

Rye Community Design Charrette

Rye, NH

May 31st and June 1st, 2019



Rye Community Design Charrette Acknowledgments

Thank you to the individuals who donated their time, energy, and expertise for this charrette. And to all the community members who shared their insights about Rye.

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The Rye Team

Without the support and participation of all of the following individuals, this charrette would not have been possible:

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Paula Tsetsilas, resident

Select Board Members

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Priscilla Jenness (2018)

Bill Epperson (2019)

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Thanks also to those who provided our meals:

Las Olas Taqueria

The Fifth Flavor Catering

The Lazy Bird Cafe

Seacoast Soups

Plan NH is grateful for the special support of these members:



Who is Plan NH?

Plan New Hampshire, The Foundation for Shaping the Built Environment (Plan NH), is a 501(c)3 non-profit organization formed in 1989. Plan NH has *a vision* of a New Hampshire that is vibrant and healthy for its people, its economies and the environment. To achieve that vision, Plan NH's mission is to "foster excellence in planning, design and development of New Hampshire's built environment," because we believe that *what* we build, *where* we build and *how* we build anything has a significant impact on that vibrancy and health.

Plan NH *champions principles and ideas* that balance building projects, including anything built in the public realm, such as buildings, roads, bridges, memorials, public sculpture, with:

- the needs of people, including where they live, how they get about, what services are necessary, what they value
- maintaining the "sense of place" of our towns, cities and villages that make them unique, including preserving historic assets, open spaces, agriculture and farming
- protecting our air, water, flora and fauna

Among our signature programs is *the design charrette*, an exercise that brings professionals from our membership together with New Hampshire communities to explore design ideas, usually around a town center or other significant neighborhood. Through recommendations made, Plan NH can demonstrate the role and importance of the principles and ideas noted above in concrete, real examples.



Why did Plan NH come to Rye?



In December of 2018, the Town of Rye (the “Town”) submitted an application for a Plan NH Community Design Charrette. The Plan NH Charrette Committee accepted the application.

The Town was seeking assistance to

- evaluate “its Town Center for its best uses in meeting the needs of its citizens” and to
- “help it formulate a comprehensive and cohesive plan for the Rye Town Center.”
- formulate a plan to “greatly enhance the health, vitality and cohesiveness of the area and a sense of community among Rye’s citizens.”

The Town was looking for

- “an unbiased bird’s eye view of potential options to maximize current assets and guide future investments”, including sequential steps
- safety improvements for pedestrians and other users of the Town Center.

In addition, they wanted assistance in identifying

- “ways to attract younger families to town, while providing needed services to seniors” as well as “ways to bring the community closer together as a whole.”
- “opportunities to improve Rye Recreational participation and/or ways to lift the community spirit.”
- “ways to add new and perhaps affordable housing in Rye center, increasing the vitality of that area.”
- town building and land use, including, as mentioned in the Master Plan, “pocket parks and gardens in the town center.”
- “ways to bring the business community and local residents together in a central area during the off-season months, helping to strengthen the community bond”
- “ways to bring the community together more, either with a multi-purpose building, zoning changes that would add retail opportunities in the center, or special events that bring the town citizens together.”
- “options for increased walkability/cycling to/from the town center.”

Plan NH in Rye, NH

May 31st and June 1st, 2019



The charrette team takes a tour of the downtown



The charrette team holds listening sessions with the general public



The charrette team processes the input received during the listening sessions and tour



The charrette team works collaboratively to draft recommendations

What is a charrette?

Simply stated, a charrette is a brief, intense, brainstorming session in which ideas are brought together for the purpose of defining potential planning recommendations and possible design solutions for an identified need. For Plan NH, this is usually related to a town center or other significant neighborhood in a community.

Plan NH's community design charrettes take place over the course of two days: eight hours on a Friday for listening and then another eight hours the next day for brainstorming, crafting recommended solutions, and presenting thoughts to the community.

The process engages planning and design professionals in direct dialog and conversation with each other and with local residents to collect information needed in order to develop good and relevant recommendations about how to address a particular challenge. Plan

NH sees this part of the process as a period of discovery: discovering who the community is, what they value, what they really want. This community input is essential and critical to the value of the outcomes.

The results of a Plan NH charrette are general and overarching planning and design recommendations, rather than specific directions. Plan NH does not dictate but suggests. Most often, the outcome of a Plan NH charrette is described as a "vision": an expression of how things might be, based on what the team saw and heard and learned.

