

**RYE TOWN CENTER COMMITTEE
MEETING
WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 23, 2019
5:30 P.M. TOWN HALL**

Members Present: Chair Karen Stewart, Vice Chair Nina Parrott, John Loftus, Secretary Kaitlyn Coffey, Victor Azzi, Mae Bradshaw, John Mitchell, and Selectmen's Rep: Phil Winslow.

I. Call to Order and Pledge of Allegiance

Chair Stewart called the meeting to order and led the pledge of allegiance at 5:30 p.m.

II. Public Input - None

III. Discussion with the Police Chief, Fire Chief and PWD Director

Chair Stewart explained that the Committee will be focusing on Safety in the Town Center first, using a couple of the recommendations from the Plan NH charette.

- Chief Cotreau: My only concern would be getting the apparatus in and out of the Safety Building Complex, safely and quickly. The proposed sidewalk would not be an issue. The round-a-bout is also not an issue because it is designed so that the large ladder truck would drive up onto the Center.
- Member Bradshaw: Is there any data regarding the number of accidents on a round-a-bout as opposed to a stop intersection?
- Chief Walsh: the round-a-bout has a low number of incidents (he will get the number for the committee). It has to do with the yield and traffic merging. The round-a-bout at Foye's Corner works, it is safe, and it keeps the traffic flowing.
- Selectman Winslow: Kevin, do you prefer a stop sign intersection or a round-a-bout. Which offers the most traffic calming?
- Chief Walsh: They both have advantages and disadvantages. If we are seriously looking at doing this, a traffic engineer should have a say in what is the best route to take, based on the particular area. At Foye's Corner, we started out by looking at a four-way stop. After engaging a traffic engineer, it was found that the four-way stop would create serious traffic backup, especially during the summer season. So, the traffic engineer determined that a round-a-bout was better suited for that area. Long-term costs of maintenance of the area is another thing that the Committee needs to look at before making a decision.
- Selectman Winslow: We are looking at two things. One is safety and the other is to make the Center of Rye welcoming. Which configuration would be best suited to this?
- Chief Walsh: Obviously the round-a-bout. It has a center that is landscaped that can be seen from all four sides. It is very welcoming.

- Chair Stewart: Relating to road management and anything that goes into the roads: We talked about options that include speed tables, speed bumps, narrowing the road, and the round-a-bout, as it would affect the plows. Could you talk to us a little about these?
- Dennis McCarthy, Public Works Director: They would not be an issue for road maintenance if the speed tables are designed correctly. I caution you that to-date you have been dealing with antidotal evidence about road safety. Our roads are really very safe roads and the speeds are not excessive. You may get push-back when you start to decide to put these things in and find that people don't want to drive that slow. There is a lot of traffic that comes through town. I know that you want to slow it down so that drivers will be aware of the center of town. Many of the drivers live in town and they may not want to slow down. One of the issues you will have with speed tables and developing tight turns and narrowing the roads, is the push-back from the people that don't want it. It isn't based on actual safety issues. It is based on antidotal evidence from public hearings. The issues that you have is separation of bikes and walkers. That is a new theory called "Complete Streets". This is where they dedicate lanes for each activity. We probably have enough right-of-way in order to do some of this. It all depends on how it is designed. Ideally, you like to see a sidewalk, a bike lane with a separation and then two lanes of traffic and parking on the opposite side so that everyone has their dedicated space.
- Member Bradshaw referenced the issues surrounding the street narrowing in Portsmouth.
- Member Azzi: The various trials that Portsmouth is experiencing is not related to what Rye wants to do. Washington Road is the focus of our attention and the solutions will be very clear-cut. Portsmouth has all the intersecting streets and they are trying to get bicyclists from one connecting street to another safely.
- PWD McCarthy: In cities one of the issues is the right turn. If the bike lane is on the right, with a lot of stops and right turns, you end up with conflict. This is where you end up with a lot of motor vehicle/bike injuries. The bikes are on the motor vehicle's blindside. Rye would not have this problem because it does not have the volume of a city. If the Committee works on pedestrian, bike and vehicle separation lanes, there should not be a problem. There is a lot of right-of-way on Washington Road in the Town Center. The issue about the round-a-bout versus an intersection is just what the committee would like to see.
- Chair Stewart: One of the things that came from Plan NH was road width. It has nothing to do with the speed limit posted on the road, but the width of the lanes is consistent with higher speed travel. Is it your opinion that a narrower traffic lane might reduce speed?
- PWD McCarthy: Every time we've paved a road, we have been reducing the travel lanes to ten feet wide, which is the minimum you would want. It does have a reducing effect. It has not been done yet in the center of town (Wallis Road intersection to Central Road intersection). The ideas about sidewalks, bike lanes and vehicles are fine. The speed is not the predominate issue to spend a lot of time on. PWD can deal with the round-a-bout and speed tables. If there are any federal funds involved with the sidewalks, they must be maintained in the winter. Currently, Rye does not plow sidewalks during the winter.
- Chair Stewart: In the issues the committee is focused on is pedestrian traffic, which is why the conversation about sidewalks. We would like to hear your opinion on maintaining the sidewalks during the winter months. We would like to see students from the middle school walking to the library and Parsons Field.

