

**RYE TOWN CENTER COMMITTEE
MEETING
Wednesday, February 7, 2024, 5:30 p.m.
Rye Town Hall**

Present: Chair John Loftus, Victor Azzi, Kaitlyn Coffey, and Lindsay Gray

Also Present: Library Trustees; Michael Moody, Jeff Ross, and Rachel McCann

I. Call to Order

Chair Loftus called the meeting to order at 5:30 p.m. and led the Pledge of Allegiance.

II. Discussion with Library Trustees

Library Trustees met with the Town Center Committee to discuss the plans for the Library Common. Library Trustee Michael Moody noted that since the Library has acquired the rights to control the former Parsonage property, the Trustees have been analyzing different options for what might be best for the Town and Library. The proposal is to focus on the parcel to make a more welcoming spot for library programs, and events, as well as a place for information gatherings. The Town has spoken time and time again about how they want a vibrant town center. The goal is to have this parcel be the centerpiece of creating a more vibrant town center. The proposal includes a performance structure; such as, a pavilion centered on the lawn towards the rear of the parcel. The area will be designed so it's a spot where people can come together and gather. The intent is for it to be an iconic, focal point in the Town Center. Along the same lines of having gathering space, the proposal includes the entry plaza by the entrance of the Library to create space for tables and umbrellas, so people can gather. The proposal also includes two seating areas for reading or for small groups to gather. The Trustees think that the combination of having the performance structure and the smaller gathering areas will serve the Town well. The final piece of the proposal is to add a stonewall along the front of Washington Road. It's felt that aesthetically it ties into Rye, while also providing a visual and sound barrier. The proposal also includes native plantings and garden spaces on the parcel, while maintaining appropriate open space.

Trustee Moody noted that in terms of funding, the Trustees have initial estimates and it's felt that the project can be completed with a \$500,000 budget. The Library has asked the Town, through a warrant article, to fund a third of the project. The Library is committed to using existing funds, as well as doing some fundraising to reach the goal. He pointed out that for a house that is assessed at \$800,000., this is a onetime ask of \$38.00 from the taxpayers. The Trustees feel this is a small ask for a project that will have a big impact on the Town Center.

Trustee Jeff Ross noted that the Trustees have been before the Rye Town Center Committee in the past. The Library has always been interested in what they can do to be a catalyst to create the space that's necessary in the Center of Town. It makes sense for the Library to be involved in the process, as it sets right in the center of town. The other thing that makes the Library a good partner is that its job is to bring people into the Center of Town for programming. This would add space for programming, which is one role of the Library's strategic planning; particularly, for arts and music. As a Budget Committee Member, and Library Trustee, the question for him has been how is this going to happen and who's going to do it, not just what's going to happen. The Library Trustees recognize that they can be that "who." He pointed out that they are only asking for \$160,000 from the Town. The rest of the money is either in hand with the Trustees, or will be raised through fundraising. The warrant article is the only ask of the taxpayers.

Chair Loftus commented that in looking at the total impact that should be made, he thinks this is a step in the wrong direction. In the beginning, the Museum was going to be moved. There is also a septic system, which may involve taking apart part of the parking lot. He thinks that before this plan is started, there should be a total plan that shows the whole plan.

Trustee Ross noted that they did a plan and the Trustees walked away from it because it had a cost estimate of 2.5 million dollars. To continue with architects to design the project would have costs thousands of dollars. He pointed out that this was presented to the Town Center Committee a couple of years ago.

Trustee Moody stated that he agrees that in the best of all worlds, they should have a comprehensive plan that could happen in the space. The Library is cautiously optimistic that the Town is going to support the request for \$160,000. The Trustees would not be confident with a much larger request at this time. He continued that the Library does expect to expand someday down the road, but the logical space for expansion is off the rear of the building. It's felt that this can be done with minimal disruption to the Library Common. This plan today won't be creating something that will have to be torn up, if the Library decides to move forward with an expansion.

Chair Loftus commented that he would rather see a whole plan developed with the Library trying to raise the funds for that plan. If that were to fail, the Library could then scale back to something like this proposal.

Trustee Ross replied that the Trustees feel they did that. They didn't feel that 2.5 million dollars was feasible and wasn't a good use of funds. It would've been something that would require all sorts of coordination with the Historical Society, and Select Board. It probably would've involved several seven figure warrant articles. He noted that several years ago, the Library had engaged a fundraising consultant for the expansion of the Library. The consultant's research indicated that while there were a lot of people interested in donating to the Library, they were not excited about doing it until and when the Town had a plan for the entire Town Center; including, resolving all the issues with the Town Hall building. He pointed out that this wouldn't have happened with just the Library. The expansion plan wouldn't be possible without coordination

and mutual backing of the plan and issues with a commitment for Rye Town Center. He commented that the best thing to do at this time is to let the Library “kick off the ball” and see where this project can go.

Trustee Rachel McCann commented that she agrees that they shouldn’t rush into something. However, she thinks people are ready to see something happen.

Trustee Ross commented that the Trustees are also interested in what the Town Center Committee is planning for the Center of Town. He doesn’t feel the Library is doing anything that would interfere with changes planned for the Center of Town through the TAP Grant. He noted that two select board members spoke in favor of the plan at the Deliberative Session.

Member Coffey stated that the Town Center Committee was shown a beautiful drawing that would have been nice to do in a perfect world. However, she can respect the Trustees wanting to do something and this would be a good starting point. She thinks the Library has been respectful in trying to keep the plan within harmony with the Town Center, while respecting the historic element, as well.

There was some discussion about the plans for the TAP Grant project.

Chair Loftus stated that he doesn’t see that there would be any problems between the TAP project and the Library project, at this part of the TAP Grant phase, in terms of the sidewalk and the wall.

Member Azzi stated that the Library has done a lot of planning; strategic planning, master planning, and programming planning. The Library has a master plan that shows a lot more than the development in the Library Common. In working out the details, the Library has gone out of their way to avoid compromising the future needs of the remainder of the land that was acquired for library purposes in 1995. He pointed out this is just one corner of this land. The future may include a change in the parking lot, and a change in the location of the museum. It may include a lot of things.

Member Azzi read a letter into the record, which are attached to the December 6, 2023 meeting minutes.

Note: *A copy of the statement is also attached to these minutes.*

III. Review and approval of meeting minutes
Tabled

IV. Other Business – None

Motion by Kaitlyn Coffey to adjourn at 6:53 p.m. Seconded by Lindsay Gray. All in favor.

JANICE - ADD TO DECEMBER 6th
MEETING MINUTES. STATEMENT BY
VICTOR ADZL.

RTCC

JAT/ff

1/2

with regard to the RTCC minutes of the August 02, 2023 mtg:

"As I have stated several times before, I take strong exception to the statement made in the minutes of the RTCC meeting of August 02, 2023. The position of the Board of Trustees of the RPL is that in the planning of the present and future of the land of the Library Common and related land obtained in 1995 for future needs of RPL expansion, nowhere is there any expressed thinking or planning about moving the museum building and building a barn (in between the museum and Library) that could be used for performances, meetings, and a coffee shop." The Master Plan for the development of the RPL indicates that the future will include further improvements in the development of the Library Common including a performance ~~platform~~ platform (of some sort) and a modest expansion of the library building. Any future addition to the library building, per se, will include additional restrooms and other amenities that will better serve the growing

2/2

needs of the use of the RPL patrons both
within the building and its ~~related~~ programmable
spaces in the Library Common adjoining the
building.

WDA

Sept 2023
Oct 2023
Nov 2023