

LONG RANGE PLANNING COMMITTEE MEETING

**Wednesday, December 15, 2021
1:30 p.m. – Rye Town Hall**

Members Present: Steve Carter, Katy Sherman, Kathryn Garcia and Rob Wright

Ad Hoc Members: Dominique Winebaum

Others Present: Planning Administrator Kim Reed and Julie LaBranche

I. Call to Order

Chair Carter called the meeting to order at 1:33 p.m. and led the Pledge of Allegiance.

II. January 12th Visioning Session

Chair Carter noted that at the recent Planning Board meeting, he was announcing that the January 12th visioning session had been cancelled because of Covid. Bill Epperson got very upset about the decision and basically said they can't do that. He asked the committee their thoughts.

Member Wright stated that he thinks their hands are tied because they don't have a sufficient number of people to monitor the event. He suggested Steve Carter write back to Bill Epperson, as committee chair, to say the committee is not opposed to having the event, but he needs to round up some help.

Chair Carter stated that he doesn't think it's worth postponing. He commented that they could provide the boards the questions, so they can try to round up people to do the event. He thinks Bill is worried about the people who will be upset that they won't have a chance to give their input in person.

Ms. LaBranche commented that if the committee decides to go in that direction, they need to start planning today. People who work the event will need to be trained. They will need materials and supplies.

Member Wright stated it's impractical at this point.

Member Sherman agreed.

Ms. LaBranche stated that this is a preliminary effort to figure out what direction the Vision Chapter should go. There has been a lot of feedback from people. She reiterated that the phase at this time is for the committee to decide the approach for the Vision Chapter. She thinks this is

most likely going to include future events. If it means there will be another event at the school with masks, then so be it. She feels they shouldn't so much delve into the results, as that's the next phase effort. The committee needs to decide what direction to head in. Obviously, the in-person events are difficult for all the reasons the committee discussed. There's no time horizon that the committee could give to say they feel comfortable doing an event.

Ms. LaBranche continued that the committee talked about distributing the handout and making it available on the town's website, in lieu of sitting at a table with other people. There's an opportunity to get feedback from people that doesn't require in-person contact or a workshop. She thinks the committee should keep this in mind.

Ad Hoc Member Winebaum stated that one of her concerns has been about computing the results. She feels the handouts would be skewing the responses. About four people that she has talked to were in attendance, but they also wanted a handout to give further thoughts. Someone could have been in attendance and then get a handout to give more detail. The committee will not know who the people are that are filling out the handouts. If they answer the survey online, it can only be done once and the committee will know who did it. If it's a handout, it's going to be submitted back to the committee and it will be unsure who it came from. In regards to surveys, all the numbers are tallied for all the answers. Her concern is that they won't have a very accurate tally of all the inputs.

Ad Hoc Member Winebaum continued that Bill Epperson is not a member of the committee. He's a select board member. He has had a lot of interference behind the scenes. The committee had to revise a decision and are being asking to revise again. She thinks they have explained why the decision was made. She feels it's too late in the process to be planning a second visioning. Even the contract was for one visioning, not two. As much as she would like a second visioning, the committee is too far into the project to be planning a second one.

Speaking to Ad Hoc Member Winebaum, Planning Administrator Reed asked how she would like the committee to proceed.

Ad Hoc Member Winebaum stated the committee has a schedule. From what she heard at the last meeting; Ms. LaBranche wanted to wrap things up by end of January.

Ms. LaBranche commented that she doesn't think the committee is near wrapping anything up.

Ad Hoc Member Winebaum noted that the committee needs to discuss the survey results. They also need to discuss how they are going to send out the handouts and how those responses will be computed fairly.

Member Sherman stated that she agrees with Ad Hoc Member Winebaum. She thought that the committee would have the survey results at this meeting.

Ms. LaBranche noted that the committee needs to come up with a strategic plan.

Member Sherman stated that her thought is that they let the public know that if they did not attend the first visioning session, they can fill out this form. If people still fill out the form who went, there's really nothing the committee can do. The forms should be collected and closed by January 12th. That information should be compiled with all the information they already have. She asked why they would not use the information from the survey to help with their framework. She thought the information from the survey was very important in establishing the framework for the visioning chapter.

