

LONG RANGE PLANNING COMMITTEE MEETING

Thursday, January 20, 2022

1:00 p.m. – Rye Town Hall

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

***Ad Hoc Members Present:* Dominique Winebaum (via Zoom)**

***Also Present:* Julie LaBranche and Planning Administrator Kim Reed**

I. Call to Order

Chair Carter called the meeting to order at 1:02 p.m. and led the Pledge of Allegiance.

II. Vision Framework to present to the Planning Board

Planning Administrator Reed noted that they need to focus on the framework and come up with some steps of where to go for the Planning Board.

The committee received copies of Ms. LaBranche's revised vision framework, which was sent to everyone on January 11th.

Ms. LaBranche stated that the email of January 11th had three bullet points that she would like to go over. First, there has been a lot of community input from the surveys, workshop and public input forum. Chair Carter also provided a summary between the last meeting and this meeting of the four themes. She noted that the idea of a vision chapter is forward thinking. It's not so much trying to capture what's going on today, although it can have some elements of that in talking about emerging issues of concerns. A vision chapter is a forward-thinking chapter with actual items, such as goals and objectives. It's really a condensed summarized version of a direction for the community. That's why she was hesitant to support the recommendations to incorporate all the community survey data. A lot of that is not forward thinking. It's what people are concerned about today. The Vision Chapter is something that would not be finished or even written until the entire update process has been completed. After which, everything would be consolidated into the Vision Chapter with goals and objectives. She reiterated it's not a summary of what's happening today because that's what the rest of the Master Plan will be about.

Ms. LaBranche continued that the second bullet is about the expectations of incorporating the public input data into the Vision Chapter. Her recommendation would be that there be a separate chapter or section where all the public input is summarized and condensed. She noted they have already gone a long way towards doing that with the summary that has been created. Next is whether this committee has a consensus to move forward with the four themes, as part of the

process of developing an RFP. She thinks the committee still has some time to think about whether they want to head in that direction. The committee has talked quite a bit about sticking with the four themes.

Chair Carter stated that one thing the committee has to decide on today is to go with the theme-based approach for the Master Plan. At the moment, they have four themes.

Ms. LaBranche noted the one thing that might be missing as a theme is governance and municipal. That's a big part of the Master Plan and it may be worth adding a theme to just cover that. It's pretty complex and has lots of moving parts. It operates differently than the other four themes because it's town governance and there's structure behind that.

Chair Carter commented this is an area that didn't get much air time at the visioning session or even in the surveys.

Member Wright asked what the headline is when talking about governance.

Ms. LaBranche commented that it would address how the town's government is structured. It would also address things like the function of a Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) and some budgetary things. She suggested that a hierarchy bracket could be created showing the town structure. The chapter would explain all the tools, resources and processes of the town governance.

Member Sherman commented the Master Plan evolves. She imagines that over the next year, it's something that could be added on if it's determined that's another theme.

Ms. LaBranche agreed. She explained that the reason she didn't add it to the themes list is because it's usually only 5% to 10% of the residents who actually vote. A lot of people really don't understand the structure. They don't understand how the town works. They don't participate in voting, public hearings or the workings of a community. One of the things to talk about in a chapter like that is the different ways the community can encourage and engage more people in governance and participation. That's why she didn't push to put this in the community survey. There would be a lot of "I don't know" or "that's not important". It's an area to really explore when working on an RFP for a master plan. This is an example of how this won't be a stagnant document. It will be a work in progress as the Master Plan update moves forward.

Ms. LaBranche stated that since the last iteration of the vision framework, she added a purpose section. It calls out RSA 674:1 that talks about what the master plan is all about. The vision statement that Member Garcia had drafted was added with the additional components discussed at the last meeting. She pointed out that the main themes and goals were organized. She tried to condense the goal statements from the summary. Each goal should start with an action item. In looking at land development and growth, a lot of people commented on the fact that they were unhappy about the number of variances that were being granted by the zoning board; however, that really can't be put in the Vision Chapter as a goal. She broke this up into two parts; adopt zoning ordinances and land development regulations that protect the town's semi-rural character; and to review zoning ordinances and land development regulations to minimize negative costs

and impacts to the town, it's resources and to property owners. That's a statement that covers the comments about too many variances. It packages it into a statement that says where the town wants to go. Under that goal, it can be broken out into an objective, which could be more specific than the broader goal. She noted that she did this for all four.

