

**RYE REGIONAL ASSOCIATION REVIEW COMMITTEE
MEETING**

Friday, March 11, 2022

5:30 p.m.

Rye Public Library

Present: Ronna Werner, Susan Cole-Ross, Linda Toumpas, Suzanne Barton, Valerie Fagin and Selectman Tom King

I. CALL TO ORDER

Selectman King called the meeting to order at 5:30 p.m.

II. INTRODUCTIONS

The members of the Committee introduced themselves:

Ronna Werner, 520 Washington Road

Susan Cole-Ross, 333 West Road

Linda Toumpas, 10 Bass Drive

Suzanne Barton, 114 Clark Road

Valerie Fagin, 5 Love Lane

Tom King, 535 Wallis Road (acting as Selectmen's Rep)

III. REVIEW COMMITTEE CHARGE

The Committee reviewed the charge from the Select Board.

The Regional Association Review Committee is charged with analyzing all funding requests received from Regional Association organizations that were previously established by warrant article. The committee will evaluate each request in terms of relevance, proportionality and benefit to the residents of Rye. Further the Committee will make recommendations to the Select Board of additional agencies which may also provide significant support to the residents of Rye, for consideration. The Committee will prepare a final report with recommendations to the Select Board no later than July 1, 2022.

The Committee will consist of not more than 7 members and shall be appointed by the Select Board for an initial term ending July 31, 2022. The Committee will participate in multiple discussions with the Select Board over the term and make a final presentation at a Select Board meeting. Staff members may be appointed as non-voting

members of the committee. It is the Select Board's intent to sunset this committee after completion of its charge, unless the Select Board votes to continue the committee.

The Town of Rye Regional Association Review Committee shall follow the Rules of Procedure for Committees established by the Select Board.

IV. ELECT CHAIRMAN, VICE-CHAIRMAN & CLERK

Motion by Tom King to appoint Linda Toumpas as chair. Seconded by Susan Cole-Ross. All in favor.

Motion by Suzanne Barton to appoint Susan Cole-Ross as vice-chair. Seconded by Valerie Fagin. All in favor.

Motion by Susan Cole-Ross to appoint Ronna Werner as clerk. Seconded by Suzanne Barton. All in favor.

V. NEXT STEPS

Chair Toumpas asked Selectman King to explain how this came about. She also asked how the agencies come up with the amount they request. Reading the letter that was sent out to agencies last July, it sounds as if it's "tell us what you want". It seems they wrote in \$56,000 worth of requests and the Town said "okay, that's the budget for this year." She noted there are five agencies that take up over 50% of the budget amount. She thinks the Town needs to ask different questions to organizations that are requesting money.

Selectman King explained that the organizations are presented to the Town by citizen petition warrant articles. The warrant article will go through the Deliberative Session and then to town vote. If it is passed, it will be added to the list. Every year, the organization will receive a letter from the Town and they reply with what they want, which will go into the budget. There is no review or analysis and this list has built up over decades. He noted that there is only one organization that has asked for an increase.

Vice-Chair Cole-Ross asked if a request for an increase has to go to a warrant article.

Selectman King replied no.

Vice-Chair Cole-Ross clarified that they are approved openly, not for an amount.

Selectman King confirmed. He explained that the organization cannot receive money without being approved by a warrant article. He further explained that the original warrant article has an amount of money, but it doesn't go back for a vote for an increase. He continued that some of the organizations are pretty obvious and some are not. It looks like one organization has merged with another. That's why he convinced the Select Board to have this review in order to make

some sense of the requests. Selectman King pointed out that what really shocked him was the Cross Roads House letter where they talked about how many nights Rye's residents were in the Cross Roads House last year. That was surprising to him. This might explain the reason for the amount of money they request versus some of the other organizations. However, he does not feel qualified to make those kinds of judgements.

Selectman King noted that the organizations are asked how much support they provide for to the Town; however, it can't be ranked just on that. For instance, the Town doesn't want to have any "customers" for a child sexual assault organization, but that doesn't mean they shouldn't receive funding. He doesn't know how to make sense of this, so that is why the Committee is here.

