

**TOWN OF RYE - SELECT BOARD
MEETING
Tuesday, July 11, 2022 – 5:45 p.m.
Rye Town Hall**

Selectmen Present: Chair Bill Epperson, Vice-Chair Phil Winslow, Selectman Tom King

Others Present: Interim Town Administrator Kevin Walsh

5:45 p.m.

I. CALL TO ORDER

Chair Epperson called the meeting to order at 5:51 p.m.

**II. NON-PUBLIC SESSION (1) per RSA 91-A:3, II (b) Hiring
(2) per RSA 91-A:3, II (d) Acquisition**

At 5:51 p.m., Phil Winslow made a motion to go into Non-Public Session per RSA 91-A:3 II (b) Hiring. Seconded by Tom King. Roll Call: Epperson – Yes, Winslow – Yes, King - Yes.

At 6:15 p.m., Bill Epperson made a motion to come out of Non-Public Session. Seconded by Tom King. Roll Call: Epperson – Yes, Winslow – Yes, King - Yes.

At 6:15 p.m., Phil Winslow made a motion to go into Non-Public Session per RSA 91-A:3 II (d) Acquisition. Seconded by Tom King. Roll Call: Epperson – Yes, Winslow – Yes, King - Yes.

At 6:34 p.m., Bill Epperson made a motion to come out of Non-Public Session. Seconded by Tom King. Roll Call: Epperson – Yes, Winslow – Yes, King - Yes.

6:30 p.m.

III. CALL TO ORDER AND PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

Chair Epperson called the meeting to order at 6:38 p.m. and led the pledge of allegiance.

IV. ANNOUNCEMENTS

- Selectman King thanked recreation, police, fire and DPW for a very successful Fourth of July Celebration.

- Chair Epperson introduced Jacob Lennon who will be filling a per diem firefighter/EMT position for the Rye Fire Department. With his background and experience, he will be a valuable resource to the town.

Jacob Lennon noted that he has been involved in this field for ten years. He is very excited to be continuing his career with the Town of Rye.

- V. **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.)

Fire Chief Mark Cotreau reported that the Fire Department has purchased an ultrasound machine for the ambulance, which will help in a lot of different ways. Two of the Rye's EMS coordinators attended training with the radiology department at Portsmouth Regional Hospital. The coordinators are now giving training to the rest of the staff on the ambulance this week. As of the end of the week, the ultrasound will be in service on the ambulance. Rye Fire Department is the first department in the Seacoast and there are only one or two total in the State that have an ultrasound machine. He is proud of his EMS team for leading the way and caring about utilizing the best technology in the field.

Chief Cotreau also reported that the Atlantic White Shark Conservancy helped the department acquire four shark buoys, which are located at Sawyers, Cable, Foss and Wallis Beaches. Shark buoys are data buoys that detect the number of tagged sharks that come close to the buoys, within 1500ft. The data will not only tell how close the tagged shark is to the buoy, but will also tell which shark it is. The most likely scenario is that they are transient sharks that are just travelling through. The scientists are looking to see if the same sharks are coming back all the time. The buoys will be taken out at the end of November and the data will be read at that time. This will give a picture of what is happening along Rye's coast. Chief Cotreau noted that Hampton has two shark buoys, so the coast of N.H. is covered. The goal is to find funding to put one at the Isles of Shoals near Star Island.

Joe Cummins, 990 Washington Road, asked about the cost of the ultrasound equipment.

Chief Cotreau replied that it was approximately \$6,500.

Mr. Cummins expressed his concerns about the speeding along Washington Road. He spoke about the possibility of installing rumble strips along the sides of the road, which will prevent vehicles from crossing over the white line. It would also prevent bicyclists from riding right on the white line. He has seen many cyclists and pedestrians well into the road.

Chair Epperson asked DPW Director Jason Rucker to do some research on rumble strips and report back to the Board.

