

**RYE TOWN CENTER COMMITTEE**  
**Wednesday, July 22, 2020**  
**5:30 p.m. – Via Zoom**

**Present:** *Chair Karen Stewart, Kaitlyn Coffey, Mae Bradshaw, John Mitchell, John Loftus, Victor Azzi and Selectmen's Rep Phil Winslow*

**I. Call to Order and Pledge of Allegiance**

Chair Stewart called the meeting to order 5:32 p.m. and led the Pledge of Allegiance.

Statement by Karen Stewart:

As Chair of the Rye Town Center Committee, I find that due to the State of Emergency declared by the Governor as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic and in accordance with the Governor's Emergency Order #12 pursuant to Executive Order 2020-04, this public body is authorized to meet electronically.

Please note that there is no physical location to observe and listen contemporaneously to this meeting, which was authorized pursuant to the Governor's Emergency Order. However, in accordance with the Emergency Order, I am confirming that we are providing public access to the meeting by telephone, with additional access possibilities by video and other electronic means. We are utilizing Zoom for this electronic meeting. All members of the board have the ability to communicate contemporaneously during this meeting through this platform, and the public has access to contemporaneously listen and, if necessary, participate in this meeting through dialing the following phone number: 646-558-8656 and Password: 397128 or by clicking on the following website address: [www.zoom.com](https://www.zoom.com) ID #878-6565-5415.

Public notice has been provided to the public for the necessary information for accessing the meeting, including how to access the meeting using Zoom telephonically. Instructions have also been provided on the website of the board at: [town.rye.nh.us](http://town.rye.nh.us) go to the Board of Selectmen page and click on the agenda for this meeting.

If anyone has a problem accessing the meeting please email the Executive Assistant Kate Drago at: [kdrago@town.rye.nh.us](mailto:kdrago@town.rye.nh.us)

In the event the public is unable to access the meeting, the meeting will be adjourned and rescheduled. Please note that all votes that are taken during this meeting shall be done by roll call vote.

Roll call attendance:

- Phil Winslow
- John Loftus
- Victor Azzi
- John Mitchell
- Kaitlyn Coffey
- Mae Bradshaw
- Karen Stewart

*Note: The Members stated where they were located and confirmed that they were the only ones in the room for the meeting.*

**II. Public Input**

- None

**III. NH DOT and TAP 2020 update (Phil)**

Selectman Winslow gave an update in regards to the NH DOT Tap Grant. He explained that the contact person for the grant is Tom Jameson who is the Project Manager for the Bureau of Planning and Community Assistance of DOT. Selectman Winslow stated that he has been in contact with Mr. Jameson three times over the past three months. DOT wants to get all the projects from last year underway before they start accepting applications for this year. After their phone conversation, Mr. Jameson sent Selectman Winslow an email talking about the “Fast Act”; which is the funding source for the TAP Grant Program that expires on the 30<sup>th</sup> of September. He explained that it was unclear what the TAP Grant Program will look like under a new authorization bill. When Selectman Winslow pushed to see if there were other Towns that were interested in the program. There were a number of Towns interested. Selectman Winslow recommended moving forward with the application and getting it submitted. Selectman Winslow reported that he has twelve letters to be sent with the application from Fire Chief Cotreau, Police Chief Walsh, Rye Junior High Principal, Rye Junior High Student Council President, School Superintendent, Planning Board Chair, Senator Tom Sherman, Dr. Snow, Heritage Commission, Rye Historic District Commission, Rye Recreation Commission and Rye Board of Selectmen.

Member Loftus reported that he has received other letters in support of the project. One from the NH Bicycle Association and one from the Rye Public Library. There were also some from other organizations. On the private side, Member Loftus reported receiving several letters in support from Rye residents. He is still waiting on one from the Rye Congregational Church.

Selectman Winslow recommended contacting Mel Low, as he is a member of the church and a member of some of the church committees.

Member Loftus stated that he would email Mr. Low.

Chair Stewart asked Selectman Winslow if he would reach out to Mr. Jameson and tell him that the Town is inclined to pursue the application.

