

RYE TOWN CENTER COMMITTEE
Wednesday, December 16, 2020
5:30 p.m. – Via Zoom

*Present: Chair Karen Stewart; Kaitlyn Coffey; John Mitchell; John Loftus; Victor Azzi and
Selectmen's Rep: Mae Bradshaw*

I. Call to Order and Pledge of Allegiance

Chair Stewart called the meeting to order 5:34 p.m. and led the Pledge of Allegiance.

Statement by Karen Stewart:

As the Select Board Representative of the Rye Historic District Commission, I find that due to the State of Emergency declared by the Governor as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic and in accordance with the Governor's Emergency Order #12 pursuant to Executive Order 2020-04, this public body is authorized to meet electronically.

Please note that there is no physical location to observe and listen contemporaneously to this meeting, which was authorized pursuant to the Governor's Emergency Order. However, in accordance with the Emergency Order. However, in accordance with the Emergency Order, I am confirming that we are:

- a) Providing public access to the meeting by telephone, with additional access possibilities by video and other electronic means. We are utilizing Zoom for this electronic meeting. All members of the Historic District Commission have the ability to communicate contemporaneously during this meeting through this platform, and the public has access to contemporaneously listen and, if necessary, participate in this meeting through dialing the following phone number: 646-558-8656 and Password: 654123 or by clicking on the following website address: www.zoom.com ID #837-5826-8538.
- b) Public notice has been provided to the public for the necessary information for accessing the meeting, including how to access the meeting using Zoom telephonically. Instructions have also been provided on the Town of Rye website town.rye.nh.us
- c) Providing a mechanism for the public to alert the public body during the meeting if there are problems with access.
If anyone has a problem, call 603-964-5523 or e-mail Janice at Jireland2@town.rye.nh.us.
- d) Adjourning the meeting if the public is unable to access the meeting.
In the event the public is unable to access the meeting, the meeting will be adjourned and rescheduled.

Please note that all votes that are taken during this meeting shall be done by roll call vote.

Roll call attendance:

- John Loftus
- Victor Azzi
- John Mitchell
- Kaitlyn Coffey
- Karen Stewart
- Mae Bradshaw

Note: The Members stated where they were located and confirmed that they were the only ones in the room for the meeting.

II. New Members

Chair Stewart introduced Lydia Tilsley and asked her to introduce herself.

Ms. Tilsley stated that she moved to Rye in September 2018 from Connecticut, after having summered here for several years. She lives at 17 Central Road across the street from the Town Hall. Her historic home was once the parsonage for the Methodist church which is now the Town Hall. She is very interested in the Town Center. When she first moved to Town, she read the Town Newsletter and learned about the Rye Center Committee and knew that she wanted to become a part of this committee, in order to help form the vision of Town Center and to help Rye become a great community.

Chair Stewart welcomed Ms. Tilsley to the committee.

Chair Stewart explained that Funi Burdick was not able to be at the meeting because of another commitment. Chair Stewart stated that Ms. Burdick is also very interested in becoming a member. Ms. Burdick splits her time between Rye and Edgartown, MA, where she is the president and C.E.O. of the Martha's Vineyard Preservation Trust. Ms. Burdick has lived in Rye for about a year. Ms. Burdick is an architect and specializes in preservation and repurposing buildings. Chair Stewart stated that Ms. Burdick is a visionary that conceptualizes and sees things in a 3-D perspective, which will be a huge asset to this committee.

Chair Stewart asked for a roll call vote to nominate Lydia Tilsley as a member to the Rye Center Committee.

Roll Call Vote: Karen Stewart – Aye; John Loftus – Aye; John Mitchell – Aye; Kaitlyn Coffey – Aye; Victor Azzi – Aye; Mae Bradshaw – Aye.

Motion Passed.

Chair Stewart asked for a roll call vote to nominate Funi Burdick as a member to the Rye Center Committee.

Roll Call Vote: Karen Stewart – Aye; John Loftus – Aye; John Mitchell – Aye; Kaitlyn Coffey – Aye; Victor Azzi – Aye; Mae Bradshaw – Aye.

Motion Passed.

Chair Stewart will send a letter of recommendation to the Select Board for their review and appointments.

III. TAP Grant Status

Chair Stewart reported that she has heard that the State is intending to move forward with the TAP Grant Program in January. If the Committee is still interested in pursuing the grant, there are a couple of things that the committee still needs to do. One is to submit a letter of interest. Kathy Hodsdon has offered to help write the letter.