Deputy Police Chief Scott Blaisdell reported that the week of the 28th the Police Department took a report about a missing elderly man. Through a lot of hard work from the community and

other resources, he was able to be located and is now doing well. He noted that it was a coordinated rescue effort. He thanked N.H. Fish and Game, New England K-9 Search and Rescue, Portsmouth Police Drone Team, Rye Fire Department, Portsmouth Fire Department and everyone in the community who assisted.

VI. CONSENT AGENDA ITEMS – (to be discussed at the meeting only if pulled off the consent agenda by one of the three Selectmen.)

Vice-Chair Winslow requested to pull Consent Agenda Item C for discussion.

- A. Parsons Field Application** – Rye Lions Club Annual Car Show: Sunday, September 18, 2022, 7:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. Also: Request waiver of the \$50/day fee for use of the field.
- B. Sign Request** – Rye Lions Club requests permission to post a sign at Parsons Field announcing the Rye Lions Club Annual Car Show. The sign is requested 9/10/22-9/17/22.

Motion by Phil Winslow to accept Consent Agenda Items B and C. Seconded by Tom King. All in favor.

- C. Energy Committee** – Unlimited Term
 - 1. Frank Melanson: Appointment as a member – letter rec'd 7/7/22
 - 2. Recommendation letter rec'd 7/7/2022 from Howard Kalet, Co-Chairman

Howard Kalet, Energy Committee Co-Chair, introduced Frank Melanson to the Select Board, who has expressed his desire to be part of the Energy Committee.

Frank Melanson, 450 Brackett Road, stated that he moved fulltime to Rye in February. He works at Eversource Energy in the Residential Energy Efficiency Program and has been there for twenty years as manager of the residential programs. He has a strong background in building science, energy efficiency and construction.

The Selectman thanked Mr. Melanson for volunteering to serve on the Energy Committee.

Motion by Phil Winslow to accept Frank Melanson as a member of the Energy Committee. Seconded by Bill Epperson. All in favor.

VII. DISCUSSION ITEMS

- A. Bruce Hurley, Race Director of the Seacoast Half Marathon – Continued discussion about the event**

Bruce Hurley, Seacoast Half Marathon Race Director, noted that just before the meeting tonight, he looked at the current hospitalization rates in N.H. for other events that have taken place in the State. It's exactly the same as when they last met at 18 hospitalizations per day. He looked at events from N.H., Vermont and Maine with 300 runners up to 1500 runners. He doesn't see limitations from the other towns right now. He has a meeting with the City of

Portsmouth next week. Right now, they haven't said anything about limiting the number of runners. He pointed out that they have access to the Portsmouth High School, so the race will be starting and ending at the school. At this time, the race is just shy of 200 runners registered. Normally, the race would be capped at 1200 runners. He thinks 800 runners is a realistic expectation based on the number of people registering for other events right now.

Interim Town Administrator Kevin Walsh noted that the past practice of the Select Board has been to limit races to 900 runners maximum. Races can cause congestion, as some have staggered start times and some don't. They are usually held on a Saturday or Sunday and day to day operations of the town have to continue. He commented that 1200 runners would be too many at once. He would support 900 runners, based on traffic in town and the past practice of the Board.

Mr. Hurley pointed out this is consistent to what they have done in the past. Generally, they have a registration of 1200 with maybe 1000 runners on race day.

Chair Epperson asked about the marathon's breakeven point.

Mr. Hurley explained the breakeven point is traditionally 285 runners. This year, costs have increased so it may be a little higher than expected.

Vice-Chair Winslow asked if he would be agreeable to capping the number at 900 with no same day registration.

Mr. Hurley stated that traditionally they haven't had same day registration, so that shouldn't be a problem. If they get 900 runners, he would be happy.

Selectman King pointed out to the Board that they just approved 1000 attendees for the Lion's Club car show, so that's not consistent. He would recommend that they go to at least 1000 with the restrictions.

Administrator Walsh noted that the car show is corralled at Parson's Field. This will be 1000 runners on Rye's roads all at once. There are times when cars have to be stopped to allow runners to go through. In the past, the Select Board has capped it at 900 runners. He asks that the Board be consistent with that.