Ms. LaBranche explained how she sorted the public input data to determine the high scoring items under each question. She suggested taking that information, the summary and the detailed summary from the surveys to put into its own section.

Referring to community, Ms. LaBranche pointed out that one thing that was big was communication and cell phone service. She thinks it should fall under the first goal in community. In thinking ahead to a comprehensive master plan update, if there was one section for community, that goal would be delved into in detail with some narrative paragraph about what the community would like to see. Expanding cell phone service is something that could be addressed. The goals and statements can be flushed out in greater detail in each individual chapter.

Member Sherman noted that she read some other towns master plans. A lot of it to her was "fluff". It wasn't specific things. She asked if there is a master plan that gets specific; such as, "we would like to have another cell tower by 2030".

Ms. LaBranche stated it should not be that specific. It might say "the town should engage with a consultant to gauge the cell coverage needs of the community". If there was already a study done in town, the Master Plan could refer to the study and the findings. What are the needs of the community to expand the overall cell phone service? What does the town need to move that ball forward? She pointed out that this is part of the master plan process.

Member Sherman commented that she'd like Rye's Master Plan to have a little more teeth to it.

Chair Carter asked how much more work is needed on the vision framework.

Ms. LaBranche explained that she did the first few pages to be sure she was heading in the right direction before a lot of time was spent on it. She noted that she can go through and draft some more goals. She can also attend one more meeting in February, if the committee would like to see it grow a bit more.

Chair Carter stated that he likes the organization. It's kind of an introduction for the Planning Board of what the committee has developed. He asked the committee if there are suggestions for additional goals.

Referring to land development, Chair Carter stated that one of the things that came up a number of times was enforcement of regulations. Some people said that more ordinances were needed. He thinks the zoning ordinance is in pretty good shape. He thinks the real issue with people has been the enforcement and "sticking to the letter of the law". People not only brought up zoning, but also non-functioning septic systems. It was all about inspection and enforcement. He pointed out that they don't have anything in here. He's not sure it's implied in the two goals.

Ms. LaBranche suggested adding something to that goal; “Review zoning ordinances and land development regulations, and their enforcement.”

Chair Carter agreed this should be added. He commented it’s a big issue for people. He’s not sure if it’s because people feel they’re abiding by the rules and others aren’t and they want to be sure everyone’s equally imposed upon.

Member Garcia pointed out that this speaks to what the committee has been talking about. There are perceptions that may not be accurate. That’s where the studies come in. This would be some of the next steps.

Chair Carter noted there’s an excellent report on the Parson’s Creek Watershed. There are steps in that report on how to fix it. He’s not sure the town would really be willing to do those steps. It means making people upgrade their septic systems, whether they’re functioning or not, because the ground is too porous to filter out the bacteria. The high-tech systems are needed to make it work. That report should go into the materials for the master plan consultant.

Member Wright asked if this goes back to the governance question. Maybe the answer is to not tell people they have to put in a \$50,000 septic system, but to have sewer. The real objective ought to be sewer.

Ms. LaBranche stated that one topic could be expressed in different ways across different themes. One could be new development and redevelopment. In redevelopment scenarios, septic technology has to be implemented in areas of town with high groundwater. That could be an action item. There could also be an action item under governance about how that can happen. How do enforcements take place? Is there an inspection program? She explained that the goals, objectives and action items can be cross referenced. Each one should cross reference septic systems, whether it be regulations, enforcement or inspections, etc. After each entry, there would be a reference so people could follow the trail of all the times that topic shows up in the plan. Cross referencing across the master plan is a great tool.

Chair Carter commented that the second most mentioned item was the low tax rate. People love the beaches and the low tax rate.

Member Sherman pointed out that open space came up a lot and clean water.

Chair Carter asked the committee if they have other goals they’d like to add.

Ms. LaBranche stated that she doesn’t think the plan was to actually flush out the goals. That’s not the phase they’re in right now. She just wanted to be sure the committee was okay with the approach, so she can move forward.

Member Wright commented that it’s a good approach. He asked what the next steps would be.

Ms. LaBranche explained the purpose of this project was to do community outreach, get some data, come up with an approach as to how the Master Plan may be updated, identify the themes and start thinking about a structure. Today, the committee identified a fifth theme; governance.

Member Wright stated that his preference is to have it be “how to organize our governance” because that overarches everything else.

Member Sherman asked if this is something that will evolve as the Master Plan is updated.