Planning Administrator Reed pointed out that it went towards the themes and what people were looking for.

Member Sherman commented that she thinks they should be compiling everything all together.

Ad Hoc Member Winebaum agreed.

Member Sherman stated that she thought they were going to compile all the information together and figure out the themes the town thinks are important to move forward. That's where she would like to see this go.

Chair Carter stated they need to find a way to make the handouts available. The handouts could be compiled on their own and kept separate. He doesn't imagine that the input is going to be dramatically different. However, for people who want to participate, the committee will have to make them aware that the handout is available on the website. He noted that the only reason he is opening the revisiting of January 12th is to be sure everyone feels the same way. He agrees with Member Sherman that they should look at the survey and the notes to determine how to move forward.

Member Wright stated they are still early in this process. The objective was to gather as much data as possible, knowing there is going to be some self-selected bias. He thinks they can track some of this if the commentary is available only online. Emails can be tracked to see if there are duplicates. Speaking to Chair Carter, he stated that it would be really important for him to get back to the Select Board to say that the second session is not happening for really good and prudent reasons. The Select Board should be told what the committee is going to do to for people who want to give input. He continued that the committee is still early and there's lots of data to still collect.

Member Wright continued that he doesn't have any problem with redundancy. At the end of the day, this is going to progress to the point where there will be more public commentary. There will be another opportunity for people to participate. This is far from the last shot for people to critique. If the committee starts with a slightly skewed genesis, it will probably come out over time. He thinks they need to collect all the data that they can. He would like to get going with the work of trying to sift through and get to the hot points. He wants to be sure the Select Board knows there will be opportunities for additional say. He pointed out that at the first session, there was an overabundance of people. He would like to start digging into the work of

cataloging the data that's available and put it into a rank order. He would like to also encourage a lot more participation.

Planning Administrator Reed pointed out that Bill Epperson is one selectman. She's not sure how the other selectmen feel. When the chair responds, he could respond as Bill being the select board rep for the planning board. In regards to cancelling the January 12th session, she thinks it was the best decision given the Covid rate in New Hampshire right now. The unprecedented no masks is a bit risky for too many involved. At the time the committee decided to have a second visioning session, they didn't have all this information. She noted that she made an announcement on the website about it being cancelled. She can also provide an attachment on the website to the handout.

There was some discussion about having the handout available through Survey Monkey. It was agreed that this would be a great solution with a link posted on the town's website.

Planning Administrator Reed stated that she would like to see the committee take all the information and come up with a framework for a Vision Chapter.

Ms. LaBranche noted that they have gone through all the tasks listed in the contract. The next phase is to delve into the results. The way the survey is structured and the way the workshop sheet is structured is apples and oranges. They can't be put together. It would be really hard to meld the two together. However, they can look at the survey and pick out the top five responses under each question. They can match it up with the workshop to see how the two differ. She commented that they could probably do this through the end of January. Also, there are a lot of open-ended questions that have to be sifted through. All of this will take a lot of time. She pointed out that it's not in the current contract to do that kind of work.

Member Wright asked if they have to wait until next year because of the funding.

Ad Hoc Member Winebaum commented that the budget is not very transparent. She would like to see a budget template for the master plan.

Member Wright stated that it sounds like the committee needs to request a budget.

Ad Hoc Member Winebaum noted that Kim Reed has already done the budget. She pointed out that she has asked for the amount.

Planning Administrator Reed stated that they don't have an amount. They don't have steps laid out yet for what's going to be done. That's why the committee has to go through this process with Julie.

Chair Carter asked what the framework would look like.

Ms. LaBranche explained that they need to put together a table that matches the SWOT analysis for the high-level points. She doesn't know what that would look like yet. It's going to take some time. She doesn't want to spend five hours doing that and have the committee say that's not what they were looking for. Ms. LaBranche commented that the Vision Chapter would have summaries of the SWOT and survey results. The committee had agreed to go with three major topics for the workshop; community, land development, and environment/climate change. She would suggest that based on the SWOT analysis and survey results, if other topics float to the top, the three topic areas could be detailed out in slightly more granular topic areas. That could be supported with the data that comes from the SWOT and survey. She suggested taking the survey results and taking the top five from each question. Those could be matched against the SWOT and then put under the three discussion categories. The committee could then start breaking them out a bit more. She pointed out that the next phase of the project would be to create an outline.

