

**Rye Heritage Commission
Meeting Minutes**

Thursday, July 7, 2022
5:30 PM – Town Hall

Members present: Chair Bev Giblin, Vice-Chair Gail Hughes, Alex Herlihy, Elizabeth Sanborn, Peter White, Alternate David Choate, Karin Nelson, Tim Durkin and Select Board Rep Bill Epperson.

Members not present: Member Frank Lagana and Alternate Mae Bradshaw

Others Present: Andy Stecher of the Rye Historical Society and Resident Sue Sawtelle

A. Welcome/Call to Order & Pledge of Allegiance

Chair Giblin called the meeting to order at 5:32 p.m. and led the pledge of allegiance.

B. Member Introductions

C. Review and Approval of Minutes - June 2, 2022

The following was noted:

- Member Choate noted that he did not report on graveyard activity. No one else remembered the comment so the following was stricken from the minutes: Member Choate reported that there has been no new activity.

Motion by Peter White to accept the minutes of June 2, 2022, as amended. Seconded by Elizabeth Sanborn. All in favor.

A. Rye 400 Andy Stecher Ocean Hotel Gazebo Restoration

Member Choate reported that he spoke to Ann Weidman of JSA Architects. She had him contact Robert White a landscape architect with Greenman-Pedersen. Member Choate presented plans to the commission that Mr. White had drafted. Mr. White proposed that the Gazebo be moved closer to Central Road to the left of Town Hall. He proposed that there could be access from the stone wall and handicap access from the church parking lot. There would be a crushed gravel walkway. Mr. White is in the process of refining the plans. Andy Stecher heard about the project and thought that it would be a good project for the 400th Celebration to take on. He thought that it may be something that the Garden Club would want to take on.

Mr. Stecher gave the commission members a quick update of what has been happening with the plans for the Rye 400th Anniversary Celebration. They have been trying to reach out to all the

local groups that would be interested in participating in the festivities; such as, the Lions Club, the Garden Club, Arts Club, etc. With Selectman Tom King's help and the Select Board, they have created some publicity and they now have a website. The activities that have already been planned are on the activities calendar on the website. Mr. Stecher reported that New Castle, Portsmouth, and Dover are all planning activities around the 400th Celebration. The goal is to make it a fun year with a lot of community activity.

Mr. Stecher went on to talk about the idea of leaving something permanent in Rye in recognition of the 400th Anniversary. There are currently two ideas. One is a monument, which would be a boulder with a plaque on it with a flagpole next to it. The idea is to expand on this and put in a bench or something that would make it more decorative. There would be some fundraising around this project. The second is the gazebo. The gazebo is a phenomenal artifact from the past. When Mr. Stecher spoke to Member Choate there was discussion that there may not be enough funds for the gazebo project. Mr. Stecher felt that maybe this project could be incorporated into a Rye 400th type of activity. The Rye 400th Committee have put together a sponsorship schedule and Mr. Stecher would like to make the gazebo a line item in that schedule. He would then go out and talk to people and businesses about becoming a sponsor. In exchange, there could be a plaque next to it talking about the history of the gazebo and who was responsible for sponsoring its restoration.

Treasurer Peter White reported that the fundraiser that the Commission did last year, produced \$4,160 allocated to the gazebo. The Commission earmarked an additional \$2,000 of the unrestricted funds to the gazebo project, making a total of \$6,160 earmarked for the Gazebo project.

Member Choate reminded the members that it has to be handicap accessible because it is on town property, so grading will be required. Also, there will be a foundation under the structure so that it is off the ground. Funding will be needed for the walkways, landscaping, and any type of plaque.

Mr. Stecher reported that he has been in touch with the Driftwood Garden Club. During their discussion regarding the Rye 400th, the gazebo came up. They will have to go through their normal meetings to discuss the idea, but the idea is to support the project similar to what they do at the transfer station with plantings and gardening. Part of the maintenance is having access to water. Many of the garden club members are elderly and are unable to carry buckets of water any distance. As long as there is a place to hook up a hose, they would be interested in taking on the project.

Member Sanborn is the co-chair of the Driftwood Garden Club. She reported that they have a meeting on Wednesday and this subject will come up. She added that the Garden Club also write grants. She added that they probably would not want to design the area. Once David's person designs it, they could fill it in and figure out what plants should go there and then maintain it, similar to what they do at the public safety building and the library.

Member Herlihy stated that the Commission needs to focus on the gazebo restorations and getting a carpenter first. Without that, there is no need for any of the landscaping ideas.