Selectwoman Bradshaw stated that she has completed the application on the form for last year. She was not sure if it is the same form that will be used this year. She reminded the committee that Phil Winslow and John Loftus gathered letters of recommendation to go with the application, that will need to be updated. There are a few other documents that will be needed relating to the Town's qualifications, such as with the Safe Routes to School Program. Those documents are available and Selectwoman Bradshaw added that she will pull the information together. She said that she would meet with Town Administrator Bergeron tomorrow and will have her forward the information to Chair Stewart for her review. She felt that there will not be much left to do, other than pinning down the budget, as the figures may have changed in the past year.

Chair Stewart stated that that was a good point. They will need the budget looked at again, and they will need a budget to hire that done.

Selectwoman Bradshaw agreed and stated that the Select Board has not discussed this, but it maybe something that they should talk about at their meeting on the 28th.

It was decided that Chair Stewart will ask Kathy Hodsdon to write the Letter of Interest.

IV. 2021 Warrant Article (TAP Local Match)

Chair Stewart informed the Committee that the 2020 warrant article for the TAP Grant will have expired. So, in order to pursue the TAP Grant, they will have to write a 2021 Warrant Article for the TAP local match.

Selectwoman Bradshaw recommended just using the same wording from the 2020 warrant article. She reminded the committee that the grant was a 40/60 split grant. However, last year they had asked the Town to pay more than the 40%. She asked if the committee wanted to rethink that.

Chair Stewart recommended that there be a preamble or a disclaimer that clearly states that the Yes vote will extend the prior approval. She added that she does not want anyone to think that they are asking for more money. Chair Stewart offered to find the warrant article from last year and to draft a statement to go with it. She will send out the draft statement for the group to review. If they have any comments, they should send them back to her directly.

Selectwoman Bradshaw stated that it will have to be presented to the Budget Committee and the Select Board. The Budget Committee will be reviewing the warrant articles on January 6th.

There was discussion regarding the historic lighting to define the Historic District. Selectwoman Bradshaw suggested that they look at the minutes from the meeting last year to see where they stand on the budget for the lighting and if they need more money. They should do another warrant article for the seed money for some other grant, like an LCHIP. LCHIP will be coming up in the fall. The Letter of interest will have to be done soon.

After further discussion, it was decided that they would just present the TAP Grant warrant article this year. The goal is to coordinate the funding of the grants. Therefore, it was decided to pursue any other grant funding in the next grant cycle. By the time the TAP Grant money is available for use, it will be spring of 2022.

V. Other Business

The Committee discussed plans to hold their meetings once a month, preferably on Wednesday nights. Chair Stewart will send out the draft language for the warrant article and the committee will meet on Monday, January 4th at 5:30 to discuss it and vote on it.

Chair Stewart also stated that the Committee has a new charter, so on the 4th, they will elect new officers.

Chair Stewart expressed some concern regarding the new charter. She explained that she had a conversation back in the summer with Selectman Winslow regarding the charter. He assured her that the Board of Selectman would draft the charter and that it would then be sent to the committee for review and edits. Then the Board of Selectman would vote on it. The committee met in July and made very minimal changes and updates. There were some easy language changes and some nuances they wanted to capture.

Chair Stewart read the Rye Town Center Committee Charge as it stands at this time as follows:

The Committee is charged with weighing the various considerations and options presented by Plan NH and incorporating those to create a comprehensive plan for a Town Center (as defined from the Old Trolley Barn to Grange park). The Committee shall evaluate the Plan NH Charrette, town owned assets, all other potential available buildings in the Town's Center, infrastructure in the Town, prior committee work, and studies and work with various other Town Committees to achieve this plan. Included in this plan will be the goal to provide ADA work spaces for our Town employees and adequate meeting and community activity spaces. The Committee shall consider the economic impact on the Rye taxpayer in its recommendation to the Select Board. The Committee shall work collaboratively with the Select Board in the development of this plan for the Rye Town Center. Further, the Select Board request that the Rye Town Center Committee focus on completing the application of the Transportation Alternative Plans Grant and any warrant articles thereto.