Charrettes blend the broad experience of planning and design professionals with local citizens' detailed knowledge of their own community to develop recommendations that address challenges and opportunities in the project at hand. These recommendations provide a framework within which more detailed solutions and plans of action can be developed.



The general public are invited back for a presentation of the charrette team's recommendations

Site Tour Observations



What the Plan NH team saw in Rye

- Safety Building
- Library
 - clear community center
- Town Hall
- Old Trolley Barn
 - asked for new uses
- Rec Center
- Parsonage
 - needs work, lots of opinions
- Parson's Field
 - connects to Rec area via trails
- TD Bank Building
 - vacant
- Parking
 - public parking seems underused
- Sidewalks great in some areas

Plan NH would like to thank Alex Herlihy for his historical and engaging tour of Rye!

What Rye Told Plan NH

What Plan NH Heard from Community Leaders

After the tour of Rye Center and a delicious lunch, the team met with key community leaders to learn about the challenges and opportunities from their perspectives as community leaders.

Focus on Town Center

- Creating destinations- reasons for people to come to town center (other than errands)
 - Possibly in Parsonage, TD Bank Building- opportunities for development

Vision of Multi-generational Community Center (5-95)

- 160+ seniors and rising
- 60 after school programs
 - Middle schoolers underserved
 - Maybe increase unstructured programs, add youth/teen center?
- First contact for new families

Historic District

- Clear desire to maintain town aesthetic
- Stuck in past?

Library is community hub

- Information Station- how do we bring people in?
- Also center and iconic
- Town owned

Parsonage

- Will be vacant in 1 year
- No/limited upkeep
- Could become a destination

Wayfinding

- Help people find town center and the places there
- Something that says “you are here”

Public Safety

- Traffic calming
- Sidewalk expansion
 - Want to connect to schools for safety
 - Seems like plenty of support
 - Facilitates more walking in town

TD Bank Building

- Currently vacant
- Could be new town hall offices or retail?
- Housing?



What Rye Residents Told Plan NH

Two public listening sessions were held during the afternoon and evening of Friday, May 30th. The sessions served as an opportunity for the public to share their comments and ideas about the Village Center. Plan NH's process encouraged participation and input from everyone in the room. The residents in attendance were highly united in their desire to keep the historic and quintessentially New England feel. It was obvious to the charrette team that there is great care for the community and that what is here is cherished.

What do you see and do now in the village center?

- Quaint, quintessential, HISTORIC town center
- Feels good!
- A place to get things done (LIBRARY, town offices/administration, school, church)
- Parson's Field and Green Spaces
 - Incredible resource so close to the town

What do you want to see in 10 years?

- Keeping that quintessential, HISTORIC town center
- NO franchises
- Increased, safe, and accessible pedestrian and bicycle CONNECTIVITY
- Multi-generational community GATHERING spaces
- Clear plan for Town Hall and historic town owned buildings

What else does Plan NH need to know?

- Community needs a WIN
- Remain sensitive to taxpayer financial concerns (making sure expectations meet reality)
- Library is considering expansion options
- Want efficient and thoughtful re-imaging of current space use
- Multi-generational focus
- Observation: High Levels of Civic Engagement



What Makes a Great Place?

WHAT MAKES A GREAT PLACE?