Selectman Winslow thought that was appropriate and added that he will also find out if they can use the same application form that Member Bradshaw has used, which was last year's form.

#### **IV. Review RTCC Charge**

Chair Stewart stated that prior to the Board of Selectmen's meeting next week, the committee should discuss the continuation of the Rye Town Center Committee and whether all the members intend to stay on through 2021, should this service the wishes of the select board.

She added that she knows that some of the members felt that the committee was ineffective, due to things being out of their control and shifting. She asked the members what they could do and what advice could they give to the select board for creating a new Charter for 2021. Chair Stewart stated that she will read the charge as it was given a year ago. They can use this as a guide in order to refresh where they were, and to give them something to work from as to the scope and the goals of the committee.

Chair Stewart read as follows:

##### ***Rye Town Center Committee Charge***

***The Committee is charged with weighing the various options by Plan NH and incorporating those to create a comprehensive plan for a Town Center (as defined from the Old Trolley Barn to Grange Park). The committee shall evaluate the Plan NH Charrette, town owned assets, infrastructure in the Town, prior committee work and studies, and work with various other Town Committees to achieve this plan. Further, the committee shall prepare at least (1) warrant article from the overall plan for the March 2020 warrant.***

***The committee will consist of not more than eight members, including a Selectmen's representative, and shall be appointed by the Board of Selectmen for an initial term ending September 30, 2020. The committee will participate in multiple discussions with the Board of Selectmen over the term and make a final presentation at a Selectmen's meeting. Staff members may be appointed as non-voting members of the committee. It is the Selectmen's intent to sunset this committee after completion of its charge, unless the Selectmen vote to continue the committee.***

Chair Stewart pointed out that it was a one-year committee and would sunset on September 30, 2020. She added that she had talked to Selectman Winslow a couple of days previously and her understanding is that the Board of Selectmen would like the committee to continue.

Selectman Winslow stated that he has not talked to the other Selectmen to get a sense of what issues they would like to get a look at; however, his sense is that the original issue was to develop a plan for the entire center, which he still feels is appropriate. One of the big pieces in the plan is the Parsonage and the exchange of that building with the TD Bank building. That piece is going to

drive what the center should look like. If the deal goes through, it could change their direction. Selectman Winslow reported that the Trustees of the Library had a meeting, as to what direction they want to go in. The Board of Selectmen have been working with the Library Trustees and Dan Philbrick in order to find a solution. So far, there has not been an acceptance from the Library Trustees. He asked Member Azzi to speak on the matter.

Member Azzi gave a short background to the members as to what the issues have been in the last few weeks. He explained that he does not have a lot of details at this time; however, the Trustees concerns are in regards to the land that accompanies the Parsonage building, which the Library Trustees consider to be a part of the library's front yard. It is the land that is adjacent to the walkways coming in from Washington Road and Old Parish Road. The discussions have been around the land that the Library has invested in, maintained and owned, at least in a de facto sense, which Mr. Philbrick is expecting as part of this transaction. The Library Trustees and Mr. Philbrick are considering alternatives that will benefit the Town, the Library and Mr. Philbrick. Mr. Philbrick has come up with a proposal that he discussed with the Trustees today regarding a compromise on the ownership of the land, where the library would get a portion and Mr. Philbrick would get a portion. The Library Trustees felt that there were some good points to Mr. Philbrick's proposal and are interested in further pursuing this discussion with Mr. Philbrick. A committee of two (Mike Moody and Victor Azzi) of the five-member Board of Trustees has been delegated to enter into conversations with Mr. Philbrick as early as tomorrow. Member Azzi went on to explain that the Trustees are feeling constrained because the Library property is right up against the Parsonage property. This will restrict any chance to expand in the near future or in long term planning for future needs of the Library. After the proposal is ironed out with Mr. Philbrick, the Library representatives will present the proposal to the Board of Selectmen.

Selectman Winslow stated that the Board of Selectmen are in agreement to do what they can to facilitate the process. They are looking at this as a five-piece puzzle. The genesis of this was space needs of Town Hall offices.