Member Barton asked how much of the taxpayers' money is put towards the support of these organizations.

Selectman King noted that the town budget is roughly \$10,000,000., so \$10,000 is .01 on the mill rate. The amount of \$50,000 would be .05 on the mill rate.

Member Barton commented that she wanted to put this in perspective. She noted that she has had a lot of familiarity with this because she has done a lot of social services type work. Being in healthcare, she sees that there's a lot of cross over. Something the Committee should keep in mind is that because of HIPAA, when it comes to healthcare situations, people can't really be forthcoming as to who is receiving services. When it comes to confidentiality, people aren't really talking about how they spent months at the homeless shelter.

Chair Toumpas commented that she had no idea this existed in this town. She bets that most people in town don't know about these organizations.

Vice-Chair Cole-Ross noted now that there's a streamed committee meeting, there will be more requests.

Member Barton stated that there is no community that is immune to any of this. Specifically speaking about sexual assault, one in four girls before the age of 18, regardless of where they live, will be assaulted and one in six boys before the age of 18. Domestic violence is one in four, no matter where they live.

Member Werner commented that she would be happy to see in a town report a publication about these specifics. It's really important to highlight why the Town gives to the organizations. Socioeconomics and the zip code does not matter to addiction and sexual abuse.

Member Barton agreed. She pointed out that she did some work with A Safe Place, which is now A Safe Haven. One of the shelter managers said to her that the biggest fear was the affluent women because they are not going to go to a shelter. Where do they go? Member Barton commented that a lot of the services are needed in the community.

Selectman King stated this is why the Select Board is asking for the Committee to make some sense of the organizations and proportionality. He suspects that part of the final recommendation might be to solicit other organizations to apply.

Vice-Chair Cole-Ross asked if the budget from other organizations has to be cut in order to do this.

Selectman King replied no. He explained this is just a budget line item. New organizations who are invited to apply would have to go to a warrant article. The money would be in the budget so it would be there if the warrant article passed.

Chair Toumpas stated that part of the reason for doing this is for organizations that help serve the citizens of Rye. Most of the applications came back with the numbers of how many citizens that were served by their organization. She pointed out that there isn't something written that talks about what this committee was formed for. Chair Toumpas continued that there are a lot of great agencies and all are looking for money.

Chair Toumpas noted that Seacoast Visiting Nurses is known as Home Health VNA of New Hampshire. They are a multi-million-dollar nonprofit located in Massachusetts. They have thirteen thousand employees. They are asking for the largest amount of almost \$10,000. They gave all kinds of information about their budget and what they do. However, there is no documentation about how many Rye residents are served. There was another VNA that she had spoken with who said they really don't have much of a presence in Rye. She continued that it's not that VNA isn't a good organization, but there's Cornerstone which is a great organization that has a lot of members in the Seacoast. That's why she talked about the letters to organizations being really specific about what they do for Rye. She thinks the best way to approach this is to take one at a time and go through them. She reiterated that there are five organizations that are requesting 53% of the total amount. She pointed out that the Richie McFarland Organization serves children with disabilities and helps their families connect with other families. In their letter, there is nothing mentioned about how many children are served in Rye. It's a good organization, but there may be others that serve Rye in a different way.

Member Werner stated that she thinks people brought the organizations forward in a random way because of a personal need and then it was never questioned again. She thinks it's good that the Committee convened and these questions are being raised. Some of the organizations do not need help from Rye. There may be others that no one would suspect who may be really helping Rye families.

Member Barton noted that she has a personal story with Richie McFarland. She happened to marry someone who had to use that as a resource for his child. The reason she brought this up is because they don't know how an organization may impact a neighbor.

Chair Toumpas pointed out that the Seacoast Mental Health Center requested \$6,000. They said in their letter that they served 101 Rye residents with over 1,000 hours of service. That's the kind of information they should see. It's not asking for stories or specifics. If an organization is not doing much right now, maybe they apply next year.

Selectman King noted that there are certain questions that are asked and sometimes those don't even get answered. However, there's no one that works this that's going to review these and follow up on the unanswered questions.