Selectman Epperson suggested that they take the idea of moving the gazebo to the Select Board first. He is pretty sure it will not be an issue. Then they should move ahead with getting the foundation. At the same time, they could get someone to restore it and get it on the foundation. Selectman Epperson stated that he saw Bud Jordan. Bud had been in Florida for the winter. He will call Bud tomorrow to talk to him about the restoration. At the Select Board's next meeting, under new business, Selectman Epperson will bring it up to the Board for approval. He asked Member Choate to forward the plans to him. Bud's estimate was \$3,000.

Member White thanked Mr. Stecher for his suggestions and ideas. He explained that the Commission is looking to get the work done faster.

Member White asked if the DPW would be able to help in anyway.

Selectman Epperson said that they can, but they are extremely busy with building the Salt Shed. They will only be able to provide minimum help.

Member Choate stated that maybe they could help by removing part of the stone wall to gain access from Central Road.

Selectman Epperson suggested putting in a granite foundation.

B. Graveyard Adoption

Chair Giblin introduced Sue Sawtelle. Ms. Sawtelle is interested in adopting the Tucker graveyards. One is off Lang Road.

Member Herlihy reported that the graveyard at 19 Lang Road has already been adopted. He understands that the guy that adopted it has not taken care of the overgrown vegetation this year.

Member Choate asked if the individual that adopted the graveyard has a stewardship to the property.

Member Herlihy confirmed.

Selectman Epperson suggested that the individual should be approached and asked if he cannot or does not want to continue with the maintenance. If he is unable to continue, he should relinquish the adoption.

Member Herlihy knows the gentleman and stated that he will talk to him and inform him that someone else has inquired about the site.

The other graveyard that Ms. Sawtelle is interested in is the Tucker site off Elwyn Road. She also mentions one on Wallis Road, near Marden's property that has a plaque.

Ms. Sawtelle asked for something in writing from the Commission that would allow her to go onto someone else's property to do the maintenance.

Selectman Epperson explained that if an individual property owner has a graveyard on the property, they don't necessarily have rights to the graveyard. As such, they cannot deny access to the site.

Member Herlihy reported that the 2012 law regarding historic graveyard states that people that live adjacent to historic graveyards do not own them. It is a felony punishable by jail time if you disrupt that graveyard.

Member White asked if there would be an easement in place.

Selectman Epperson stated that there would not.

Member Choate read the 2012 law. Highlights are as follows:

- They are sacred and entrusted to the care of the public.
- Any descendant of the people buried in these graveyards have the right of first refusal to be the designated caretaker of such graveyard, i.e., adopt the graveyard.
- The Select Board of each town has the responsibility for delegating what part of the government is responsible for overseeing the graveyards.
- If the graveyard is not on a roadside location, caregivers or visitors must seek permission from landowners to cross their property to reach the graveyard.

He also read that the abutters must be informed by the Rye Heritage Commission of an official adopter.

Ms. Sawtelle stated that if the Commission would email a letter on letterhead, she would get it to the property owner.

Member Herlihy stressed the need to have all contact information on every person that is adopting the graveyards so that the Commission can stay in contact with the individual.

Motion by Elizabeth Sanborn to allow Sue Sawtelle to adopt the graveyards as follows; graveyard 19 off Wallis Road, near the Marden property; graveyard 35 off Elwyn Road, the Tucker site. Seconded by Bill Epperson. All in Favor.

C. Treasurer's Report

Treasurer Peter White reported the Commission had a very successful fundraiser. They raised \$2,925.00 from 25 people. That money is now in the unrestricted funds. The breakdown of funds that the Commission currently has is as follows: total of \$19,306., of which, \$5,263 is restricted for Town Hall; \$6,160 is restricted for the gazebo; and \$7,883 is unrestricted. The Commission has spent 11% of its budget year to date.

Treasurer White noted that he will be writing a note to the donors with the tax id number.

Motion by Bill Epperson to accept the treasurer's report as presented. Seconded by Gail Hughes. All in favor.

D. Demolition Review Committee Update

Member Choate reported that since the last meeting, the garage at 1220 Ocean Blvd came up for review. They have deemed it not significant of historical importance. There are a few zoning petitions that they are keeping an eye on, but nothing for the Committee to get involved with at this time.

Member Choate also brought up the subject of the Rye Beach Village Precinct starting up their own Heritage Commission. Which would then allow them to have a Demolition Review Committee. He suggested that the two members that live in Rye Beach Village (Member Sanborn and Alternate Durkin) go to a Rye Beach Village Commission meeting to talk about the advantage of having a Heritage Commission. He added that he did not know if they could vote to become part of the Town's Heritage Commission.

Member Durkin stated that that would be his preference. noting the challenges, they have getting individuals to run for positions. To be able to rely on this Commission and to work together would be a much more efficient way to go.

Alternate Nelson reported that she has talked to Frank Drake about this subject. He is opened to someone coming to a commissioner's meeting to talk about it.