- PWD McCarthy: PWD has no issue with doing the maintenance; however, we would have to have the equipment and the labor, so there will be a cost. Do not let that cost drive what you're trying to do. It is our job to take care of the Town's assets and we're building new assets all the time.
- Member Bradshaw: It needs to be part of our decision making process because we are going to have to educate the public about what we're doing. Part of which, is anticipating their questions and having the answers.
- PWD McCarthy: True; however, if the focus is on providing safety for pedestrians, there are costs that go with it.
- Selectman Winslow: We need a vision. My understanding of the vision is it being pedestrian sidewalks and bike lanes from the Rye Junior High to at least the library and possibly to the Town Hall, if appropriate. Also, we would like some type of traffic calming and a welcoming feeling coming into the Town of Rye. Looking at these three things, what are the variants that we have and how do we address those variants? One of the variants is ownership of the right-of-ways. We need to find out who has the ownership of the right-of-ways and how much space is going to be needed.
- PWD McCarthy: You will need 6 feet for the sidewalk, 6 feet for the bike lane and 10 feet for each of the vehicle lanes. So, there is 32 feet of improvement, plus green area. There are sections in the Center that are 66 feet wide. It begins to narrow down just beyond Lange Road to Grange Park; however, one side of that is the Junior High School. They may be willing to give up some of their property along the right-of-way.
- Member Loftus: (Referring to a survey of the area; he pointed out that there is a constraint by utility poles on the TD Bank side of the road.) The easement goes almost up to Doctor Joseph's foundation. Across the road, moving toward the school is the Coffey property. It would be hard to get more than a bike lane on the TD Bank side, two traffic lanes and a sidewalk on the opposite side. There are three houses there and one other house on the other side of Lang Road.
- PWD McCarthy: Don't use the utility poles as a limit to the right-of-way. They're in the right-of-way but we don't know where they are located in the right-of-way.
- Member Loftus: We have a pretty good idea because the right-of-way in front of the Joseph's property goes almost up to the foundation, according to the survey. The utility poles are about eight feet from the foundation. Strictly looking at the pole across the street from the Coffey property to their stonewall, this is the restriction in this whole plan.
- Member Azzi: My understanding that the road and right-of-way in that neighborhood is three rods, which is 49 1/2 feet. (From James Verra). One of the issues with trying to make these judgements, using existing conditions, is that the center lane of the road (the yellow lane that we see) is not necessarily the center lane of the right-of-way. Over the years, the center lane could have migrated one way or the other. So, if and when we get serious about this, a surveyor will need to sort this out and deal with it. The primary goal is to provide a safe walkway and sidewalk from the Junior High School to the Rye Public Library.
- Member Bradshaw: I would like to remind the Committee that we are not only concerned about the two intersections at each end of the Center, but also the intersection of Lange Road and Washington. There have been some safety concerns at that intersection, as well.