Member Wright replied it’s a fact. It’s how the town is organized. There are boards, committees, commissions and other entities that interoperate with each other; for example, public water utilities, and sewer commission. It would list out all the functional parts of the government and describe how the town manages.

Member Garcia stated that rather than creating another theme, she would suggest that it’s included under community. She’s not sure it needs to be separate; however, if it is, she would agree with Member Wright that it be overarching. There are people who are educated on town governance and some are not.

Ms. LaBranche stated it’s a good idea to have it upfront because it gives that overarching umbrella of how the town works. Having it as a theme doesn’t hurt at this phase. It has its own structure; statutes govern budgets, town meetings and the CIP. It’s slightly different than the four other themes in that its own entity by statute.

Member Wright stated he doesn’t think it’s a theme. It’s part of the operating paradigm. Why is this being done? This is how.

Chair Carter asked what the goals would be for town governance.

Ms. LaBranche stated they would look at the municipal survey for some of the input. She commented that she likes the fact that the town has so many commissions and boards. However, she thinks it’s inefficient for a town of this size because there are not enough people willing to man the committees.

Member Sherman pointed out that committees keep being added.

Ms. LaBranche commented that it might be a good idea to do an audit to see if there’s a more efficient way. Maybe some of the committees could be consolidated. Do the committees have enough work? Do they have too much work? Why is there so much work?

Chair Carter asked if this should be added as a fifth topic.

Member Wright commented it should be outside the themes.

Ms. LaBranche noted it could be its own section of the Vision Chapter that isn’t part of the themes.

Member Garcia pointed out that the governance of the town is part of the Master Plan. She asked why it wouldn't be a theme.

Member Wright stated they identify a purpose as a singular descriptive narrative that says why it's being done. Then there would be a vision statement that says here is what it will look like. To him, the next logical follow up, before getting into the specifics, would be how it's done. How does the town operate? What are the rules?

Planning Administrator Reed stated that she doesn't think the actual governance would go in the Master Plan.

Ms. LaBranche commented it may not be "governance". It may be referred to as "municipal organization".

Member Wright noted that he heard lots of criticism that it's hard to understand how the town operates. If the town operation and governance is described, that question is answered. From a goals perspective, what that translates into is "is that the best way to do things?". Should the town be looking to amend its operational structure? This is different than the needs of the community and the need to manage land development and growth. Those are point focused solutions.

Ms. LaBranche noted that Rye is an MS-4 community. How is Rye complying with that permit? Should there be another committee that deals with it? She continued there are a lot of statements that can be made for action items. She asked if the committee wants those to be laid out in the Vision Chapter, which reflects goals. She was pushing it to be in that section because if future steps are going to be identified, that's the place to do it.

Member Wright asked if it becomes more difficult to get to the granular detail, if it's not in themes and goals.

Ms. LaBranche explained that when cross referencing is done, the actual things that they relate to should be referenced. If it's divorced from that structure, it will be hard to do.

Chair Carter asked if there is agreement that there will be a fifth section prior to community called 'Governance and Town Operations'.

Ms. LaBranche noted these are temporary place holders that may change.

Chair Carter explained they're trying to get something together that they can present to the Planning Board that shows them the direction the committee thinks they should be going.

The committee agreed to add municipal operations and organization.

Ms. LaBranche stated that after this work is done in February, the next steps, if the committee wants to do it, would be to delve into the details of the community survey and community input. However, that could be a job for the consultant and not the committee.

Referring to the public input, Member Wright stated that from his perspective it was pretty well flushed out. The committee heard most of it. It was a self-selected group and they heard loud and clear from that group. He thinks it was fairly well advertised. It was fairly well known there was an opportunity to provide input. The people who are in town government on boards and committees have a more informed position. He stated that they should take the input they already have, solicit input from people who are making things happen and generate the recommendations from that data. He would not spend any more time trying to read the tea leaves from the public input.

Ms. LaBranche stated that one thing they haven't gone through in any kind of detail is the municipal survey. That could inform the new theme; municipal operations and organization. That's where they could get raw data. Maybe in the course of the Master Plan update they would convene with all boards to have one more conversation about the input that was received. She thinks that the first two bullets in the path forward section should probably be put on hold.

Referring to bullet number 3, Ms. LaBranche noted that this committee has landed on a theme-based approach.