Member Choate noted that some of the most important demolitions in the past few years have happened in Rye Beach Village.

Alternate Durkin offered to try to coordinate a meeting.

Member Choate said he would be happy to attend with Member Sanborn or Member Herlihy.

E. Rye Advocates Update

Member Choate noted that this is another area where they would like to get a couple of people from the precincts to participate in the Rye Advocates Group. The original group was comprised of two members of all the preservation boards. They have since lost a couple of members. The main focus is not only to identify and get the history of pre-1900 houses, but also to digitize that information and get it to a point where people can access it.

Member Sanborn reported that the do-it-yourself workshop started at 3:30 and went to 5:30 today. They only accepted four households, one had to drop out. She added that they really feel that that is all that they can work with at the same time. It is real hands on and they are working over the homeowners' shoulders. The homeowners that attended were David Caswell of 277 Washington Road, Becky & Walter Franz of 804 Central Road and Ann Fisher of 281 Brackett Road.

Member Choate explained that these workshops are to show people how to research the history of their houses. They have found that some of these homeowners have information regarding the property that they have not shared with anyone.

Member Sanborn talked about the benefits the three homeowners have gotten from participating in the workshop.

Member Herlihy stated that they really could use more help. He continued to explain that they have identified three hundred and twenty houses built before 1901. The digitizing of volume one and two has been done. They have now received volumes three and four and will be continuing the process. When it is done, they will decide if the information will go on the Rye Heritage website as well as the Historical Society website. They will publicize where the information can be found, so that people will have access.

The next do-it-yourself workshop will be held August 3rd. Member Sanborn thought that it was already filled.

There was discussion regarding the heritage of Rye.

Alternate Nelson stated that she was on Portsmouth's Advocates years ago. She suggested including new constructed houses that are very well designed, in keeping with the designs of the community that fit into the character of the town, as an important part of the work.

Member Herlihy agreed and explained the three phases of the Rye Advocates work

- To identify and document house prior to 1901 – 320 houses
- To identify and document house built from 1901 to 1950 – 800 houses
- To identify and document houses built after 1951 - 2,000 houses

He added that there are significant wonderful reproductions that have been built after 1951. These homes should be identified and highlighted.

Member Choate explained that another thing that the Rye Advocates are trying to do is a Preservation Award. This is an award to a homeowner that has done a remarkable job in restoring their home. They have not gotten the criteria off the ground. He gave an example of a home on Washington Road. The owners have been working on the property for about two years and are doing a superior job.

F. Fundraising Subcommittee Update

Chair Giblin reported that there is no new information on fundraising. It has been put off for a month or two.

G. Rye Signage Committee

Member Herlihy reported that the Signage Committee will be going to the Select Board on Monday. They will be presenting their ideas on the sign design. They have identified 8 sites and are working on the text and images. They have researched the material and discussed the funding. He added that some of the sites will be on town land and some on private land. In some areas, it is not appropriate to put up a sign on a post, due to safety issues. This would be a

sign that is close to the road, where people will be pulling over to read the sign. An example of that would be the site of the Trefethen Corner, which is now Jen Madden's office. It started out as Trefethen's Store in 1947. Ms. Madden suggested that a sign be placed on the building, just left of the door.

Member Herlihy summed up by reporting that they have made great progress.

H. Old Business

a. Gazebo – addressed earlier in the meeting

I. New Business

a. Graveyard Adoption – addressed earlier in the meeting

J. Other Business

Alternate Durkin raised the question regarding demolition. He stated many of the members have had historic houses. At some point, they may consider selling the house. What can be done of certain homeowners who want to make provisions in their respective deed as to what can be done to the property? What restrictions can be placed on the property?

Member Choate stated that he used to be on the Preservation Alliance. Whenever, he has a question like this he would reach out to them. He said he would call them.

Member Sanborn pointed out that this is another area that it is important to get realtors educated about with regard to the history of the homes. Hopefully, this information will get translated to the potential new homeowners. At the end of the day, if they own the property, they can do whatever they want.

Member Choate responded that there are a number of significant properties in the State that this has happened to. If you really want to limit your buyer pool, a homeowner could put a preservation easement on the property. Then someone would have to accept the easement. He added that he will talk to Jen at Preservation Alliance. He also recommended going to the Preservation Alliance website. They have a lot of great information available there.

Member Choate reported that at the next HDC meeting they are going to be talking about expansion of the Historic District down Central Road past the white house next to the cemetery on the left and coming back on the right of Central. There are a lot of important houses in that area.

- **Next Meeting: Thursday, August 4, 2022, 5:30 p.m. Rye Town Hall**

Motion by Alex Herlihy to adjourn the meeting at 6:45 p.m. Seconded by Peter White. All in Favor.

Respectfully Submitted, Dyana F. Ledger