Chair Stewart stated that the prior scope was to come up with a comprehensive plan for the whole town center by evaluating the role and usage of all town owned property. Not knowing what properties will be involved, it may be premature to start.

Selectman Winslow added that if this was to happen, the select board will have to take it back to a special town meeting or wait until March. Mr. Philbrick is not willing to wait until March. It will have to happen sooner.

Member Bradshaw explained that if this proposal were to be agreeable to all the parties involved, there will need to be a new warrant article outlining the terms and describing the new transaction for a new vote. Mr. Philbrick made the proposal without the understanding that there would have to be a new warrant article and a new vote.

Member Loftus pointed out that the original idea was to renovate the building. Now there is talk about tearing it down. With this proposal, Mr. Philbrick will have two-tenths of an acre which is approximately 9,000 square feet and then there are setbacks. He asked what kind of a building Mr. Philbrick would be proposing.

Selectman Winslow responded that Mr. Philbrick is talking about an office and maybe some apartments over the office, but that is still a fluid situation. The Board is still not sure as to what the final idea will be.

Member Azzi stressed that there are two major forces at work here. One is the deal and the other is a need to have a comprehensive plan for the Rye Town Center.

Chair Stewart agreed with Member Azzi. She added that this is why she wanted the Committee to get together to make suggestions to the select board regarding the charge moving forward. She stated that she understands everyone's frustration when they were working with the guidelines of the old charge and to then have the deal disrupt the direction of their work. She stressed the importance of knowing what properties are in the committee's purview moving forward. Chair Stewart added that with the town vote and the stalled deal, they were not in a place to know these details yet. She reminded the committee that they had previously written an understanding of the scope of work they were to perform. She read it as follows:

### ***Internal Alignment of Project Vision and Goals***

***The Committee has been charged by the select board to create a comprehensive plan for a Town Center, as defined from the Old Trolley Barn to Grange Park; as well as, to propose at least one warrant article related to this charge for the March 2020 warrant. To achieve these goals in a timely manner, while also for filling obligations to the future, the committee will evaluate Town owned assets, infrastructure, and prior committees' work and studies to properly weigh and incorporate into the comprehensive plan options presented by Plan New Hampshire and the Plan New Hampshire Charette. When necessary, the committee will also call on other town committees and officials to first identify a feasible short-term action that the committee believes would be accepted by the Town in the March warrant.***

***The Rye Town Center shall be a safe neighborhood with a strong sense of community and connectivity. We envision a town center that retains its distinctive historical charm and provides a welcoming and walkable environment with connections between destinations and multi-generational gathering places. All forms of development and redevelopment will preserve the town center's unique and historical small-town identity.***

Chair Stewart pointed out that the first part of this statement is almost a rewrite of the charge, but it does bring up the Town owned buildings and infrastructure. She asked if the members felt that they should pause until they know what the town owned buildings will be.

Member Bradshaw said that made sense.

Member Loftus felt that the committee should continue to look at things the way that they are and adjust their thoughts accordingly as things develop.

Member Mitchell agreed with Member Loftus. He added that instead of putting the committee on hold, it has a valid reason to still exist. He pointed out that it is up to the Board of Selectmen as to what that is. There was a majority vote in the March election to approve the plan and work to get a grant to make the changes in the town center. The Plan New Hampshire Charette had very good participation, which laid a foundation for the direction the committee should follow. It is extremely

valuable to continue, have someone to oversee the vision and to come up with a comprehensive plan for the town center, so that it stays going in the right direction. The committee members bring varied experience in engineering, construction, surveying, and real estate. There is a common interest in the town center. Member Mitchell added that he thought the statement that they did back in the beginning was great. He doesn't feel that anything has really changed. There may be a few things that got away from them. Originally, it was from the Trolley Barn to Grange Park. Maybe that will change a little, based on the sale of the Trolley Barn. However, the overall vision of town center and the need to oversee that, so that it is going in the right direction, is still critical. There has been enough interest shown by the majority of the Town to continue. He feels there is a really solid foundation for this committee to continue its work.