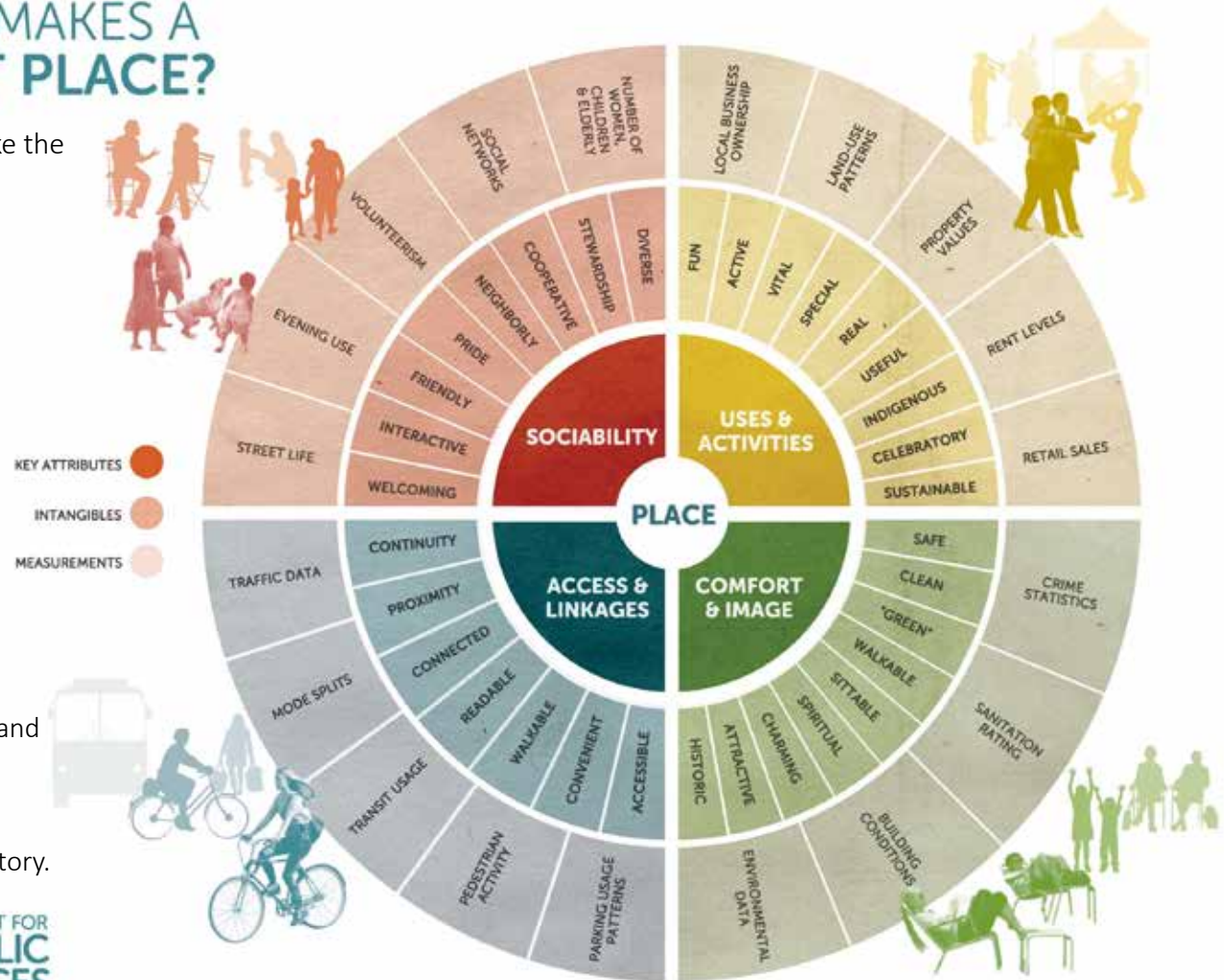
The Plan NH recommendations sought to make the Rye Town Center more...

- Social
- Comfortable
- Charming and beautiful
- Accessible
- Connected

The Plan NH team considers what makes a place great when crafting our recommendations. The image on the right from the Project for Public Spaces outlines what makes a great place.

For the town center, the charrette team recommendations included:

- Green spaces and the creation of gathering places.
- Use of village path loops to connect spaces and amenities.
- Places to call home to build village life
- Traffic calming to secure livability and safety
- Preserving historical resources and Rye's history.
- Places to play to support health and wellness.



Embrace Existing Assets



When evaluating a place, and developing recommendations for revitalization, a good place to start is by taking inventory of existing assets.

Rye has a quintessential Town Center, with incredible assets that contribute to its own sense of place:

- Town Hall
- Church
- Rye Public Library
 - Obviously a town gathering place and community center
- Parsonage
 - Much potential for future
- Rye Historical Society
- Rye Public Safety Building
- Parson's Field
 - Rare to have a green space such as this so close to the heart of the village
- Rye Junior High
 - Used as a gathering place, could potentially expand multi-generational programming
- TD Bank Building
 - Larger than expected (3.5 acres), lots of potential
- Trolley Barn/Old Police Station

Existing Assets

Connectivity and Safety



Roads are for people, too

There was clear need and desire for increased connectivity of most used buildings (Town Hall, Library, Rye Junior High) for both pedestrians and bicyclists. The current lack of continuous sidewalks combined with wide travel lanes and Y-intersections is unsafe for people who are walking and people on bicycles.

