

**TOWN OF RYE – SELECT BOARD
MEETING/WORKSESSION**

Thursday, June 3, 2021

5:30 p.m.

Rye Town Hall

Present: Chair Phil Winslow, Selectman Bill Epperson, Selectwoman Mae Bradshaw

Others Present: Town Administrator Becky Bergeron, Police Chief Kevin Walsh, Public Works Director Dennis McCarthy, Rye Town Center Committee Chair Karen Stewart.

I. CALL TO ORDER AND PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

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

II. PUBLIC COMMENT – (at the beginning of the meeting, for any comment by any Rye resident on any topic. Requested time limit, up to 5 minutes each person.)

- **Ronna Werner of 520 Washington Road** spoke about the traffic on Washington Road and her concerns about the middle school students who walk through the Town Center before and after school. She said the police are doing a good job but more needs to be done. She supports any solution that the Town Center Committee has come up with.
- **Chief Walsh** reported that recently, one of the officers stopped two Rye residents for speeding. One was on Washington Road and was a resident of Washington Road and one was on Central Road and was a resident of Central Road. He noted that he had sent a letter out to all the residents of Rye on September 3rd. The letter explained that as residents, we are the problem and we must work together to solve the problem, by being aware of our speeds and by driving safely. He stated that the department will continue to promote education and awareness. They are also asking the citizens to have this conversation around the dinner table; with our spouses, kids and neighbors. Chief Walsh reported that he spent a half hour at 860 Washington Road, next to the digital sign, to observe traffic. He noted that the out-of-town trucks, such as FedEx and UPS, were all driving below the speed limit. Every time the frown face or the slow down warning came up on the sign, there was a Rye beach sticker on the back window. We are the problem and we must have this open conversation with everyone that lives here.
- **Katharine Brown of 541 Washington Road** spoke about her observation of the traffic in front of her house. She disagrees with Chief Walsh that it is residents that are the problem. She also feels that it is commercial vehicles.

- **Susan Shepcaro of 45 Recreation Road** spoke about driving slowly and the reactions and backlash of other drivers following her through town. She stated that they just have to keep at it, because it is very important.

III. WORK SESSION

A. Follow-up of the Town Center Safety Concerns

Town Center Committee Karen Stewart presented the Select Board with a letter outlining the Committee's safety concerns and recommendations.

Chair Winslow started the discussion by stating that the Rye Town Center Committee was chartered in October of 2019. As part of that charter, they were charged with looking at the safety in the center of town, as well as the layout of the center.

Ms. Stewart explained that the charette started as a citizen's petition warrant article that failed in 2018. A group of citizens approached the Selectboard to ask if they could privately fund the charette that dealt with the Center of Town. The charette was held in May and June of 2019 with over 100 people in attendance. The Town Center Committee was established as a result of the charette, in order to follow through with the recommendations that came from it. The purpose of the charette was:

- To evaluate the Town Center and its best uses to meet the needs of its citizens;
- To help formulate a comprehensive cohesive plan for Rye Town Center;
- Formulate a plan to greatly enhance the health, vitality and cohesiveness; and
- Improve safety for pedestrians and other users of the Town Center.

There were meetings with town leaders and two days of listening sessions, where the experts from Plan New Hampshire came and heard the citizens of the community.

What came from these meetings was a 10-year vision from the Rye Citizens of which included:

1. Increased, safe and accessible pedestrian and bicycle connectivity; and
2. Keeping the quintessential historic town center.

The first year of the Town Center Committee, they were tasked with coming up with one warrant article. That warrant article is for the Transportation Alternative Program Grant (TAP). This grant will help with increased connectivity and safety in the Town Center by installing streetscapes, sidewalks, bike lanes and crosswalks.

The Town Center Committee was rechartered in December or January. They followed through with getting the TAP Grant application written and submitted. Now, they have come up with recommendations to present to the Selectboard in regards to other things that could happen in the Town Center while they are waiting on the Tap Grant award. The recommendations start with:

1. Evaluate and address the speed limit

The posted speed is currently 35 mph. The travel lanes are very wide and are comparable to highway widths with speeds of 60 mph. If the TAP Grant award happens, the plan is to put in bike lanes, which will narrow the travel lanes and have an organic traffic calming effect. However, the results of the project will not be visible and usable for about two or three years. The Committee is recommending that the Selectboard lower the speed limit in the interim.

2. Evaluate and address the intersection of Lang Road and Washington Road

This is not currently a safe intersection for pedestrians. There is a right turn lane and the Committee is recommending the right turn lane be removed. The Committee is also recommending that this intersection become a three-way stop.

3. Evaluate and address the intersection of Central Road and Washington Road

Because of the wide shoulder on Central going into Washington, vehicle traffic uses it as a travel lane, going at higher speeds than what is recommended. There are a lot of runners and bicyclists that also use that shoulder. The Committee is recommending that this shoulder is narrowed.

Ms. Stewart stated that she appreciates Chief Walsh's opinion that if he takes action on all these things, he would have to do it in other areas of town. She disagrees, as the Town Center is not like other neighborhoods. The Town Center has the school, library, Parsons Field and town government. There is also the charette that the residents attended and feel vested in having a cultural and community center.

