

RYE TOWN CENTER COMMUNITY DESIGN CHARRETTE

Stakeholder Discussion

Minutes

Friday, May 31, 2019, 1:00 p.m.

Rye Public Library

In Attendance:

Representing Plan NH - *Robin LeBlanc, Plan NH Executive Director; North Sturtevant, JSA Architects; Peter Michaud, Historic Preservation; Jay Longtin, JSA Architects, Jamie Simchik, Simchik Planning & Development; Katiemae White, Ecological Design & Marketing; Douglas Dowell, AARP Executive Council; Charlotte Bouvier, Thornton Tomasetti/Becker Structural Engineers; and Bob White, Landscape Architect.*

Representing the Rye Community – *Selectmen Keriann Roman, Phil Winslow and Bill Epperson; Paula Tssetsilas, Rye School Board; Alex Herlihy, Heritage Commission; Victor Azzi, Library Trustee; Gregg Mikolaities, Recreation Commission; Lee Arthur, Recreation Director; Deb Crapo, Rye School Board; Pat Losik, Planning Board; Karen Oliver, Library Trustee; Jeff Ross, Library Trustee; Scott Marion, Rye School Board; Margaret Honda, Rye School Board; Kim Reed, Planning/Zoning Administrator; Sally King, Conservation Commission; Debbie Toohey, Rye Historical Society; Andrew Richmond, Library Director; Becky Bergeron, Acting Town Administrator/Finance Director; Michael Magnant, Town Administrator; Dennis McCarthy, Public Works Director; Fire Chief Mark Cotreau; and Police Chief Kevin Walsh.*

Selectman Chair Phil Winslow opened the stakeholders meeting at 1:00 p.m. and introduced **North Sturtevant, representing Plan NH**, to lead the discussion.

Plan NH is an organization made up of architects, engineers, contractors, planners and others who brainstorm recommendations to address challenges a community may face. The charrette for Rye was sponsored by a group of citizens who fundraised for the event, which is held over a period of two days. The purpose of Rye's charrette is to focus on the center of town and look at ways to make it the "heart" of the town with a goal of contributing to the health and vibrancy of the community.

The Plan NH Charrette Team conducted a site walk of the Rye Town Center (*area between the Rye Town Hall and the split near the junior high on Washington Road*) before the stakeholders meeting, on the morning of May 31st. The tour included the following buildings; Public Safety Building, Library, Town Hall, Old Trolley Barn, Parsonage, Parson's Field, TD Bank building and the recreation area. The purpose of the stakeholders meeting was to speak with community leaders regarding any issues or concerns around the town center and how it operates.

Discussion was opened to the community leaders present.

Gregg Mikolaities, Recreation Commission Chair, spoke in regards to recreation's vision to have a multi-generation community center. Rye's Recreation Department serves people from the ages of 5 to 95. The town has robust recreational programming, which is growing every year. Popular programs include senior programming and the after-school program for the elementary students. The Recreation Commission has found that there is a need for more programs serving the middle school children and have been working to find a space to house those activities. At the current time, the Recreation Department uses available space throughout the community, which makes organization of programming challenging. The hope for the recreation center is that it could be used and enjoyed by people of all ages with programs being held throughout the day.

Paula Tsetsilas, School Board Member, spoke about how the recreation program may be a family's first interaction with the town, as the programming starts at age 5. The intent should be to create an impression that would appeal to younger families.

Lee Arthur, Recreation Director, commented on the type of programming that middle school aged children are looking for in town, which included a place to do homework and a safe place to "hangout" with friends.

Deb Crapo, School Board Member, spoke about the importance of sidewalks for pedestrian safety, as well as promoting the feeling of community.

Alex Herlihy, Heritage Commission, noted the challenges of Rye's Historic District. He also spoke in favor of sidewalks and the idea of having sidewalk access to the war memorial that was established in 1919. He promoted the idea of having a café in the town center for a place where people could gather.

Debbie Toohey, Rye Historical Society President, gave a history of the Historical Society, which was established in the center of town in 1976. She also spoke about the society's intent to keep promoting and expanding its membership.