Planning Administrator Reed stated that she would like to see an outline by the end of January. She asked if they should just do a Vision Chapter. She pointed out that the outline might be "eye-opening" and they may decide that they need to start the RFP process in 2022 for a complete rewrite for 2023. She asked if they should just start looking at the whole master plan.

Member Wright commented that he personally thinks they should. He hasn't encountered anyone, through this whole process, who just wanted to focus in on a Vision Chapter. They really wanted to talk about what they thought was great and what was not.

Ad Hoc Member Winebaum noted that the committee hasn't spent five minutes looking at the master plan. The committee should devote a few hours to analyzing the current master plan. The committee should have decided that they are going to do the whole master plan, not just a Vision Chapter. It's going to take five years before there's a new master plan. When people came to the visioning, they thought that there would be one in eighteen months. The town needs a new master plan.

Member Sherman agreed.

Ms. LaBranche stated that the anticipated outcome of this project the committee has been working on, is not a Vision Chapter. It was a way for this committee to become educated about what direction the master plan should head in, based on the feedback and concerns of the community. That will inform the committee as to what direction to take. The rest of the master plan will grow from the Vision outline.

Member Sherman asked how they get the ball rolling on funding for updating the whole master plan.

Planning Administrator Reed explained they are not there yet. Before expenses can be discussed, the committee has to have an idea of what they want, so they can go out with an RFP.

Member Wright commented that he struggles with a Vision Chapter versus the master plan. Everything in the master plan emanates from the vision of what the community wants the town to look like.

Planning Administrator Reed stated that the process should be that the committee gets the outline and look at the data. They should look at the current master plan versus the outline for 2021. They need to decide what type of master plan it should be and an RFP would be put together. In the fall, they may get a contract saying how much it will cost. She reiterated that the first step is to get the outline and see what residents want. From there, the committee can decide what type of master plan it should be based on people's thoughts. An RFP will be prepared to see how many companies are out there that can do this work. The RFP is a process in itself. The committee will then start doing interviews and will put together a timeline. That will take the committee up until the fall and the budgeting for 2023 will be starting.

Ms. LaBranche stated that a lot of towns will put out a Request for Quote (RFQ). It will put some parameters around how they want to structure the master plan. The community will receive a range of numbers and can choose a price point that they would be comfortable with budgeting. At this time next year, an RFP could be drafted and be ready to be issued as soon as the warrant article is voted on.

Member Sherman stated she is surprised by how long this whole process takes. She was hoping they would have something for this upcoming election and be able to start this coming year. However, it sounds like that's not possible.

Planning Administrator Reed commented they are not ready.

Ad Hoc Member Winebaum disagreed. A planner would have been able to plan without waiting two years. She stated its two more years to wait. She thinks there's a lot of excuses.

Ms. LaBranche noted that the committee wanted to go through this process of fact finding, getting the pulse of the community and getting a direction for a master plan update. Earlier this year, she heard that this committee wanted to go through the process of doing that before launching into a full RFP. She noted that an RFP really has to have details and direction.

Planning Administrator Reed stated that it was clear in the beginning that this was not going to be done in 2022.

Member Wright stated that he thinks they decided on some things already. They went through the conversation of thematic versus chapter based. He thought they came up with the idea that they preferred a theme-based master plan. The committee voted on it.

Member Sherman agreed.

Member Wright continued that they have some data. He thinks the next steps should be for the committee to frame that out into an outline.

Planning Administrator Reed noted this is what Julie is trying to do for the committee.

Chair Carter noted that a lot of stuff that has surfaced is actually in the current master plan. The problem with the current master plan is the way it's organized. His feeling is they need a new master plan. It should be theme based. In order to get there, they have to ask for input and have focus groups. Some things will surface and that will evolve into a master plan. He reiterated that a lot of these topics are already addressed in the master plan. It's just not organized in a way that's particularly useable.