Chief Kevin Walsh referred to a memo dated May 19, 2021 which contains data that explains some of the traffic counts taken with a device that a traffic engineer would use. The data was from 500 Washington Road in 2019 and 580 Washington Road in 2021. It shows that for the middle speed limits, (25 to 30 mph and 30 to 35 mph), education and enforcement plans are key. He stressed the need to do more in the areas of awareness and education for all town roads. Chief Walsh agreed with Ms. Stewart regarding the uniqueness of the activity in the Town Center. As such, his personnel are out on foot in the Town Center in the mornings when the students are arriving at school. He does this because it is important that the citizens see the faces of their police officers. It also gives him a first-hand look and keeps him connected with some of the issues that Ms. Stewart and the neighbors are talking about. He agrees that there is a lot of activity and moving parts in the Town Center. The department's goal is to make people aware of what an appropriate behavior might be during the height of these activities. For instance, even if the speed limit is posted at 35 mph, the appropriate speed during peak times maybe 20.

Chief Walsh added that he and DPW Director McCarthy have put up signs in the middle of the crosswalks. The crosswalks have also been painted. They are also looking at the signage on the side of the road at the crosswalks for more driver awareness. However, the most effective thing so far has been the signs in the middle of the crosswalks. Some of the other things seem to melt into the back ground and the drivers don't notice them because they drive that route every day.

He stressed the need to gain the buy-in from the residents, in order to get the desired results. That will only happen with awareness, education and enforcement.

Chief Walsh encouraged the Selectboard to not make changes unless they are fact-based. He argued that changes must have facts in order to base them on a standard for change, which may or may not make the change enforceable. Currently, the speed limit of 30 mph is backed up by the RSAs that outline the criteria of the facts and standards. The goal of writing a ticket is to curb a behavior. Chief Walsh stated that his goal is to curb that behavior, before they even have to write the ticket, with voluntary compliance. He believes that the sincerity of the Town Center Committee and the information that they are presenting is 100% accurate. His department is going to go out and work harder than they ever have on education, awareness and enforcement, to try to gain more buy-in from the people that live here.

Chief Walsh reported that he has talked to Bill Lambert the State of New Hampshire Traffic Engineer in regards to the Lang Road intersection and the Town Center Committee's concerns. Mr. Lambert pointed out that they are currently in the process of making some changes at the other end of Lang Road and the intersection of Route 1. Part of the process on that project is to look at Rye's end of Lang Road. Mr. Lambert is willing to look at the suggestions the Town Center Committee has made to see if they can be put into a standard for change. Chief Walsh noted that the turn lane was changed in 2013 because the traffic was backing up at the stop sign and drivers were creating a right turn lane already.

Chief Walsh promised to follow up with Mr. Lambert to get a concrete answer on whether they should make a change to that intersection and if so, what changes would be best. Chief Walsh commented that he is in favor of going the route of the TAP Grant and having a traffic engineer oversee the entire project for the changes in the Center of Town

Chair Winslow suggested that the Town send out a couple of postcards in the next few months with a picture of children riding bikes or some elderly pedestrians walking in the Center of Town. It would be a way to get the word out to the residents about the safety issues and it could ask for their help and participation.

Selectman Epperson stated that he is not sure that they should make any sweeping changes prior to the TAP Grant. He pointed out that the current travel lanes are 12ft wide and could easily be changed by adding a fog line, temporarily, to see if that has any affect. If the Town doesn't get the TAP Grant, he suggested they have a more serious conversation as to how to proceed.

Selectwoman Bradshaw stated that she completely agrees with the Town Center Committee's recommendations. She also agrees that this is not a normal neighborhood. It is a town center where children walk. It is a campus and it will become more of a campus as they extend into the annex. She totally disagrees that they need to study this to death. She believes they need to take action now. It is clearly understood that the TAP Grant will not be funded until January. In the meantime, there is no reason not to experiment to see which of these alternatives will make a difference. If there is a difference, they will see it. She also agrees with continuing education and enforcing the rules. Being afraid to make changes shouldn't stop them from worrying about the safety of the Town's children.

Chief Walsh discussed the ongoing sign survey along Washington Road. He reported that all the intersections along Washington Road have a 30-mph speed sign. Where there is a gap or where the sign's condition is poor, he is having the highway foreman install new ones.

Referring to the increased traffic in town, Chair Winslow pointed out that there are twenty new condos on the corner of Washington and US 1. There are also potentially 30 more units going in at the old Hector's site and 40 more units going in at Rye Air Field. A lot of these people will have children in school. So, the traffic will be increased substantially over the next couple of years. Chair Winslow stated that he agrees with both Selectman Epperson and Selectwoman Bradshaw. He would like to see something done now. He also agrees with the temporary narrowing of the travel lanes and widening of the bike lanes.

Selectwoman Bradshaw pointed out that changing the width of the road temporarily and tracing the effect from that is a fact-finding expedition. If there are clear signs that this is not a highway running through the Center of Town, people may become more aware and maybe they will take the education more seriously.