As the committee is reviewing the Center, that intersection is an area that also needs attention.

- Chief Walsh: (Promised to get the accident data from the Lange/Washington Road intersection for the committee.) Usually, the problem at that intersection is that a person will take an improper left turn from Washington Road onto Lange Road. They end up colliding into the vehicle at the stop sign. There were two traffic counts done on Washington Road. One on the Fourth of July week where there were a little over 43,000 vehicles:

- 3 vehicles traveling 51 - 55 mph
- 35 vehicles traveling 46 – 50 mph
- 404 vehicles traveling 45 – 41 mph
- 4,665 vehicles traveling 36 – 40 mph

A nine-day survey of Washington Road was just completed with 39,298 vehicles:

- 1 vehicle traveling 50 - 55 mph
- 19 vehicles traveling 45 – 50 mph
- 420 vehicles traveling 40 – 45 mph
- 6,039 vehicles traveling 35 – 40 mph

- Chair Stewart: The Town has made a tremendous effort to slow traffic on Dow Lane. Traveling that road twice a day, I have noticed the effort and believe there has been some pretty dramatic change in the traffic behavior. That has been a year-long process. Could you speak to what has gone into the process besides the enforcement and the speed signs?
- Chief Walsh: Education and awareness has been an important piece of the process. Reviewing and revamping the road’s set-up also had played a part. The road was set-up that a vehicle was going from a 45-mph zone to a 30-mph zone and there was nothing to transition the change. Also, because of the width of the road, motorists were doing an improper turn, not reducing their speed at 35 mph, and cutting across the stop bar. These were necessary to do because of the two connecting roads; Washington and Route 1. So, in order to slow down the traffic, the widths were reduced. This forces the motorists to slow down on the turns.
- Chair Stewart: Are there lessons learned there that might apply to the Town Center?
- Chief Walsh: The traffic statistics from Washington Road are not the same as Dow Lane. We are going to continue to monitor it because we get four seasons of different types of traffic coming through Town. The difference between the two roads is that Dow Lane has the 45-mph zone feeding into a 30-mph zone. This does not exist on Washington Road in the Town Center; however, enforcement, education and awareness are the key elements.
- Chair Stewart: Would it make your job easier in traffic enforcement and would you get behind the idea of narrower roads?
- Chief Walsh: I have always supported narrower roads. There is a need for space for the walkers, runners, and bikes, along with the regular traffic. It is important to have the space for the students going from the school to the library. There should be an extended sidewalk between the junior high and the library. What the Town would look like, should be up to this committee. But if we make a dramatic change, a traffic engineer should specifically look at the plan, so when it goes to the voters we can show that serious homework was done.