Chair Epperson stated that he would support the suggestion for 900 with no signups the day of race.

Mr. Hurley asked if they could allow same day signups, if they are below 900 runners before the day of race.

Administrator Walsh stated that as long as it's capped right at 900.

The Select Board agreed.

Motion by Phil Winslow to cap the Seacoast Half Marathon at 900 runners. If less than 900 are preregistered, same day signups will be allowed with 900 total runners being the maximum. Seconded by Tom King. All in favor.

B. MRI Preliminary Revaluation

Representatives from Municipal Resources, Inc. met with the Select Board to give an update on the mandated five-year property revaluation. The last two years, property values have increased at accelerated rates. Right now, there is a \$124,640,000 increase in the town's assessed value. This represents an overall increase of 48%. The residentials have increased 49%, condominiums 48%, vacant land parcels 46%, and commercial 39%. It was noted that the valuation of commercial property doesn't move as rapidly as residential because only so much revenue can be generated from that parcel of land. A lot of the value is based on the income approach to value.

One of the representatives noted that they looked at 193 sales between April 1, 2020 and March 31, 2022. They went into approximately 20% of those sales. There were 158 residential homes, 25 condominium sales, 9 vacant land sales and 1 commercial sale that were reviewed. Only qualified sales were considered. In looking at the sales over the last two years, the median assessment for sales ratio is at 104%. In looking at just last years sales, it's 98.47%. The coefficient disbursement is a way of measuring the quality of the data. The requirement is to be less than 15% from the median. For two years it's at 10.84% and for one year it's 8.62%, which is well within the national association's limits.

Preliminary values will be mailed by the end of the week. Calls from property owners will be taken through August 3rd. People will also be able to go online to set up an appointment for either a phone hearing, Zoom hearing or in-person hearing. The hearings will be based at the Town Hall from July 27th through August 5th. Most hearings will be held during the day with evening hours available one day per week.

Motion by Bill Epperson to accept the preliminary value update report as of 2022 with the proviso that they are open to listening to individual property owners in relation to their values. Seconded Tom King. All in favor.

C. Town Clerk/Tax Collector, Donna DeCostis – Job Functions of the Town Clerk's Office

Donna DeCotis, Town Clerk/Tax Collector, spoke to the Select Board regarding the duties of the Town Clerk/Tax Collector for the Town of Rye. The town clerk/tax collector is elected by the people of Rye at town meeting and is accountable to the citizens of Rye. The responsibilities of a town clerk/tax collector are defined by state statute. It is her duty to discharge the obligations and responsibilities of the Town Clerk's office to the best of her ability. However, the State of New Hampshire regulates some of those responsibilities. If the N.H. Secretary of State says how to receive a voter registration, an absentee ballot or to stay until a certain hour for elections, those laws must be obeyed and followed. Likewise, the Department of Revenue, Department of Motor Vehicles, Department of Vital Records, Department of Agriculture and Department of Safety, also give instructions and regulations for the town clerk/tax collector's job. Thus, it is

primarily State law that must be followed. The town clerk/tax collector has the authority and responsibility to determine how and when the job is to be done. That includes the work of the town clerk/tax collector and the deputy town clerk/tax collector.

Ms. DeCotis noted that she loves her work, the citizens of Rye and the people she works with in the town. It is why she has run for town clerk/tax collector and continues to do the job. She would like to speak with the Select Board about any issues involving the Town Clerk's Office and fellow employees in the Town of Rye about issues involving the town. She wants the Select Board and others working at the Town Hall to understand that she is elected had has certain state guidelines to do the town clerk/tax collector job, as she sees fit, and also to direct the deputy town clerk/tax collector on their job.

Ms. DeCotis continued that effective Monday; she is requesting to have new hours in the Town Clerk/Tax Collector's Office. The hours will be Monday through Thursday 8:00 to 4:30 and Friday 8:00 to 12:00.

Chair Epperson asked why the hours are until 12:00 on Friday.