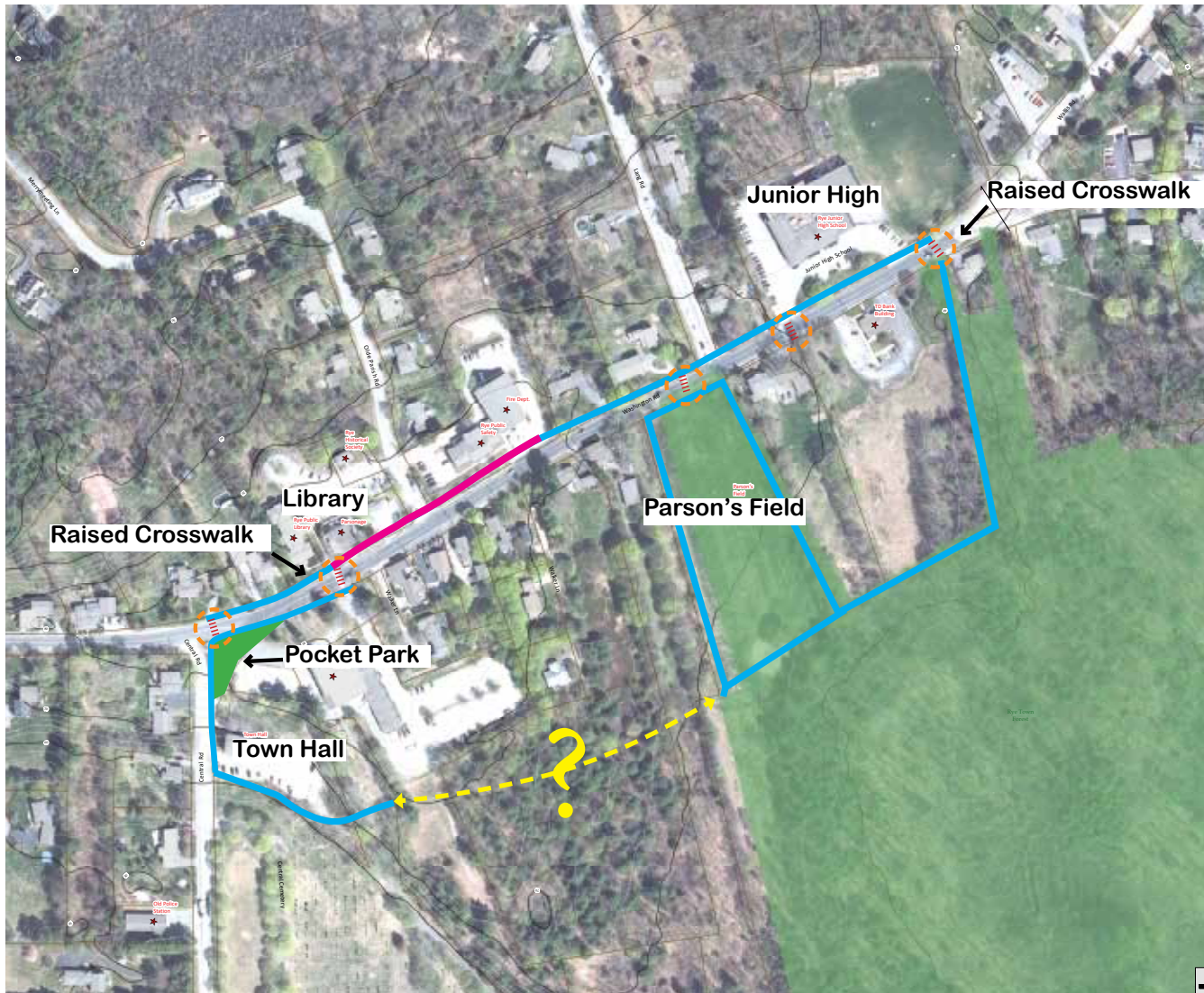
Plan NH Recommendations

- Traffic calming gateways on either end of Washington Rd at Wallis Rd and Central Rd
- o Define edges of the village center while also slowing speeds
- Change Y-intersections to T-intersections to create STOPS and slow traffic
- Existing Washington Rd has 12 ft travel lanes, which are the same as an interstate highway and can be narrowed to 10-11 ft and the pavement reallocated to other uses
- Bicycle lanes throughout
- Extending the sidewalk on west side of Washington Rd connect the middle school to the library and then cross to town hall
- Make sidewalks along the street a nice visual enhancement to compliment the historic setting



Transportation, Parking, and Safety

Map of Potential Projects



This overview shows several recommendations to assist in traffic calming and walkability.

Firstly, adding raised crosswalks, also called “speed tables”, where shown in red and orange would help slow drivers and provide safety for pedestrians.