**Motion by Katy Sherman to propose a comprehensive theme-based master plan update starting with the five themes identified by the committee today.
Seconded by Kathryn Garcia. All in favor.**

Ms. LaBranche stated that moving forward, the last two bullets are the ones that should really be focused on in 2022. The committee needs to start flushing out an approach to a comprehensive plan update. Things like developing the resource list would be good to start working on.

Planning Administrator Reed pointed out that she submitted a memo to the committee outlining the timeframe.

Ms. LaBranche commented that the process and structure needs to be considered; whether LRP will be the body that continues to work with the consultant to prepare the Master Plan or if there will be an extended committee.

Member Sherman stated that Dominique brought up the idea of a steering committee.

Planning Administrator Reed noted that they should wait to make that decision until a consultant is brought in.

Member Sherman commented that she wouldn't mind other people being pulled in from the community. She thought it was in the Planning Board's purview to do the Master Plan.

Chair Carter stated he likes the idea of having a steering committee that would have members from this group, someone from the Select Board, and other committees. He continued the next step is to bring a final document to the Planning Board for acceptance and to accept the idea of a theme-based approach. It needs to go to the Planning Board to be endorsed. He continued the

next step would be to seek out quotes to develop the Master Plan. He asked where the money would come from to develop an RFP to do the work.

Planning Administrator Reed explained that when it's time to do the RFP, it will be determined how much it's going to cost and where the money is going to come from.

Chair Carter asked where the money will come from in the fall, if it's not already in the budget.

Ms. LaBranche replied it will be the next budget.

Member Sherman stated they are not even going to be able to ask for the money until 2023.

Chair Carter noted that they need money to develop the RFP.

Planning Administrator Reed replied the RFP is not going to cost \$15,000. It's not going to be a huge amount of money.

Member Sherman clarified that this will be presented to the Planning Board in April. They will approve the committee doing an RFP.

Planning Administrator Reed noted that in April there will be new people on the Planning Board and it's not known who will be on the committee. Every April, the members for each committee is reevaluated. At that point, the Planning Board will decide if it's the Long Range Planning that's going to do the RFP or the Planning Administrator, bringing it back to the full board. These are discussions the Planning Board needs to have.

Ad Hoc Member Winebaum asked why the committee never had a discussion about not completing the Visioning Chapter.

Member Sherman replied that they were never charged with redoing the Visioning Chapter.

Ad Hoc Member Winebaum stated that initially back in September 2020 it was to be a complete visioning chapter. There was never any discussion as to why there isn't a whole visioning.

Chair Carter explained there was never an intent to have a whole visioning chapter at this point.

Ad Hoc Member Winebaum asked how many responses were received for the online visioning survey.

Chair Carter explained that one was received that was a couple of people who filled it out together.

Planning Administrator Reed noted it was hand delivered to her by a member of the community who had a small gathering at her house and they typed up one response.

Ms. LaBranche stated that the public information form was put on Survey Monkey. There were probably less than ten responses. She will get the number and let Dominique know. She pointed out that she reviewed the input forms that were submitted and there's nothing new that would move the dial from the summary that was already done.

Referring to the vision statement, Member Sherman commented that she thought they had talked about two sentences. She asked if there's a reason that it's one sentence.

Ms. LaBranche replied it's because it's a vision statement.

Member Garcia stated it seems to be a bit of a run-on sentence, which makes it a little unclear.

Ms. LaBranche stated that in looking at other master plan vision statements they are a bit complex.

III. Next steps after this project concludes and recommendations to the Planning Board with those steps

Planning Administrator Reed explained that the task of the committee was to come up with a vision framework. She thinks the committee is very close. There will be one more meeting and then it will be presented to the Planning Board. This has to be completed once it's presented to the Planning Board. In looking at the work Julie has done; she's done the community outreach and she's drafted all the materials. Now the final vision chapter framework is being completed and Julie has provided the results. Planning Administrator Reed continued that after this process, the next step would be a question of how does the Planning Board want to analyze the data they've received? What does the Planning Board want to do with this information?

Ms. LaBranche stated that she can create a PowerPoint presentation that shows the process the committee went through and the framework that was decided upon. It will also have a summary of the next steps.

The committee agreed this would be great to present to the Planning Board at their next meeting on February 8th.

IV. One more meeting in February

- Next meeting scheduled for February 1st, 1:00 p.m., Town Hall

Adjourn

Motion by Rob Wright to adjourn at 2:46 p.m. Seconded by Kathryn Garcia. All in favor.

Respectfully Submitted,
Dyana F. Ledger