

RYE TOWN CENTER COMMITTEE
Wednesday May 05, 2021
5:30 p.m. – Via Zoom

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

Others Present: Conservation Commission Chair, Suzanne McFarland and Vice-Chair Sally King

I. Call to Order

Chair Stewart called the meeting to order at 5:30 pm.

II. Attestation

Statement by Karen Stewart:

As Chair of the Rye Town Center Committee, 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, 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 board 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 with meeting ID number: 892 2535 2073 and Password: 986532 or by participating via Zoom: www.zoom.com ID # 892 2535 2073 and Password: 986532.
- b) Providing public notice of 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 at 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 e-mail Becky Bergeron at bbergeron@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.

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Roll call attendance:

- John Loftus - Alone
- Victor Azzi - Alone
- Kaitlyn Coffey - Alone
- Karen Stewart – Son is in the room
- John Mitchell – Alone
- Mae Bradshaw – Alone
- Note: Member Tilsley joined the meeting after the roll call attendance was taken.

III. Rye Conservation Commission – Update from Suzanne McFarland and/or Sally King

Chair Stewart opened by asking if everyone received the email that she sent last week that defines the property lines of the Town Center. She feels that this will help to better inform their discussion regarding what they can do and where. She asked Ms. McFarland and Ms. King to give an update to the Committee regarding the conservation land; along with the opportunities and restrictions that may exist, in terms of the work that the Committee is doing to increase connectivity in the Town Center.

Ms. McFarland explained that the property is in progress. It is being surveyed with 2.3 acres of conservation land being subdivided off the parcel of the TD Bank building going to the Town. Currently, part of the septic system (the leach field) is on conservation land. It has been worked out with the Select Board that they will be moving it. They will have some time to accomplish this. The 2.3 acres is going to be wrapped into the Town Forest. Rockingham County Conservation District is the easement holder for the Town Forest; therefore, they will be the easement holder on the additional land and there are restrictions under that easement.

Chair Stewart put up a map on the screen of the Town Center. She pointed out the parcel that Ms. McFarland is talking about, along with Parsons Field. She asked Ms. McFarland if she could talk about anything that is allowable for either of these properties in regards to activities and/or structures, gardens, walking paths, etc.

Ms. McFarland explained that the Town regulates the Parsons Field parcel, so Selectwoman Bradshaw would be better able to talk about that piece. There is already a road that goes into the Town Forest and the conservation land. The Conservation Commission has not yet discussed anything regarding a new trail or path. They need to see the survey in order to see how it lines up with the surrounding properties. All plans will be run by the Rockingham Conservation Commission. They are extremely familiar about the Town Forest, as they have been monitoring it for years.

Member Loftus asked Ms. McFarland who controls the access road.

Ms. King answered that there is an easement on it to Parsons Field. It is used for access to Parsons Field and the Town Forest. It is Town property, the Town and Conservation work together on any improvements and repairs to the road.

Ms. McFarland presented a conservation map that showed the entire Town Forest as well as the surrounding properties.

Chair Stewart pointed out that there are a lot of walking trails in the Town Forest. Given that they are close to her house, she is very familiar with them. She would be happy to do a walking tour if anyone wants to see them.

Member Mitchell talked about the idea of having a recreation area and skating rink behind the church. He pointed out that there are a lot of pieces to the Town Center. There is a need for the junior high students to go safely to the library and maybe a rec center.

Chair Stewart suggested that the Committee invite the leadership of the Church Planning Committee, to attend one of the Rye Town Center Committee's meetings to discuss their plans.

After further discussion, it was decided to schedule a site walk along some of the trails of the Town Forest.

Ms. King recommended including Rockingham Conservation Commission (Tracy Degnan) in the site walk, as they are the easement holder.

IV. Parsonage Planning Update

Chair Stewart reported that she met with Library Trustee Jeff Ross at the Parsonage site. They talked about what the Library Trustees are hoping to accomplish in advance of this summer. They talked about the interest of the members of the Rye Town Center Committee, to be good partners to the Library, as they identify the needs of the community and the goals of the Library, to host events and ultimately landscape that parcel. They discussed having a subcommittee of the Rye Center Committee, to serve as a liaison to the Library Trustees. Member Burdick and Mitchell as well as Member Azzi (who is a Library Trustee) will make up this subcommittee.

Selectwoman Bradshaw recommended that someone from the Historic District Commission should be involved as well. She recommended Lydia Tilsley. Member Tilsley agreed.

Member Loftus also expressed interest in being on the subcommittee.

Chair Stewart said that she would contact Jeff Ross and let him know that there are a few members that are interested.

