

RYE TOWN CENTER COMMITTEE

Wednesday, October 6, 2021

5:00 p.m.

Rye Town Hall

***Members Present:* Chair Karen Stewart, Kaitlyn Coffey, John Mitchell, Victor Azzi, John Loftus and Select Board Rep Tom King**

***Also Present:* Rye Library Trustees**

5:00 p.m. Site Walk

I. Call to Order

The site walk was called to order at 5:00 p.m.

II. Site Walk

The Rye Town Center Committee met with Recreation Director Meghan Spaulding at the Rye Congregational Church to tour the Wave Center which will be used for teen and senior programming.

5:30 p.m. Reconvene at Town Hall

III. Call to Order

Chair Stewart reconvened the public meeting at the Town Hall at 5:40 p.m.

IV. Presentation and Q/A about Library Commons with Library Trustees

Jeff Ross, Library Board of Trustees Chair, gave a presentation to the Town Center Committee regarding the planning for the open space next to the library (former Parsonage property). The Library Trustees held a general information session in June and much public input came out of that meeting. From that meeting, an advisory committee was formed to help with the planning process. It was noted that the planning to date for the open space next to the library ties into Rye's Master Plan, which states in the Vision Chapter:

Our vision for Rye Town Center recognizes it as the foundation upon which the Town has grown. We will protect, preserve, and reinforce its character and integrity. There will be a palpable sense of community for residents as well as visitors.

We will promote additional opportunities to foster regular and multiple social interactions for all members of the community.

Part of the plan moving forward from this point, would be to seek partners in the planning process; such as, the advisory committee, architect, and Library Trustees, as well as the Town Center Committee. The goal is to ensure a successful execution of the plan by having multiple partners and stakeholders.

The first event at the Library Commons was held a couple of weeks ago, which was a huge success. People who attended were of different ages and there were multiple generations with a number of younger families. A lot of people expressed that this type of gathering is what they had been wanting in Rye for a long time. They wish that the town would do more of these types of events.

In looking at the themes and features that people are most interested in, the clearest goal for the common was to have it be a gathering space; a meeting space where both small and large groups could gather. People also viewed the Library Commons as a place for performances to take place; art, music and theater. These are the key features that the architect is considering in the designs. It is very likely that this will emerge in the final plan. People also expressed the desire for the landscaping to be simple with native plantings that have low impact to the environment.

The four critical goals that the architect has taken into consideration for the final plans; include,

1. Keeping the open space with a simple design. From Washington Road, the commons should look like it has been there forever.
2. The plan must take into account the possible future expansion of the library.
3. The plan should complement the existing town buildings adjacent to the commons.
4. Library programming will be an essential part of the enhancement of this project. What is done inside the building, as well as outside, should be integrated into the plan.

The Committee reviewed architectural drawings showing different options for the library property. One of the designs submitted for review did the best job of reaching the goals of the biggest open space with a performance space. The plan has the easiest and clearest place to expand the library. The plan shows a relocated town museum and parking, which would be the same size as it is now just moved back about 40'. The open space would be doubled in size from what it is now. The current library is about 6,200sf. The space available for library expansion would be another 5,000sf to 6,000sf. This would be a significant investment in the future for library possibilities. The town museum will be moved to a more integrated, accessible, visible place along Washington Road. There has been discussion with the Historical Society about the plan. They are interested in further conversations about how to use the parcel differently than it is now, which may involve a possible relocation for the museum.

There was some discussion in regards to the anticipated timing for the project. One of the factors the Historical Society asked was for the timing to be taken into consideration. The Historical Society wishes to remain undisturbed during the year 2023 because of the activities and events they'd like to host during the year of the town's 400th anniversary. The idea might be to do the open space and relocation after the 400th anniversary. It might be better timing to do fundraising

and publicity with the 400th anniversary of the town, which might help to promote excitement and support for the project.

Mr. Ross noted that the Library Trustees are looking to see if there could be a partnership with the Town Center Committee. The Trustees are looking to work in partnership with a common goal that would serve the entire town, at least as far as town center is considered. It was noted that some of the work of the Town Center Committee are things that the Library Commons would benefit from; such as, traffic calming and sidewalks to attract pedestrians and bicyclists to the library for events.

The next steps in the project include working closely with the architect. It is anticipated that the architect will start to get into the details of the preferred concept. There will be many discussions about the final details with the advisory committee.