Ms. DeCotis explained that she has done a survey of hours open for town clerks on the Seacoast and some neighboring towns. A lot of the offices are closed on Fridays and some are half days on Fridays. (A list of town clerk office hours for nearby communities was submitted to the Board.)

Chair Epperson clarified that the office hours are not mandated by state statute on the hours that the office has to be open. He asked if she generally makes the hours.

Ms. DeCotis replied that she does, as long as the work is being completed. If the load is heavier or it's a snow day, she and the deputy town clerk will bring their computers home to work from home also.

In regards to having access to the Select Board, Chair Epperson noted that the first line of defense is to go to the town administrator. If they feel the issue is important enough to bring to the Select Board, they will certainly do that. He is a little concerned about what will happen in the afternoons on Fridays. There are a lot of folks that come in to the Town Hall after work between 3:00 and 4:00 in the afternoon. He asked if there is an overarching reason to close at 12:00.

Ms. DeCotis explained that if there is an overload of work during the week, if the office closes at 12:00, they could stay a couple of extra hours to clean up the work and other things that need to be done.

Vice-Chair Winslow pointed out that some towns have evening hours. He asked if that has been considered.

Ms. DeCotis replied yes. She noted that right now, she comes in around 7:00 a.m. and is at the Town Hall until 4:30. The Deputy Town Clerk comes in about 8:00 a.m. and is willing to stay

later if need be. Ms. DeCotis suggested staying later maybe one night a week or having the office open until 5:00, instead of 4:30.

Selectman King pointed out that four of the twelve towns don't have evening hours. Eight of the twelve towns listed have hours in the evening and Rye doesn't. He thinks that is something they may want to consider for the demographic that needs evening hours. He commented the Town Clerk has the right to make the hours and these are only observations. He also pointed out that six of the twelve towns listed have half days on Fridays. All of those that are closed on Fridays have evening hours. This is something that may be helpful to the community. He would encourage evening hours if the office is going to close early on Fridays.

Administrator Walsh noted that there are a lot of folks who come in to the office on Fridays, just before the weekend. Ms. DeCotis has talked about how busy her office can be on a Friday afternoon and now that service won't be there. His other question is about the office not being open a full forty hours. Do the employees have to work the full forty hours in order to contribute to N.H. Retirement? He does not know the answer; however, this needs to be considered. Most of all, it's about customer service and the people that the town staff works for.

Ms. DeCotis explained that the reason they get hit hard on Fridays is because marriage licenses, vital records and boat registrations are universal throughout the State. People from all over the State come to Rye for those things.

Chair Epperson asked why she is limiting the Friday hours.

Ms. DeCotis commented the office gives good customer service to Rye residents. These are people coming from other towns because other town clerk offices are closed on Fridays. She pointed out that people come from Massachusetts, New Hampshire and Maine. A Maine resident who has a mooring at Rye Harbor or another N.H. water, must have their boat registered in New Hampshire. It's the same for Massachusetts.

Chair Epperson stated that he would be inclined to agree with the hours, as long as there is consistent evening availability for people to do their business.

Assistant Town Clerk Lindsay Murphy spoke about the work load of the town clerk's office.

Joe Cummins, 990 Washington Road, commented that he would hope that the town is compensated for the marriage licenses and vital records for the processing. He also worries about the employee's safety if they are to be alone in the building in the evening.

Chairman Epperson pointed out that the Town Clerk's Office has a security system.

Administrator Walsh agreed to do some research on the hours in regards to employee retirement.

The Select Board asked Ms. DeCotis to give them an idea of what night the office will stay open and when the new hours will start.

Ms. DeCotis agreed to look into the night hours further. She would like to start the new day hours on July 18th. She also agreed to get the new hours posted on the town's website and other town social media.

D. Alex Herlihy, RHC Sign Committee – Proposal for Historic Signs in Rye

Alex Herlihy presented the Select Board with a report of what the sign committee has accomplished. He stated that he would like to review it with the Board because he would like to get their feedback. Some of the historic signs that the committee examined were on private land and some on public land and on buildings. He pointed out that one that is the most impressive is the one on the boulevard bike path, just off Cable Road. In fifty words it describes two historic elements the Sunken Forest and the Cable. The committee's idea is to look at the whole town, and to have some diversity; some buildings and some natural areas. The two that Mr. Herlihy is working on is the Drake House and Trefethen Corner.