Member Coffey expressed that she can see the value in having a long-term plan and the value in the committee's work. The challenge that they are facing is the ownership of the buildings changing. It is hard to do work and then to have to rewind and redo work. She expressed the need to be able to be productive during their meetings and not to just have meetings.

Member Loftus suggested that there is a lot of room for discussions. He gave two examples. One, if the Town Hall offices move to the TD Bank Building, what uses would there be for the land behind that building? He suggested that along the walkway to a parking area, on the right side of the pathway, there could be a garden that could be like a park. The garden could be used for teaching the kids from the grammar school or the junior high. On the left side, there could be a new building like a barn or a small coffee shop, which could be a gathering place for the public. Second, the Trolley Barn is the ugliest building in town and has a poor lot for residential purposes. He feels that the Town should not sell the property, but keep it for storage. He added that a quick, inexpensive fix for the building would be to take the roof off, replace it with a pitched roof, replace the siding with cedar shakes and get the mold out of the structure. Member Loftus stated that these are just two quick thoughts and there are many other things this committee should discuss.

Selectman Winslow stated that the members should applaud themselves for the progress that they have made. Taking the TAP Grant and getting it to the voters for approval for funding was herculean. We can't lose sight of that. If the Town gets the TAP Grant, the Committee will be up to their ears in decisions on lighting, sidewalks, materials, etc. The Committee needs to stay focused on bringing this to fruition.

Chair Stewart asked about the tangibles for an updated charge.

Selectman Winslow stated that the Board is looking for the vision of the town center. The Committee talked about traffic calming, a round-a-bout, plantings and moving the memorial. There are a lot of unanswered questions. They want to also talk to the Congregational Church about having an ice skating/recreation area behind the church. There are a lot of things in play that the Committee could bring some value too.

Chair Stewart asked for an assurance from the Board of Selectman that if the Committee is moving in the direction as outlined, there would not be shifting tides that takes them off task. She noted that the changes in the past did not take them off task, but they changed their scope. There are members that are hesitant to say, "okay, now we are going to do a comprehensive plan", and to then have the Board of Selectmen decide to sell or not sell a property. She added that the committee wants to know that their work is for the Board of Selectmen, and not competing against, the Board of Selectmen.

Selectman Winslow pointed out that there is no guarantee in life. If Dan Brown came in and handed the Town a half million dollars to renovate the round-a-about and do something else in town, the Board is not prepared to say; “we can’t do that because we have a Town Center Committee that is looking at this and that is only a part of it”. He added that they must be somewhat fluid.

Chair Stewart agreed. She asked what role the Town Center Committee would play in those conversations, if they were actively working on the select board’s behalf.

Selectman Winslow stated that the Board would be asking the Committee to come into the conversation with the vision. There are some great, knowledgeable people on this committee that can provide the vision.

Member Loftus reminded the members that the Committee is an advisory committee and it is the Board of Selectmen that runs the Town.

Chair Stewart agreed. She clarified that when she talked to Selectman Winslow, he had asked for suggestions in order to update the charge.

Member Loftus stated that the charge will be the same, minus the warrant article. The Committee can still act in an advisory capacity.

Member Bradshaw agreed with Member Loftus. She added that there is other grant work that can still be done. There are plenty of things that can be worked on.

Speaking to Selectman Winslow, Chair Stewart commented that the committee may or may not want to create a warrant that goes to the voters next year or they may or may not want to seek grant funding. She asked if there could be language that has that flexibility.

Selectman Winslow replied that would be acceptable. The importance of having a warrant article last year was to gain traction to get moving. If the TAP is approved the Committee will have more on their plate then they can handle, and it will be good for the Town.

Chair Stewart reiterated Member Mitchell’s comment that the Committee does have a good foundation to work from.

## **V. Next Steps**

It was agreed that the Committee will meet monthly until the Town finds out about the TAP Grant and the issues with the buildings are resolved.

## **ADJOURNMENT**

**Motion by Mae Bradshaw to Adjourn at 6:31 p.m. Seconded by John Loftus. All in Favor.**

Respectfully Submitted, Dyana F, Ledger