Secondly, the blue lines show potential routes for walking on town land. Ensuring that these paths are completely connected with sidewalks, crosswalks, and maintain paths will go far to increasing walkability. The pink lines show existing sidewalks along this route.

The yellow dotted path crosses some private land but is a potential connection to create a closed loop that borders the entire village center.

The pocket park is described in full on the next page.

Transportation, Parking, and Safety

Intersection Adjustments: Central and Washington

Intersection Changes

By the simple shifting of the monument to the other side of the intersection, the intersection is moved into more of a “T”.

- Reduces the width of central road in the intersection change, it currently has a 20’ shoulder
- Slows traffic coming around the corner by adding a stop sign rather than the current wide yield
- Idea of a roundabout: since the volume of traffic is relatively low a T-intersection would be more likely to provide the desired outcome

Pocket Park: Monument Access

Moving the monument just 10 feet places it in an accessible location and makes it a clearer part of the town center. It also provides the opportunity to develop a pocket park and a public parking area.

- Town actually owns most of the land in front of the church (historic drop-off) and parking lot
 - Narrow the drop off from 40 feet wide to a single lane and add landscaping
 - Opportunity to change pavement type directly in front of church to highlight the space
- Green space with paths become a connection for town hall to Washington Rd
- The width reduction of the drop off and the central road, and the intersection T alignment creates space for a parking lot which can serve the new town hall offices



Transportation, Parking, and Safety

Intersection Adjustments: Wallis and Washington



Intersection Changes

Swinging the road around through the current Y effectively T's the intersection and offers a stop, rather than a yield.

- Wide road here offers opportunity for a pedestrian refuge in the crosswalk
- Also opens area on right for a pocket park around the memorial here and acts as a visual gateway

Transportation, Parking, and Safety

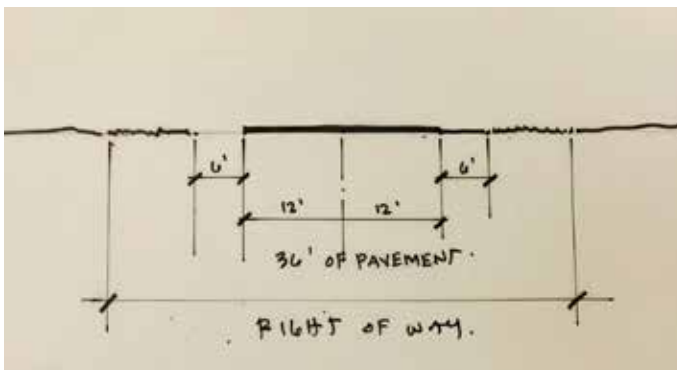
Traffic Operations

Complete Roads and Safety

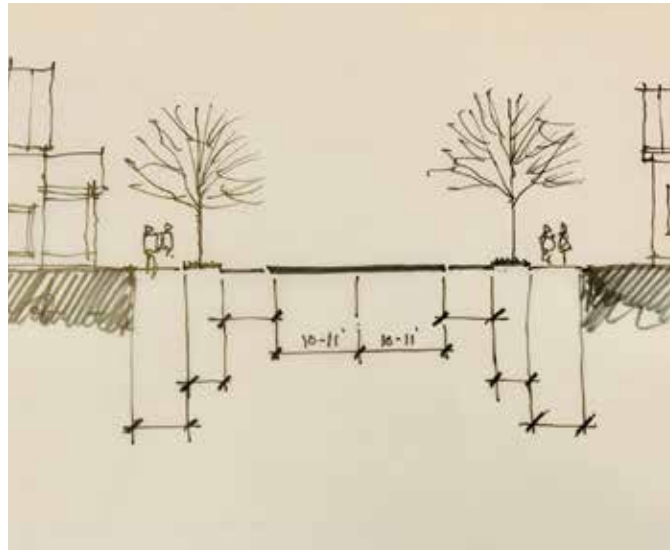
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- Make sidewalks along the street a nice visual enhancement to compliment the historic setting