It was noted that the property of the Rye Historical Museum is owned by Rye. The Historical Society rents the building from the town.

Jeff Ross, Library Trustee, highlighted that the Rye Library is very much the "center of the town" and has been in the community for over 100 years. The library has been in the process of strategic planning over the past 7 to 8 years. As part of that planning, the possible renovation and expansion of the library is being considered, taking into account the fact that the town might do some things, with regard to space, that the library might be tied into. The library director and trustees are hoping the charrette will give a sense of direction in which the library should be heading.

It was noted that the library building is owned by the town; however, the library trustees are responsible for maintaining the property and building. By statute, the library trustees have complete control over the business of the library.

Victor Azzi, Library Trustees, spoke in regards to the history of the library expansion. He also spoke about the Parsonage and the initiative which brought in low cost housing for Rye's senior citizens. The idea was to provide for seniors, who were in need of affordable housing, in an area that was walkable to typical town amenities. Rye still has a need for low cost senior housing and should be considered for the Rye town center. The center should be like a campus with visual and functional connections with walkways, sidewalks, pocket parks and benches, which would invite and welcome people into the area.

Pat Losik, Planning Board Chair, addressed the growing density issues the Town of Rye is facing and the space needs of the municipality. Some of the issues that need to be considered are transportation, safe passage for automobiles, parking, and sidewalks that would facilitate walking amongst the center's buildings.

Selectman Keriann Roman expressed her ideas for the vision of Rye's center, such as having a café, where people from every aspect of the community can meet and socialize. She also spoke about the safety issues regarding the "curve" on Central Road near town hall. The traffic should be slowed down in that area, as it is a gateway into the center of town. She noted for Plan NH that there is an access to the town center through the town forest, which is located near the recreation fields and connects to Parsons Field. She also noted that a large part of the community is seasonal and it is very busy during the summer. A "sanctuary" in the center of town would be nice for residents to go who are looking to get away from the crowds.

It was noted by a library trustee that the library sees a significant increase in its activities over the summer months.

Selectman Bill Epperson noted that a committee was formed a couple of years ago to take a look at the Parsonage and its future. It became apparent that a decision on that property could not be made without including the entire town center. This is what started the idea of having a charrette in order to get an overall view. Also, the town had the opportunity to buy the TD Bank building to use as a location for town hall offices; however, that was voted down by the voters. He spoke in support of the idea of having a café and/or some type of retail shop in the center of town.

Police Chief Kevin Walsh spoke about the high traffic count on Washington Road through the center of town.

There was some discussion about the services that Rye Public Library provides.

Margaret Honda, School Board Member, spoke about the use of the schools by other organizations in town and the challenges of managing the use of those facilities.

Scott Marion, School Board Member, highlighted the challenges the community is facing with low student enrollment and ideas that have been considered to address that challenge. He also noted that the school properties are owned by the school district (SAU #50). If a school should not exist on the property, then the town would own the building and land.

Paula Tsetsilas, School Board Member, expressed her thoughts on building a vibrant “downtown” area that would be family friendly to help attract younger families to Rye. She spoke in support of promoting a multi-generational community in order to balance the demographics. There is a need to bring the generations and community together, while balancing the history of Rye and the vision for the future.

Kim Reed, Planning/Zoning Administrator, gave a brief history on the planning challenges that have been faced in the town. She expressed the importance of the timing on the proposed concepts being discussed, as they have been talked about in the past but never moved forward.

Discussion continued with ideas the residents have for the town center and the vision for Rye’s future.

Mr. Sturtevant concluded the discussion and thanked the community leaders for attending the meeting.

A motion was made by Bill Epperson to adjourn the meeting at 2:30 p.m. Seconded by Keriann Roman. Selectmen all in favor.

Listening Session with the General Public

**Rye Jr. High School
May 31st
3:30 p.m. and 6:30 p.m.**

Plan NH Presentation of Recommendations

**Rye Jr. High School
June 1st
3:00 p.m.**

Respectfully Submitted,
Dyana F. Ledger