The Committee will consist of no more the 8 members including a Selectman's representative and shall be appointed by the Select Board for an initial term ending March 21, 2023. Over the term, the Committee will participate in discussion with and make a final presentation to the Select Board. Staff members may be appointed as non-voting members of the Committee. It is the intent of the Select Board to sunset this Committee after the completion of its charge, unless the members of the Board vote to continue the Committee.

Chair Stewart suggested that there are some additions to this that she would like the Committee to reflect on and discuss. Also, there are some issues that she would like to clean up. One thing is that the Committee will make a final presentation to the Select Board. She felt that it reads as though they will be making a final presentation in March of 2023. She felt that the Committee will be making many more presentations along the way.

Selectwoman Bradshaw agreed that there would be many meetings along the way. She pointed out that that is what working collaboratively and the participation in discussions with the Select Board suggest.

Chair Stewart also pointed out that this is not the initial term. She also pointed out that in the draft that was submitted there were two things that the Committee wanted to clean up; one is the language around the Plan NH findings, some of it is the verbatim pick up from the last charter. She pointed out that the Committee has already done a lot of that work. There are also some language things; like the Committee creating a comprehensive plan. The Committee agreed that it should be their charter to holistically propose what a plan might be. However, she felt that a professional should create the final plan.

Member Azzi disagreed and stated that from the beginning a comprehensive plan was desirable to have for the Rye Town Center. Planning is an essential part of any good community. If not this Committee; who should develop a comprehensive plan? He pointed out that this Committee is not doing the analysis, the engineering, and the development of the traffic plan of the safety and improvements of the travel lanes on Washington Road; however, this Committee is providing the oversight of the professional consultant that has been retained to do that. He added that if the goal is to develop a comprehensive plan; it could be done by an outside consultant, however, that consultant will need direction from someone. That should be this Committee.

Chair Stewart agreed. She just wanted to clarify that this Committee would not be able, on its own, to develop that concrete plan.

Member Loftus stated that he is in favor of having meetings every two weeks because there is a lot of work to do. For example, the Trolley Barn. He doesn't think the Town should sell it and has a lot of reasons why. The TD Bank building; what is the Town going to do with that building and what about the land behind it?

Member Mitchell stated that he felt that it is even more important now for the Committee to carry on with the work that they have already started. The way that he interprets the language of the charter is that someone does have to come up with an overall structure to things, while pulling in qualified people to do the design work. He sees this phase as just like what they went through with the bike lines and the sidewalks and the lighting. He feels that the committee members all have qualifications. They all know the Town and have tools and resources (like the Plan NH report). They all have their visions of what the Town Center should be or could be. He added that they should use those resources to develop a comprehensive plan, because there isn't one. He stressed that they should continue on and where they are not qualified, bring in the consultants that are. He felt that this is the Committee's duty to the Town; discuss what is best for the Town. They should use their knowledge of the Town and their varied expertise, the tool that has been given to them and come up with a plan, not just for now, but for a hundred years from now. He added that the TAP Grant work took up a large portion of their work last year, but that was just the first step of a bigger plan. They need to continue on from there.

Member Loftus agreed. The TAP portion of the work was huge, because it lays out the basic road ways and pathways. Now the Committee will be looking at the individual buildings and how they interact with that infrastructure. He feels that there should now be a discussion on each building.

It was agreed that there may be more work on the traffic flow ;such as, at the intersection of Washington and Central Road.

Member Mitchell stated that he is interested in the accessibility of the whole Town Center; how it's all interconnected and how it can be connected in the future. He asked if the recreation center is still being planned for behind the church and what will be going where the Parsonage used to be.

Selectwoman Bradshaw stated that she can't talk about the litigation. However, at the last Select Board meeting, the Board said that this Committee was authorized to proceed with the TAP Grant. What is not part of the charge immediately, is to get involved with the buildings, because there is still not clarity until perhaps after the March election. The charge states working collaboratively with the Select Board and at this point the Board is not going to entertain any other plan regarding the buildings, until the litigation is over and that could be a while. The Library Trustees have filed litigation and that is still pending. There is a petitioned warrant article that has an uncertainty as to what it will lead to by the electors. Given those uncertainties, for the Committee to spend a whole lot of attention on properties that the Town may or may not own, and that the electors or the courts are dealing with, would be a waste of time. If the Town loses the TD Bank exchange because of the vote or the court decision, then the Committee is stuck with coming up with what to do with the Town employees; hence the language in the new charge, ***"Included in this plan will be the goal to provide ADA work spaces for our Town employees and adequate meeting and community activity spaces."***

Member Loftus interjected that it seemed to him that Select Chair Winslow is telling the Committee not to do anything, when they as a Committee are supposed to be advising the Town and being the spokesman for the Town's people.