Chair Winslow pointed out that the road narrowing is already included in the TAP Grant, which has been submitted and the Board has already agreed to it. He agreed with Selectman Epperson that whatever they do should be consistent with what they will be doing with the TAP Grant. He feels that it would be a "no-brainer" to narrow the traffic lanes and to stripe the shoulder of Central at Washington so that people wouldn't consider that a travel lane. Those are two things that can be done that wouldn't be that expensive.

DPW Director McCarthy stated that the striping is not an issue, as they haven't striped the roads yet. So, they can get that done at the same time. Unfortunately, it is going to be delayed because the suppliers are having trouble getting the paint. He agrees with Selectwoman Bradshaw that it doesn't hurt anything to try it. However, he was not convinced that it will help with the speed issues. He pointed out that 10ft is a reasonable traffic lane and he has no problem with doing it. However, there is another factor with width of roads and that is how close an object is to the white line. Currently, they have very wide shoulders, which is very good. When a road is redesigned, it physically makes the width of the road smaller by putting in curbing and things like that. That is also good. It isn't going to have a major effect but it wouldn't hurt it either. So, he promised to get it done. Director McCarthy talked about the effects of having more signs; such as, the blinking signs get peoples' attention. He noted that signs that have been in place for a while just fade into the background and have no effect. The problem with a road is that the physical way a road is built, is what determines in theory what the safe speed limit should be. So, more signs or posting lower speed limit signs is not going to make people drive slower. The problem with lowering the speed limit on a road, where there haven't been any changes to that road to make it slower, is the only way to slow it is enforcement. By lowering it to 25 mph, every person who is not driving 25 will be breaking the law. The police will have to enforce it and that means giving residents tickets.

In regards to three-way stops, Director McCarthy stated that they are never used to control traffic or speed. They are actually unsafe and increase accidents. There is also a higher problem with enforcement, as a road that has a stop sign where vehicles shouldn't be stopping, will have

drivers just going through without stopping. He commented that the Town Center Committee has a great plan. Hopefully everyone is going to vote for it and get it done. He pointed out that the original discussion was about connectivity and walkability, not safety. He feels that the Town of Rye has very safe roads, so it will be very difficult to make a big change, as far as the safety statistics are concerned. However, they will accomplish the bigger things; such as, walkability, connectivity and accessibility.

After further discussion, it was agreed to narrow the travel lanes and to stripe both sides of the road from the Town Hall to the intersection of Wallis Road and Washington Road.

Ms. Stewart pointed out that the area at the top of Central Road is so wide that the Town Center Committee was thinking that taking away some of the asphalt would be a good solution.

Selectman Epperson stated that would create a big issue with bike riders. The sides of the streets are not the best and that would add to their demise.

Ms. Stewart also stated that she understands about how it is evaluated and there are pros and cons about having a three-way stop intersection. She pointed out that the right turn line was put in in 2013 without fact-based data; other than, traffic was backing up there and because drivers were already doing it. She feels that it is an easy thing to undo.

Chief Walsh responded that accident statistics for that intersection are very low. He also pointed out that there is now a pedestrian sign in the middle of the intersection. The goal is that when a vehicle is turning onto Lang Road, from either direction, it forces the driver to make a proper turn.

Ms. Stewart agreed with the issues with the three-way stop, but getting rid of the right turn lane seems like a “no-brainer”.

Chair Winslow commented that he would like to hear what Bill Lambert has to say about this before making any decisions.

Chief Walsh promised to contact Mr. Lambert.

Selectwoman Bradshaw responded that she would be interested in setting a time to get the information back from Bill Lambert on the right turn lane on Lang Road. She suggested one month.

Chief Walsh promised to contact Mr. Lambert tomorrow. He will copy the Town Administrator and Ms. Stewart on the email.

Selectman Epperson stated that they should give the road striping 30 to 45 days and then evaluate the impact that it has had. Hopefully, they will know about the TAP Grant by that time and they will have some facts to move forward with.

Chair Winslow agreed that once they get the answer back on the TAP Grant, they need to be ready to move forward with it. If they don't get the award, they need to reconvene this session to see where they will go from there.

Selectman Epperson stated that regardless of if they get the TAP Grant or not, they need to do something in the Center of Town. It may mean writing a warrant article to bond the project.

Director McCarthy pointed out that they could phase the project in over a period of years.

Chair Winslow asked Town Administrator Bergeron to set up a meeting to readdress this issue again on Thursday, August 12th.

Selectman Epperson summarized the meeting. The Board agreed they would use a fog line to reduce the travel lanes to 10 feet. The rest will be hashed-marked. They will use the traffic counter and reevaluate in 45 days to see if there is any impact to the speed.

IV. OTHER BUSINESS

None

ADJOURNMENT

**Motion by Bill Epperson to Adjourn at 6:42 p.m. Seconded by Mae Bradshaw.
All in Favor. Motion Passed.**

Respectfully Submitted,
Dyana F. Ledger