Ad Hoc Member Winebaum pointed out that the demographics need to be updated. There should be some new suggestions about housing. There is an Energy Chapter, but not a vision. There's a very good Energy Committee and they are moving forward with a lot of ideas. There's a lot of things that need to be updated in terms of what the town has now that it didn't have before.

Chair Carter commented that he doesn't think they want to update the current master plan. They want a whole new structure. In the process, the updates will happen.

Ad Hoc Member Winebaum stated that she was in favor of the themes from Day 1. She's just mentioning some content.

Member Wright stated that demographic data is a fact that describes the community in various ways. A plan speaks to how ordinances, policies and procedures are going to be created that are in accordance and supported by the people who live in the community.

Chair Carter commented the first part of the master plan is to put out the data to say this is where the community is now. The plan follows. It's really an informative chapter.

Planning Administrator Reed stated that the current master plan was written right after the 2010 Census came out, so it has those demographics. The timing is now right because there was just the 2020 Census and the data just came out. She continued that they want to see growth and calculate the percentages, in order to plan for the community. The updated demographics are needed in order to have a plan for the town for the land development growth and town services.

Chair Carter stated that this "introductory" chapter is needed because a lot of people are going to read the report and they need the background of where the content of the other chapters came from. People will have a common spot from which to launch to get into the content.

Ad Hoc Member Winebaum stated that the other component is doing an existing condition assessment, which informs the master plan.

Planning Administrator Reed noted that a lot of data and information is already in the master plan. It's just not up to date. As a result of the surveys and visioning, and because it was put together chapter by chapter, it has to be melded all together.

Ms. LaBranche stated that the committee discussed how the Vision Chapter would pick up on the main themes from the input received. There would be a set of appendices. One appendix would be the demographics of the town. It can be brought up to date as needed to support different topics.

Member Wright stated that he sees an executive summary being a story of who and what the town is in narrative form. These are the things that people are happy about and these are the concerns.

Planning Administrator Reed stated that the Vision Chapter could be as easy as that. The timeframe and executive summary can be used as a launching point to start planning the new master plan.

Member Sherman asked if they can start the outline with the information they have.

Member Wright pointed out that Julie is going to provide the outline and that will be used to start the narrative.

Ms. LaBranche noted that she will also include the information from the survey.

Member Sherman stated this is important. There are some people from the public who are eager to hear the results. She would like to have a product that could be shown to the public, as to where they are at.

Planning Administrator Reed noted this is what they are going to spend January doing.

Ms. LaBranche noted that over the next couple of weeks, she will be narrowing down the input, using the highest-ranking topics, and putting it into an outline.

Referring to the strengths and weaknesses, Chair Carter asked if there were things that people thought should be included in the lists that were not there. He had a couple of things that he thinks are important. Under the strengths, he thought rural character and safety were a big factor for why people like Rye. He also thinks that one of the strengths of the town is that they have strong regulations. The town actually has pretty good regulations on things. He thinks under weaknesses there's a lack of sidewalks. Rye is a lovely town and people should be able to safely walk around. If there was a sidewalk that went through the center of town, down to Lang's Corner, took a left to the elementary school and a right to the beach, there would a lot more people walking in that part of town. He pointed out that sidewalks have to be maintained and plowed. Chair Carter noted that under opportunities there was sidewalks. The lack of sidewalks was also under weaknesses.

Ms. LaBranche commented that sidewalks show up under opportunities, along with traffic calming.

Chair Carter stated this is something for them to think about as Rye becomes busy and more crowded. People think Rye is a little farming community by the seashore. The reality is there's a lot more traffic. He continued that Rye has strong regulations. In fact, the Town of Rye was cited as being pretty unfriendly to affordable housing because the zoning is too strict.

Ad Hoc Member Winebaum commented that she saw that same article, but had some reservation about it. For instance, Rye doesn't want to start to offer street parking. Street parking is fine in Portsmouth, but it's not fine in Rye.

Chair Carter noted that the point he is making is that Rye is not a laissez-faire town.

Ad Hoc Member Winebaum stated there has been plenty of issue with lack of enforcement. This is a problem.