Selectwoman Bradshaw reminded him that there is no certainty as to what the Committee will be dealing with at this time.

Member Loftus agreed that there is no certainty, but that doesn't preclude them from having ideas and discussions.

Selectwoman Bradshaw reminded the Committee that they are not representing the Town's people. They are representing the Select Board. They are a Committee of the Select Board to advised them.

Member Loftus interjected for the Town's people.

Chair Stewart stated that her thought back in the summer was why the Committee would meet to discuss this. She felt that they would not have any effect or any impact, because it felt like the Select Board was already on a path.

Selectwoman Bradshaw agreed and stated that they still are. They are looking for a place that they can move the staff too, safely. That is the first priority of the Town.

Member Loftus reminded the Committee that the Select Board will make the final decision, as that is what they were elected to do. The Committee is just an advisory committee. The Committee is eight people with ideas, who know people throughout the Town.

Selectwoman Bradshaw agreed and stated that the Select Board wants the advice.

Member Coffey suggested that the Committee could have an A idea or a B idea, depending on each circumstance because they don't know what is going to happen with the buildings. Also, she has been following Facebook during the last year and reading what people are posting in town. She stated that from the comments, she doesn't know if the general public understood how much work and time this Committee put into the TAP Grant. People are saying "What about the Town Center Committee, aren't they putting together a plan?" People are looking for a plan, even if it is in the works. An overall plan. She understands that it is going to have a lot of moving parts because of the buildings.

Selectwoman Bradshaw stated that the Select Board is sensitive to this and appreciates that the Town is looking for this. They also appreciate that the Committee is eager to do this. They just don't want to see the Committee spinning their wheels, if things are not more clearly defined.

Member Loftus pointed out things will never be clearly defined unless they are discussed and the problems worked out.

Chair Stewart stated that they should have a meeting on January 4th. At that point, they will have a revised warrant article to discuss and amend if needed. She asked Selectwoman Bradshaw for a forecast.

Selectwoman Bradshaw responded that the reason she asked the Select Board for an extension on the charter until March of 2023 was two-folded. One was that the TAP Grant could have the Committee actually working on the Town Center, paying for all that and finishing it (with all the engineering and the construction they certainly could be looking at 2023.) Second is because of all the uncertainty that is going on now surrounding the buildings, it could be three-to-six-month window before the Committee can get back to work. This will give the Committee a good length of time to get the work done. She added that hopefully it is a short window of uncertainty.

Member Loftus pointed out that with any Committee like this, there will be discussion about things that will happen and things that will not happen. There must be plan A and plan B. There don't have to have deals, but the discussion will lead to some resolution within the Committee as to what is the desired direction to take.

Selectwoman Bradshaw suggested that the Committee discuss what the Town will do with the four acres of land behind the bank if the deal goes through.

Chair Stewart also pointed out that there could be an empty .2-acre lot in the Center of Town that will need some thought, if the bank deal does not go through.

Selectwoman Bradshaw responded that is proposed as open space and they will have to see what happens.

Chair Stewart asked for any other business before the Committee. She stated that she hears the desire to stay engaged and having the conversations. She said they can sit around and share ideas, but will they make sense when the all the chips fall? Will the Select Board be open to recommendations presented by this Committee? She felt that the Committee is comprised of individuals that have a lot of great ideas and brains. The Select Board has the benefit of most of them being involved in the Town and knowing the challenges that the Town is up against. She felt

that the Committee should continue to meet and talk. She suggested that their first order of business could be to decide what the 3 to 6 months of uncertainty will look like for the Committee. What the Committee should focus on during that time.

Selectwoman Bradshaw pointed out that the first month should be the warrant article and the second month needs to be the TAP Grant application and to find out who the engineers are going to be by writing up the RFP.

ADJOURNMENT

Motion by John Loftus to Adjourn at 6:54 p.m. Seconded by John Mae Bradshaw.

Roll Call Vote: Mae Bradshaw – Aye; Victor Azzi – Aye; John Mitchell – Aye; Kaitlyn Coffey – Aye; John Loftus – Aye; Karen Stewart – Aye.

Motion passed.

Respectfully Submitted,
Dyana F, Ledger