V. TAP Update

Chair Stewart reported that she talked to Scott Bogle a couple of weeks ago regarding how the Rye Town Center Committee will work if the TAP Grant is awarded to Rye. She asked him if he had any

best practices or prior experiences that he could share about how the Committee might structure themselves. He affirmed that it would be up to the Town as to how they want to organize the work; if and when they receive the TAP award. Mr. Bogle said it would be appropriate for the Committee to serve in an advisory capacity to the Town. She suggested that when the news comes to them, the members should be prepared. If they are interested in playing a more active role, they could form an advisory subcommittee and bring in the whole Committee as needed.

VI. Existing Conditions Review

The Committee viewed the map presented to them by Chair Stewart. Member Azzi explained the library parcel's boundaries as it is now; which includes, the parcel that was known as the Parsonage. It looks like an "L" on the map. The parcel borders on Old Parish Road with frontage on Washington Road.

Selectwoman Bradshaw paraphrased the guidelines of Parsons Field to the members as follows:

Parsons Field was acquired by the Town of Rye to be kept as open space for a Town Common. As such the following requirement is to be apply to any organization that wishes to hold an event in the Parsons Field..... (Followed by a discussion regarding an application to the Selectmen's office).....
Since Parsons Field is to be used as a Rye Town Common, all events held at the field must be sponsored by a nonprofit organization for their direct benefit and operated by them. Signs erected at the field to advertise events must be in conformance with the requirements of the Rye Historic District Commission. Alcohol is forbidden. Access to the field will be by the wall opening on Washington and by the access road located to the east of First National Bank. Pedestrian and vehicular traffic must be directed to use these accesses. All other accesses over private property constitutes trespassing without the express written consent of the owners. The normal usage is 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. Exceptions can be made by the Selectmen. Objective: Encourage use of Parsons Field as the Rye Town Common, for Rye Town Events, to promote community spirit and enhance the Historic District. This policy is nonbinding on the Rye Selectmen, but represents an approach to the Parsons Field management. Size and frequency of events may be limited so as to not adversely affect the Historic District and general traffic flow through the Town. The size may be limited to the maximum of 1,000 attendees; frequency may be limited to no more than one major (over 300 attendees) weekend or holiday event per month, on and average between May 1st and September 30th, for a maximum limit of five per summer.

Note: This policy was adopted on August 20, 1990 and was updated October 20, 2016. This policy is not the actual easement on the Parsons Field. The easement contains a restriction on having any fixed structures on the field.

Chair Stewart promised to get a copy of the easement to share with the Committee members. Chair Stewart reminded the members that at the last meeting they agreed to start at the beginning to try to understand what they have to work with in regards to buildings and properties, so they can have a more informed discussion as to what they see as strategic goals for the Town Center. The Committee took all the recommendations from the Plan New Hampshire Charette. They took information from prior reports and studies of other town committees. From this, they identified priorities and then identified four critical goals with the flexibility to add others as needed. They also articulated a vision for the Town Center.

Chair Stewart read the vision statement as follows:

The Rye Town Center shall be a safe neighborhood with a strong sense of community and connectivity. We envision a Town Center that retains its distinctive historical charm and provides a welcoming and walkable environment, with connects between destinations and multigenerational gathering places. All forms of development and redevelopment will present the Town Center's unique and historical small-town identity.

From this vision the Committee came up with core goals as:

1. Increasing safe and accessible multi-modal travel
2. Retaining the quintessential historic nature
3. Maintaining multi-generational focus on all planning
 - a. Social Engagements
 - b. Employment
 - c. Sports/Physical Activity
 - d. Gathering Spaces
4. Re-imagining existing town owned buildings as efficient and functional spaces

Member Mitchell asked to redefine the Town Center. He asked for clarification. Is it from the Trolley Barn to Grange Park? He stated that he is still thinking about the interconnectivity piece of this project. He asked how they could make the Town Center accessible to multi-generations. He also asked how to make the Town Center a place where the residents come to get together, talk over coffee and do their business.

Member Tilsley pointed out that the town green is the parcel in front of the cemetery on Central Road. She suggested that that should be included in the Town Center. The Trolley Barn is across the road from the cemetery and should also be included.

Chair Stewart stated that the scope of the charge was assigned by the Select Board. However, she couldn't imagine the Board objecting if the Committee wanted to enlarge their scope.

Member Mitchell liked the idea of including the area on Central Road.

Member Coffey stated that she also likes the idea of including that area. She added that she just got the fund-raising flyer from the Rye Heritage Commission for the gazebo behind the Town Hall. The Heritage Commission is talking about having a small pocket park on that land as well. She suggested the Committee should include this area in the planning.