Member Sherman stated that they have the regulations. One of the common themes was about granting variances to those regulations. People are frustrated with the fact that variances are granted. Some people live within the rules and regulations. There are others who put up monster houses and huge developments and get a lot of variances. There's an imbalance.

Chair Carter stated that enforcement of regulations is a weakness and can also be an opportunity. He thinks this came through loud and clear in the session.

Ad Hoc Member Winebaum stated that the Rye Civic League has been computing the number of variances that have been granted in the wetlands. People are becoming more informed. She commented that in her district, the lots are much smaller. People are asking for ten variances. The more hardship they have, the more variances they will grant. Other people who are asking for one variance are being told to do it another way, so they don't have to have a variance. She continued that in some towns, the system is different so not as many variances are granted. She thinks it would be helpful to review what's being done, so the town is not just granting variances.

Chair Carter asked if there are other things that should be on the summary list for SWOT.

Member Wright commented that he was not sure what data point was for "high land value". He asked how this came up as a strength.

Chair Carter replied that he thinks it has to do with people feeling that their property is appreciating. He imagines that some people like the fact that it costs a lot to live in Rye, so certain people can't move into Rye.

Member Wright commented that some people think that the town is not encouraging enough diversity.

Chair Carter stated this shows up under affordable and workforce housing. Of course, no one wants to live near that, so it's difficult to build.

Member Wright suggested changing the words "high land value" to "desirable real estate".

Ms. LaBranche noted that it shows up, three to four times, under Strengths; development and growth. She changed the wording to "high/increasing property value".

Planning Administrator Reed stated that diversity was one of the weaknesses that came out. It should be right up there front and center. She doesn't think it was just talking about property. At the table she was at, diversity came through for the types of housing and the types of people.

Member Sherman pointed out that under opportunities, open space/conservation land is seen twice in the common themes, but it's not on the front page.

Chair Carter noted it's under strengths.

Ms. LaBranche commented that she thinks it's also an opportunity.

Ad Hoc Member Winebaum stated that her table, someone mentioned executive summary of the master plan. This person had mentioned it during the update of the 2013 master plan. The town still doesn't have an executive summary. In addition to the executive summary, two people said long-term planning. She asked if long-term planning could be a common theme.

Member Wright commented that he doesn't think they want to point out that there needs to be better long-term planning in an outline of a document that purports the plan.

Ad Hoc Member Winebaum commented that she is just pointing this out as an opportunity, as there were three mentions of master plan at her table. Long term planning is a weakness, but it's also an opportunity.

Ms. LaBranche commented that she will go back and look at that table's comments.

Chair Carter stated that one thing that was not mentioned was the low tax rate, which is a strength; however, it could also be viewed as a weakness.

Ms. LaBranche pointed out that the tax rate is low; however, the land values are high which affects the taxes.

Chair Carter noted that some people mentioned that there was a lack of commercial properties in Rye. There's a feeling that it's all residential and there could be more opportunity for commercial.

Member Sherman stated that they can't tell people how to develop their property.

Member Wright stated that they can put in an ordinance to provide tax relief to business formation.

Planning Board Administrator Reed commented that this is why they need to have a visioning of what people want, so they can plan for how to get there.

Ms. LaBranche stated that part of the vision outline could bring forth the fact that there's a lack of commercial services and businesses in town. They could then look at what the tools and opportunities are that the town could explore to encourage more commercial businesses and services. This would probably translate into a later section in land use and recommendations could be developed around it. She pointed out that the State Economic Development Office has all kinds of tools and resources.

Ad Hoc Member Winebaum stated that they missed the opportunity with Route 1, which should have had more commercial.

Next Steps:

- Julie will make the changes and revisions to the summary.
- A PDF of the revised summary will be sent to Kim for distribution to the committee.
- Julie will get the community survey results to the committee within the next few days.
- Planning Administrator Reed will create a Long Range Planning page for the town's website, in order to keep the community updated on their work.
- Next meetings scheduled for January 5th 12:00 p.m. and January 20th 1:00 p.m.

Adjournment

Motion by Rob Wright to adjourn at 3:05 p.m. Seconded by Katy Sherman. All in favor.

Respectfully Submitted,
Dyana F. Ledger