- Member Bradshaw: Have you used any traffic engineers in recent projects?
- PWD McCarthy: Most engineering firms have traffic engineers.
- Selectman Winslow: There are a lot of unanswered questions. I would like to see us get a hold of Rockingham Planning Commission and ask them come to a meeting to discuss our vision and issues that we are facing (safety, traffic calming, etc.) Have them help us with a plan. We would have to do this soon, as we have to bring this to the warrant. Rockingham will arrange for a traffic engineer. There would be a cost involved.
- PWD McCarthy: I believe they have one traffic engineer on staff. Another thing Rockingham Planning could possibly do for the Committee, is to provide some large worksheets/plans for you to work off from. They have the ability of taking aerial photos and making them into a large sheet that the Committee could scale from and sketch on.
- Selectman Winslow: They can also do the research on the right-of-ways.
- Member Azzi: (Recommended collecting data of the origin and destinations of the various vehicles that are going through Town.) I believe that a lot of people are using Washington Road as a thoroughfare from a Portsmouth neighborhood to someplace south of Rye, which is a connection to the interstate system, etc. If we squeeze down with traffic calming measures, particularly on Washington Road, it will discourage people from using Rye as a short cut.
- Chair Stewart: Our vision and objective is that regardless of who is coming through the Town Center, they enjoy it, feel welcomed and that they are safe and are behaving safely.
- PWD McCarthy: Rockingham County does traffic counting and may be able to assist the Town in determining where the traffic is from; if that is a concern.
- Member Loftus: Plan NH recommends raised crosswalks. My understanding is that they have to be at least 36 inches across the top.
- PWD McCarthy: Speed tables are designed to the speed you want it to be. If you're using a crosswalk as a speed table, they have to be big enough. The size depends on the approach speeds. In order to reduce the approach speed to a set speed, the distance of the top of the speed table changes. You would put the crosswalk on top of the speed table. The width of the crosswalk may not be the size of the speed table.
- Member Bradshaw: Would three be too many? One at the Town Hall end, one at Lange and one at the Wallis Road end.
- PWD McCarthy: Absolutely. But don't mix speed tables with crosswalks. I understand that you're talking about crosswalks and you want them safe; however, there are other ways of dealing with that. Safety isn't always a function of speed. Safety may be the separation that you're working on, as in trying to get sidewalks for the pedestrians, bike lanes for people on bikes and vehicle lanes for the motorists. The Committee should just decide the vision of what the Center of Town should look like and let the experts work out the details of how to make it happen.
- Chief Cotreau: What I don't like about speed tables is that if they are too aggressive, it creates problems for some people being transported by the ambulance. If they are too aggressive, they can be a detriment to patient care on the way to the hospital.
- Member Coffey: Chief Walsh, how responsive have people been to the blinking speed sign on Dow Lane?

- Chief Walsh: It gave immediate results; however, the road designs are for the long-term solution. The sign works in conjunction with the road design changes. However, over time it becomes familiar and it fades into the landscape.
- Member Parrott: Are there main priorities for safety that any of you would want to see as we move forward on a plan?
- PWD McCarthy: The roads are very good. We respond to the neighbors. One of the things about Dow Lane is that it had a very specific problem, which was it had that easy turn off Route One, so a vehicle could be into Dow Lane still moving at 45 mph. The speed sign did catch people's attention and had a dramatic effect. As time passes, and people get use to seeing a sign, it doesn't get their attention any more. That is why we made the adjustment in the turn. Now the vehicle has to physically slow down. That was unique to that area. If you do that type of thing in the Center, we will get that type of slowing. However, I don't believe we have the kind of issue where we are trying to slow vehicles going 45-50 mph.
- Member Bradshaw: I am not advocating this but what do you think about traffic signals, may be at Lange Road?
- PWD McCarthy: The problem with traffic signals is that they are very expensive. They are substantially over \$100,000 and then there is the maintenance. Also, all traffic items are what is called warranted. There are all kinds of studies that traffic engineers work with and these items have to be warranted. You would need the traffic volume, in order to put in a traffic signal. Unless you can convince the Town that they want a signal. Typically, the driving public does not like a controlled intersection. It does take care of the control of the area but it has a very big cost, high maintenance costs and it isn't something that the public really likes, which is a controlled intersection. The traffic volume there does not even closely recommend it.
- Chair Stewart: Would a simple inexpensive design solution be more effective there?
- PWD McCarthy: Yes. It might involve more geometry; widening what is there, a smaller lane on one side or a different setting on how you come into it. Sometimes they will offset the stop bars so that the car on the right stops further up than the car on the left.
- Member Parrott: As a follow-up question, of the recommendations from Plan NH, are there any that you feel strongly about?
- PWD McCarthy: Sidewalks is number one. Then reconfiguring the road.
- Member Parrott: Is that for aesthetic value or safety?
- PWD McCarthy: The safety is the separation of the pedestrians, bikes and vehicles. Sidewalks are a great solution to the livability and safety of a Town.
- Selectman Winslow: These are a lot of details that the Committee can talk to Rockingham Planning about. To discuss the points about round-a-bouts, etc. is not the best use of our time. If possible, we should try to get Rockingham Planning to attend the Committee's next meeting. By then we need to have a definition of what we would like to see. Do we want sidewalks and bike lanes? Do we want them to stop at the library or go to the Town Hall? These are the decisions that the Committee should make. The concerns that we have, such as the right-of-ways, speed tables, moving a pocket park, and reducing travel lanes to 10 feet, are all things that the Committee can discuss with Rockingham Planning. Once that has been done Rockingham can come back and say this is what can be done and this is what

it is going to cost. The question is do we have the funds to do this and do they have the time to do this, in order to produce an article for the warrant.