Vice-Chair Cole-Ross explained that most grantors don't. The organizations submit and they either get the funding or they don't. The submissions are not edited. If it's not good enough, they don't get it.

Selectman King commented these may be worthy organizations. An easy question is "how many Rye residents were served?" Some of them just ignore this question. Maybe it's because they didn't want to say they served none, but they shouldn't be afraid of that. He reiterated that with some organizations they don't want to have anyone being served.

Member Fagin asked if there can be a certain amount allowed for organizations that directly benefit individuals and this can be proved. Maybe there's another group that can be funded that may impact the community within a certain mileage, so the Town is affected that way. Some might be directly and some not as direct, but impactful.

Member Werner stated that she has written a lot of grants and have been called on the phone to answer some questions. A lot of times, if the question wasn't answered, it would get thrown in the basket. If the letter addresses all the information, and it's fine-tuned, and three organizations of the eighteen that applied for 2023 don't say how many Rye families they serve, they can come back next year. The door is not being closed. If the organization doesn't respond to the questions that are legitimate, they don't get funded that year.

Selectman King pointed out that they should be given a chance. Someone should call and ask if they forgot to answer the question.

Chair Toumpas commented that they want to be sure that the organizations are not taking it for granted. Rye is on a donation list and the letters aren't just being sent out without being changed. As the Committee goes through each one and reads through the letters, they can determine if it's a definite "yes" or if more information is needed. She thinks they will come to a conclusion with that. Chair Toumpas pointed out that the letters went out in July 2021, but the Committee is meeting now. They send in letters and months later it's being reviewed. She asked if the Committee would be better served looking at the letters in September or October.

Selectman King commented that could be one way of doing it. He pointed out that some of the questions may not be the best questions. The Committee has the ability to influence some of the questions that are going to go out in July of this year. If the Committee asks to continue in order to review these in September, the Select Board would be thrilled. Part of the initial recommendation might be better questions and a methodology to the types of organizations.

Vice-Chair Cole-Ross clarified that the charge is not for this year. It's for setting it up for next year.

Selectman King stated that he would hope the Committee would give recommendations on a percentage for each organization. If there are twenty-five agencies in different categories, maybe 50% will be given to agencies directly involved, 30% to indirect and 20% to something else. If the budget can be increased, they would get more.

Vice-Chair Cole-Ross noted that there could be a spreadsheet on what they want to give preference to; relevance, proportionality, and benefit to residents. There's also transparency, whether it's a 501c3 and whether it's a New Hampshire charitable foundation. The other piece is categories. The Committee may want to look from a higher view. How many organizations serve families? How many serves disaster relief? How many address hunger, addiction or abuse? The Committee may find they want to diversify a little more and therefore, make some adjustments over time.

Member Werner commented that they do need some parameters. Otherwise, it's a "free for all", which is what it has been with no one asking questions.

Selectman King noted that the Committee can define their own parameters.

Member Fagin asked if the organizations have to resubmit every year.

Selectman King confirmed. He explained that now that the budget for 2022 has been passed, those organizations will get the money requested for this year. He further explained that it's a line item in the budget for \$56,000 for charity.

Member Werner suggested that since this has already been allotted by town vote, maybe they need to just ask questions.

Chair Toumpas commented that she is confused by the process. It seems the organizations' requests should be approved prior to the budget. Otherwise, the Committee is just saying that whatever has appeared gets to go. She asked if they will get the amount because it's already been budgeted.

Selectman King confirmed.

Vice-Chair Cole-Ross pointed out that they are preparing for September.

It was noted that this is the first committee to do this type of review.

Chair Toumpas stated that they need the purpose of the Committee and a mission statement of what they are tasked to do.

Vice-Chair Cole-Ross pointed out that they have the Select Board's charge, not a mission statement, and they do what they say.

Selectman King commented that the Select Board doesn't know how to approach this. The Committee has brought up a lot of valid points.

Member Werner stated that she thinks the Committee needs to establish the categories and what the times are asking for. She would be happy with just the public education piece.

Selectman King pointed out that they would like to have better questions for this next cycle. The organizations are going to come back with the same amount, as they've been successful for decades. Any work that is done now in regards to proportionality would be applicable for next year also.