It was noted that the key to the scheme is for the Rye Historical Society to be willing to relocate the town museum building to the green space. There was also discussion about the parking lot relocation and whether the Select Board would support the proposal. It was agreed that the concept should be brought to the Select Board for their initial response.

After discussion, it was the consensus of the Committee that they favored the preferred concept presented by the Library Trustees.

Karen Stewart moved to endorse the Library Commons design concept as it currently stands and continue to partner with the Trustees as they move forward in their planning. Seconded by John Loftus.

Vote: John Loftus – Aye; Tom King – Aye; Karen Stewart – Aye; John Mitchell – Aye; Kaitlyn Coffey – Aye; Victor Azzi – Aye

Motion passed.

Note: *John Mitchell left the meeting at 6:47 p.m.*

V. Other Business

Member Loftus read from information taken from architectural standards books addressing new additions and alterations to historic buildings. He expressed his concerns regarding the architectural changes proposed for the new Town Hall Annex on Washington Road, which is in the town center and within the Historic District. He noted that additions and changes to historic buildings are to be subordinate to the original structure. He feels that the changes and additions for the Town Hall Annex are overpowering and domineering to the existing building.

Chair Stewart urged Member Loftus to bring this to the Historic District Commission.

Member Loftus noted that the charette showed that people wanted to keep the town charming. In looking at the monstrosity of the building, in terms of architecture, and the function, it's going against what the town wanted.

There was discussion about the role of the Town Center Committee. Chair Stewart read the charge for the Committee. She agrees with the statement that the plans become the opposite of charming for the historic downtown Rye. She asked what the next move would be if the Committee agrees.

Member Loftus suggested filing an advisement to the Select Board stating their concerns about the proposed changes to the building.

Chair Stewart noted that she and Kaitlyn are on the Historic District Commission. From the HDC standpoint, they sort of green lighted the advancement of the project.

Member Coffey pointed out that the HDC evaluated it from a materials standpoint and whether it followed the guidelines. The HDC wasn't give a choice to give input on the design. In looking at it from the Town Center Committee's standpoint, the question is whether there is a problem with the design. She believes there is.

Chair Stewart commented that she had a lot of questions about the massing. It feels like a lot. She asked Selectman King the progress of the plans.

Selectman King explained that the direction is to have a warrant article to approve and fund the proposal. He commented that the only way to really stop the issues about the design, massing and whether it's really needed, is to not approve and fund it. The Town voted to not acquire the bank a few years ago, but then they did vote to swap it. There has been no vote on the vision to expand this into a town hall complex. The voters thought they were acquiring a bank for a drive-thru town clerk's office. The existing building is a little ranch and is a suitable historic district building.

It was noted that the Town voted in favor of spending up to \$280,000 from the Trolley Barn proceeds for this project, which makes it possible for the work to move forward. It is anticipated that Phase I will be going out to bid at any time.

There was discussion about possibly sending a recommendation to the Select Board from the Town Center Committee asking that the addition to the building be smaller and for a change in the design to soften the look. It was noted that the Committee is tasked with making proposals and planning that supports the retainage of the historical charm in the town center. The Committee is also charged with keeping an eye on the economic impact this planning will have on the taxpayer, along with keeping an eye on work spaces for town employees, adequate meeting and community activity spaces. There was also discussion about getting the Historic District Commission and Heritage Commission to support the Town Center Committee's recommendations to the Select Board. It was agreed to discuss this further at a future meeting.

VI. Correspondence

Chair Stewart read a letter from Robert Wylde, dated September 15th, suggesting that sidewalks go from the intersection of Washington Road and Wallis Road, westbound to the intersection of Central Road and Washington Road, and proceed down to the Town Hall driveway.

It was noted that this is part of the plan; however, not all of it is going to be completed with the TAP Grant. The whole project will happen in stages. Chair Stewart will reply to Mr. Wylde's letter.

VII. Committee Survey (Victor Azzi)

To be addressed at the next meeting.

VIII. Approval of Minutes

Tabled to next meeting

- Next Town Center Committee meeting to be held on November 3rd, Rye Town Hall

Adjournment

Motion by Victor Azzi to adjourn at 7:22 p.m. Seconded by Tom King. All in favor.

Respectfully Submitted,
Dyana F. Ledger