlanc asked that all questions people may have moving forward be directed through a point person. She also encouraged feedback on their thoughts on the application and timeline to help Plan NH with their planning.

### **ADJOURNMENT**

**Motion by Keriann Roman to adjourn the meeting at 4:45 p.m. Seconded by Phil Winslow. All in favor.**

Respectfully Submitted,  
Dyana F. Ledger