Member Werner commented that the Committee's first charge might be to rewrite the request.

Chair Toumpas asked if an organization can be removed without a warrant article.

Selectman King noted that he is going to ask town counsel whether they can remove or reduce below the limit of the original warrant article.

Member Fagin stated that if the Committee had a mission statement and a purpose, it would tie in with the letter and it would meet some of the criteria.

Member Werner agreed it would help the Committee in making decisions. They are not only rewriting the letter; they are saying what they're priorities are.

Member Fagin stated that at her church, she is part of something called Shared Plate. Every Sunday when they collect money, half the proceeds go to a nonprofit. Part of that is educating the congregation about that organization. The education piece is important because people don't know this is happening in Rye. There may be some way to communicate what has been given, what the purpose of that organization is and how they impact the community. This is not only for education but someone may say they want to donate to that organization. It helps with visibility.

Member Barton noted that they are looking at this through the lens of a committee, town's people and taxpayers. They are not looking at this through the lens of being inside a nonprofit. If they haven't worked for a nonprofit, they probably don't have a good idea of how a nonprofit works or how they are all different. For example, with the Next Generation Shelter, they don't know if this huge organization receives a certain amount of federal funding for certain categories with nothing coming in for the shelter. They may have no choice but to go to communities for help. There are a lot of assumptions being made, but they are not inside. She commented that she has been inside. Organizations are frustrated because they are underpaid, overburdened and nobody wants to give. Member Barton continued that Rye is not a poor community. What type of community do we want to be? Do we want to be the type of community that only takes care of our bubble? She pointed out that there are a lot of communities that might be served where the burden is bigger. However, those communities might not have the funding to give to these organizations. Does Rye want to be the "big sister"? Maybe only three residents of Rye were served, but it's doing something for the greater good. People are interconnected and are going to be out beyond Rye. What is done, or not done, to help other people in neighboring communities is going to affect what happens to Rye residents and family members. All of this trickles down

and trickles out. She commented it's not that they should be "rubber stamping" and giving money to people who don't need it. At some point they have to hope that people wouldn't be asking for it if they didn't need it.

Member Fagin stated that as part of the mission and education, there should be what kind of community Rye is. What kind of work do they do when they are given a budget where they can give money?

Chair Toumpas pointed out that most of the requests that came through were smaller amounts. They gave the information that was needed and how many people were served. As the Committee looks through these requests, they will start to get answers on some of the questions, such as, what do they really do for Rye? The majority of these are not asking for a lot.

Member Werner commented that in going through each request, they will come to a consensus.

Chair Toumpas stated that people may think of Rye as the rich community. However, it doesn't matter, rich or poor, they still have all the same social needs that come up. It could be any family in town. Except for a couple, they did serve the residents of Rye. They served a need and were there for what needed to be done for that family.

Vice-Chair Cole-Ross pointed out that the needs vary. There are times when the need is in one area and times when it's in another. The idea of once it is on the warrant the Town always gives to it, may not be the best use of taxpayers' funds.

Member Werner stated that if they have a mission statement, if a petition comes for a warrant article, they could say in a respectful way that "we're sorry and hope you come back next year, but that's not a top priority for us." It's important to tell the Town how much they are spending as a household per year on nonprofits that serve the greater good. It's okay to turn down a request.

Vice-Chair Cole-Ross commented that she's not sure that it is. It's been on a warrant article and voted on by the taxpayers.

Selectman King stated that he believes the way it is worded, the Town is not obligated to donate to them. They have requested an amount, but it's not obligated. He noted that he has a list of questions for town counsel to answer.

Vice-Chair Cole-Ross asked for a spreadsheet listing the organizations with the amount they received from Rye over the last five years.

Selectman King agreed to get this information for the Committee.

There was some discussion about how the Committee would like to set up the spreadsheet and what categories should be included.

Note: *The live-stream ended; however, the Committee continued with discussion about questions to present to town counsel. They also discussed future meeting dates/times.*

ADJOURNMENT

The meeting adjourned at approximately 7:20 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,
Dyana F. Ledger