- PWD McCarthy: If you design what you want, as it grows the safety will get built into the design. The Committee needs to lay out their design plan.
- Member Azzi: That relates to part of our charge. We need to come up with the plan but not the details of a design.
- Member Mitchell: It comes down to getting Rockingham Planning involved. We really need a survey. We need to know what the playing field is. All the other issues, regarding safety and speeds, will be clarified once the Town is defined. When the Town is defined it will create a whole different attitude and mindset of the people driving through the Town. It was really valuable to heard what they had to say tonight. They had no objections with anything. So that brings us back to what is that playing field that we have to work with. When you walk the area and take a hard look, it is really complicated. We need to narrow this in with some professional help.
- Chair Stewart: That is a good point. Phil, you had responded to an e-mail question that I had about the last meeting. It seemed that we needed a survey and surveys are expensive. Does that have to be our warrant article? You suggested that the survey could perhaps be a line item in the budget. I am looking for clarity on next steps. We have no idea of the costs of sidewalks. How do we move forward with our warrant article?
- Selectman Winslow: I'm afraid that after this discussion, if our aspirations were to have a warrant article, that would define numerically the costs of the sidewalks and the bike lanes, etc. I think we are not going to be able to make it. If we want to have Rockingham Planning work with us, they are going to have to assign staff. I don't feel they would be able to get it to us by the first of January. If they can, that is great. If not, let's go before the voters and present our vision. Instead of putting the money into the budget, have the voters vote if they want to do this. At least that gets the voters saying "yes". When we bring the presentation back in 2021, they have already voted that they want to do it and now we have the numbers for them to vote on.
- Chair Stewart: Would that be money for the survey or the traffic study?
- Selectman Winslow: It would be for Rockingham Planning to do the whole package. It would be the traffic study, an analysis of the right-of-ways, pricing on the sidewalks, and determine if there are concerns regarding the placement of the utilities in the area. They will better our plan for the Town. They will address the problem areas and how to correct them.
- Member Loftus: Without the professional assistance, we really can't move forward.
- Member Parrott: So, the cost of the survey from Rockingham Planning would be the warrant article.
- Selectman Winslow: Right, but the voters will be dissatisfied with that. They want to have a plan. So, it is important to do a lot of PR. We need to get an article in Rye Reflections and information on the Town's social media site before the elections. We need to have an actual professional design to present. A pictorial of what we want to accomplish or our vision.
- Member Azzi: I think we are finally coming to some focus. I think we have a vision. I think we need a plan, which is a graphic representation of that vision. However, a plan is not a

design. So, we can succeed in putting together a plan that we would propose in a warrant article to the voters. That warrant article would ask for some money in order to effect the design that will flash out some of the details that will have to be decided, in order to accomplish the physical manifestations of the vision.

- Chair Stewart: Next step is to reach out to Rockingham Planning.
- Selectman Winslow: Whenever we reach out to any outside organization, we should go through Town Administrator Becky Bergeron.
- Chair Stewart: My action plan will be to work with Becky Bergeron to have Rockingham Planning Commission come to either our next meeting or the meeting after.

IV. Other Business

Chair Stewart suggested doing the approval of the meeting minutes at the next meeting.

Member Parrott reported updates to the task schedule:

- Selectmen's Secretary Janice Ireland recommended having the draft warrant article ready for the December 8th Board of Selectmen's meeting. If any revisions are necessary, there would be two more Selectmen's meetings to revise it. The Board of Selectmen will have to finalize it before the Budget Committee.

ADJOURNMENT

Motion by Phil Winslow to adjourn at 7:13 p.m. Seconded by Nina Parrott. All in Favor.

Respectfully Submitted.
Dyana F. Ledger