Selectwoman Bradshaw suggested that the Committee invite Mr. Valley, the buyer of the Trolley Barn, to a meeting to talk about his plans. She recommended having a meeting with all the owners/managers of the non-private properties in the area to talk about what their overall plans are and how that might work into the Town Center vision (i. e. the church representatives, etc.).

Member Mitchell liked the idea. He suggested rehashing the Plan New Hampshire Plan again at that meeting.

Chair Stewart liked the idea but wanted to see the Committee get their piece of the plan off the ground prior to that meeting. She stated that she is sensitive to everyone's time and she almost feels badly about

inviting the Conservation folks to tonight's meeting because she knows that it is still early for them too. However, on the other hand, she wants everyone to know that the Committee wants to hear from them and work with them and they want to do it right. She would like for the Committee's process or plan to be more formed before meeting with other committees.

Selectwoman Bradshaw stated that it was good for the Conservation Commission to hear from the Rye Town Center Committee about the idea of the connectivity. It may open dialog about maybe adding a trail to the conservation land.

Member Coffey expressed the importance of planning outdoor spaces. She pointed out that it would be great to have a place to walk with a friend or sit and talk at a picnic table or bench.

Chair Stewart pointed out that the Committee is talking more about the Town Center being the destination with gathering and meeting spaces. Previously, they thought of it as a connection between destinations. She loved the reminder of the pocket park between the Town Hall and the Church.

Selectwoman Bradshaw pointed out that the Heritage Commission owns the gazebo and are currently raising funds to restore it. She suggested talking to the Heritage Commission to see how this Committee could show support for their efforts.

After further discussion, it was decided to start the site walk at the Library (Parsonage Lot). They will walk across to the church, down to the cemetery and onto the conservation land.

Member Azzi asked if Chair Stewart could contact Bruce Valley to ask him to join them so he could tell them something about his plans for the Trolley Barn property. Also, it would be nice to let Mr. Valley know what the plans are for the Rye Town Center.

Chair Stewart promised to reach out to Tracy Degnan of Rockingham Conservation Commission to schedule the walking tour. The plan would be to meet with the Library Trustees at the former Parsonage lot and then meet with Mr. Valley at the Old Trolley Barn parcel. After that they could meet with the Church representatives and then Tracy Degnan for the walk through the Town Forest.

Member Mitchell brought up the subject of parking spaces in the Town Center. Public parking includes the area left of the church, the lot behind the church, the lot to the left of the police station and the lot at the Town Hall. It also includes an area behind the safety building that is not paved.

Member Azzi had done an inventory several months ago of the parking. He came up with 368 spaces which includes 90 spaces that are owned by the church (behind the church).

Selectwoman Bradshaw reported that the Town currently leases two rooms in the church for the 'Over Fifty-Five' activities, so the parking needs to be available for those events.

VII. Traffic Safety, Next Steps

Chair Stewart welcomed Katharine Brown to the meeting. Ms. Brown noted that there was a typo in her email to the Committee. The traffic count was 96 not 76. She will correct it and resend it to Chair Stewart. Chair Stewart promised to forward it to Janice Ireland for the Select Board's review. Ms.

Brown stressed that until the traffic issues are resolved, there is never going to be a Town Center where people will want to wander around, have coffee, relax and talk to each other. It is just too noisy and busy.

Chair Stewart reported that she had sent a letter outlining the Town Center Committee's concerns regarding traffic issues in the Town Center with their recommendations to the Select Board and Chief Walsh. She said she had not sent it to Dennis McCarthy, but feels she should have, as it would require some engineering and some road work. She has not followed up with the Select Board yet.

Chief Walsh sent Chair Stewart an email outlining the Police Department's Driving Compliance Plan.

Chief Walsh explained that about two years ago, the Select Board gave him information regarding the residents' concerns about traffic issues, such as the speed of vehicles and drivers' behavior in all areas of town. He and the command staff sat down and came up with a Driving Compliance Plan. They tapped into some outside resources in order to come up with a method to accomplish engineering, education and enforcement, and then to implement it on all town roads. The engineering has been completed on some of the other town roads with the education and enforcement ongoing. The department was awarded a Highway Safety Grant, which allows the department to add extra patrol shifts. The responsibility of these patrols is to focus on speed enforcement and poor driving behavior. The department's digital sign and the traffic counter collects times and the days of the week of the most frequent violations. The department is using this information to target the problem areas. The department's goal is to have three officers on at the same time and to divide the Town into three sectors. The third sector would be roaming to create greater visibility. People will be seeing multiple cars being stopped at multiple places and times. This will get the message out that in Rye you must drive the speed limit. Also, part of the Compliance Plan is to review the location of the speed limit and reduce speed signs, in order to check on their condition and to make sure they are in the most effective locations.