Selectman Winslow asked for the size, design, color, the material of the sign, and the graphics. He also asked about the maintenance of the signs.

Committee Member Peter White responded that the signs will be approximately 3'x 2' on a single pedestal. They will be weather resistant with plexiglass over them. There will be photos and a limited number of words. He described the theme concept: Farming, Goss Farm Barn; Fishing, Rye Harbor; Hospitality, Drake House; History, the burial ground on Brackett; Trefethen Corner; Rye Town Center and Odiorne Point.

Selectman Winslow expressed concerns regarding the use of plexiglass.

Mr. Herlihy responded that they have not made any final decision regarding the material. They are working with a professional on the designs.

Mr. White also informed the Board that they are working on private fundraising, so that there will be no costs to the Town.

Chair Epperson suggested that the committee come up with graphics for the Board to review. He added that they have to be durable and sustainable.

Mr. White pointed out that they are also being mindful of the locations, so that there is parking for drivers to stop and look; as well as, bikers and pedestrians.

The Board was in favor of the plans as presented so far.

VIII. CORRESPONDENCE - None

IX. NEW BUSINESS - None

X. OLD BUSINESS

Selectman Winslow asked Administrator Walsh if he had an update from Rockingham Planning on getting state funds for the Route 1 and Lang Road intersection.

Administrator Walsh responded that he believed that it is in a holding pattern. He will email Dania Seiglie to find out.

Selectman Winslow reminded Administrator Walsh that the request has to be in by the 15th.

Selectman King asked about the progress on the work on the Town Hall second floor windows.

Administrator Walsh responded that he received an email from the contractor Monday. The contractor had outlined a list of items that the Board needs to address because it looks like the contractor will be asking for more money. The work that is being done upstairs currently is the lead paint removal. This is not being done by the contractor who is restoring the windows.

Selectman King presented the Board with a sample of the Rye 400th telephone pole banner.

Selectman King asked about the pump-out letters.

Administrator Walsh responded that Dr. Snow will be signing the letters then a copy of each will be given to the building inspector and the originals will be sent out registered mail.

Selectman King referred to an article in the Portsmouth Herald regarding Covid shots for infants. A lot of pediatricians are not giving it out because the dose is small for an infant and they would have to throw away the rest of the dosage. He asked Fire Chief Cotreau if it would be beneficial to talk to Dr. Snow about holding an infant clinic.

Chief Cotreau responded that he would be happy to talk with Dr. Snow and he would have Lt. MacGlashing reach out to the State for further information.

XI. OTHER BUSINESS

A. Meeting Minutes

1. Meeting, Monday, June 13, 2022, 6:00 p.m., Rye Town Hall

The following was noted:

- Page 9, 1st paragraph last sentence should read: **Selectman Winslow recommended Parsons Creek and town-wide cell service.**
- Page 10, 1st paragraph, 2nd sentence should read: **If there are one or two sharks, typically they are transient.**

Motion by Phil Winslow to approve the meeting minutes of Monday, June 13, 2022 as amended. Seconded by Bill Epperson. All in Favor.

2. Non-public Session, Monday, June 13, 2022 (1) per RSA 91-A:3 II (d) Hiring

Motion by Phil Winslow to approve the Non-public Session minutes of Monday, June 13, 2022, as presented and not to seal. Seconded by Bill Epperson. All in Favor.

3. Meeting, Wednesday, June 15, 2022, 7:00 p.m., Rye Town Hall

Motion by Phil Winslow to approve the meeting minutes of Wednesday, June 15, 2022 as presented. Seconded by Bill Epperson. All in Favor.

Adjournment

Motion to adjourn by Bill Epperson at 8:00 p.m. Seconded by Phil Winslow. All in favor.

Respectfully Submitted, Dyana F Ledger