Chair Stewart stated that one of the things that came out of talks with the engineers and landscape architects that the Committee has been working with is that if they move forward with the engineering plan, as outlined by the TAP Grant, it would organically slow down traffic because it will narrow the vehicle travel lanes and have more pedestrian and bike accommodations. All the recommendations that the Committee submitted to the Select Board are to help transition drivers in advance of that happening. It is also taking the bold step in making the downtown area more inviting and accommodating to walkers and bikers, if they are not awarded the grant.

She added that she understands that 30 mph isn't necessarily consistent with increased safety, but what if it was used to increase the comfort level to the parents and children or bicyclist? She asked Chief Walsh if he would support the notion of lowering the speed limit in the Center of Town.

Chief Walsh replied not unless there is an engineer study with data and specific facts to back it. If the Select Board is put in a position of randomly lowering speed limits for the center of town, there will be the exact same discussions for South Road and Central Road in the precinct area and Dow Lane. Before too long, the whole town will be 20 mph. Safety is the number one priority, but to think that changing the sign to a lower speed and to have drivers drive below that speed is unrealistic. It is not based on any science driven data as to why it should be done. The way the speed law is written, if a driver is driving the speed limit and the conditions dictate that they should be driving at a lower speed, (such as an ice storm), they can be ticketed. Another thing that has been initiated is the placement of more pedestrian

crosswalk signs throughout town. He summed up by saying that it comes down to the driver's responsibility. He and the officers are taking very seriously what this Committee and the residents have said. There has been a sufficient uptake in vehicle stops and the number of tickets being issued. They are also working with the neighboring towns in this effort. The next step will be to gather new traffic information for Washington and Central Road from the traffic counter and provide it to the engineer that will be working with this Committee if they are awarded the TAP Grant.

There was discussion regarding the vehicle turn lane at the end of Lang Road where it connects to Washington Road. Chair Stewart asked about the effectiveness of using a rumble strip there to keep cars in the lane and to slow them.

Chief Walsh responded that he follows Dennis McCarthy's lead in road improvement initiatives. Mr. McCarthy has all the roads on a road improvement plan and maintenance schedule. Once a particular road comes up on the schedule, that is when any adjustments or changes are generally made. He recommended that a traffic engineer should look at that intersection.

Chair Stewart asked about a three-way stop at that intersection.

Chief Walsh noted that he is not convinced that a three-way stop would be effective.

Chair Stewart asked Chief Walsh if he would support the committee if they wanted to move ahead with their recommendation to the Select Board to illuminate the right lane.

Chief Walsh responded that he would like to do some more research and share that research with the Committee. He would want that research to be supportive of the idea before he commits to it. He wants the Committee to present the Select Board with solid facts. He promised to get that information as quickly as possible, as he understands it is a priority to the Committee.

Chair Stewart asked what Chief Walsh's timeline would be.

Chief Walsh explained that he needs another week and a half with the traffic counter in its present location and then four weeks on the Central road side. He is hoping to look at the sign survey at the end of this week for the entire length of Washington Road. He will be working with the highway department on this. He will put the results in writing for the Committee to review.

VIII. Approval of Minutes

1. April 01, 2021

The following was noted:

- **Note that in the roll call there were five in attendance. Later in the meeting; members Burdick, Tilsley and Coffey all joined.**
- **Page 5 reads:** There has been a questionary that has gone out to all the Boards and Commission to have them look at their section of the Master Plan, for changes that need to be made.
- **It should read:** There has been a questionnaire that has gone out to all the Boards and Commission to have them look at their section of the Master Plan, for changes that need to be made.

Motion by Mae Bradshaw to approve the meeting minutes of April 1, 2021 as amended. Seconded by John Loftus.

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

Motion Passed.

2. April 07, 2021

The following was noted:

- **Page 2 reads:** He suggested that stop signs be installed at Lang Road and both ways on Washington ~~at~~ three way stop.
- **It should read:** He suggested that stop signs be installed at Lang Road and both ways on Washington as a three way stop.
- **Page 2 reads:** More people are working from home and not ~~communing~~.
- **It Should read:** More people are working from home and not commuting.

Note: At this time the audio/visual recording of this meeting ended. However, there was no further business before the Committee and Chair Stewart adjourned the meeting with all in favor.

Respectfully Submitted,
Dyana F, Ledger