The road up by the school, showing the narrow walking area



Current layout of the roads through town center



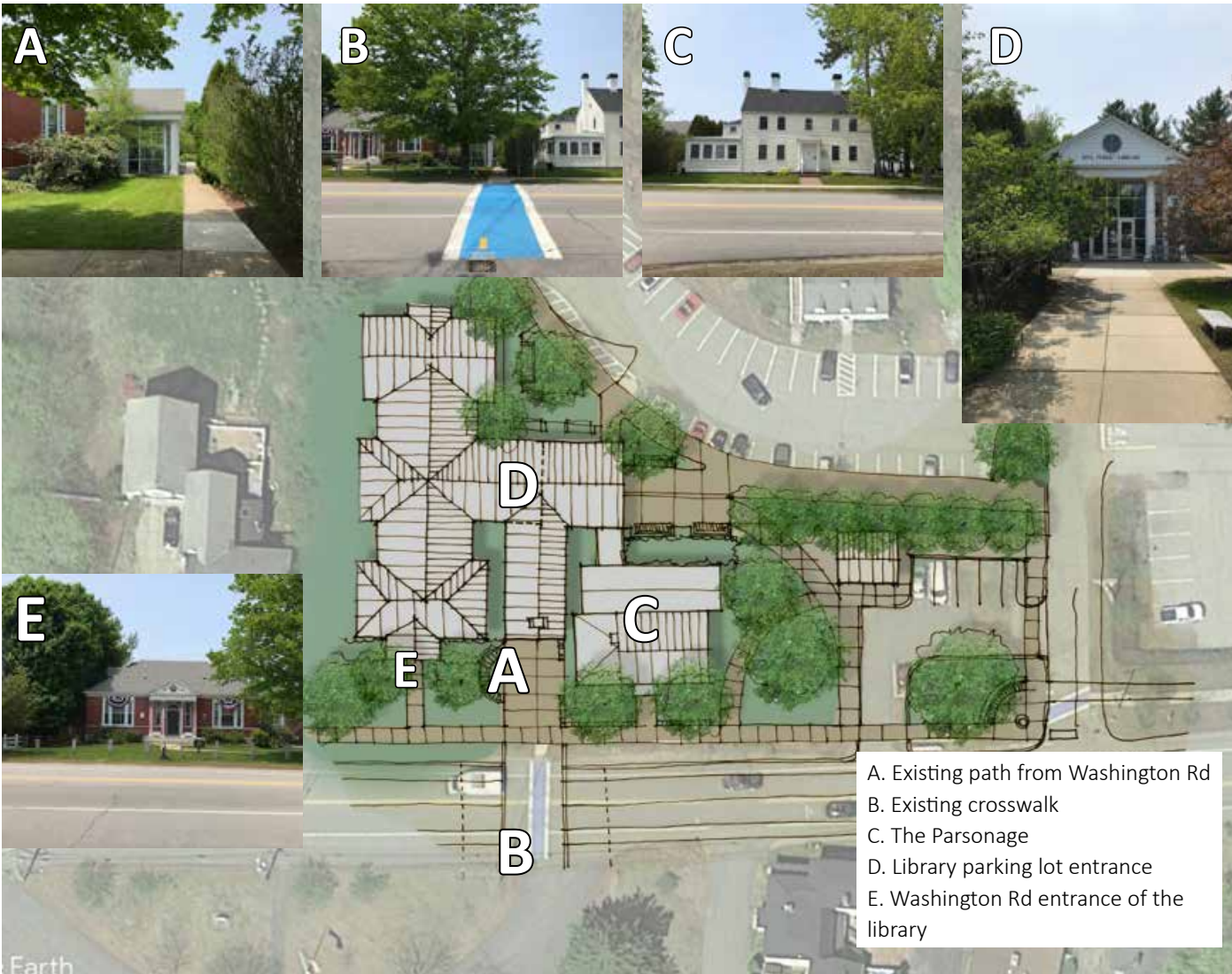
A sketch of a potential "complete" road layout for the town center



The road heading into town showing the stone walls

Transportation, Parking, and Safety

Library & Parsonage Connections



A. Existing path from Washington Rd
 B. Existing crosswalk
 C. The Parsonage
 D. Library parking lot entrance
 E. Washington Rd entrance of the library

Exploring Possibilities

The charrette team fully embraced the call to offer new and unique solutions to some of Rye's most well-known properties.

Connections

The Library is looking to expand, in part to accommodate the middle grade students who come in after school. By incorporating the Parsonage building into a Library Campus, the Library could gain a space for youth programming and gatherings that there is not currently space for. This "campus" would

- Extend pathways and landscaping
- Not impact parking negatively and could in fact enforce a connection with Washington Rd and the public parking near the church
 - o Light and airy- building but not building
 - o Widens walkway from Washington Rd to Library lobby
 - o Gives space for welcoming

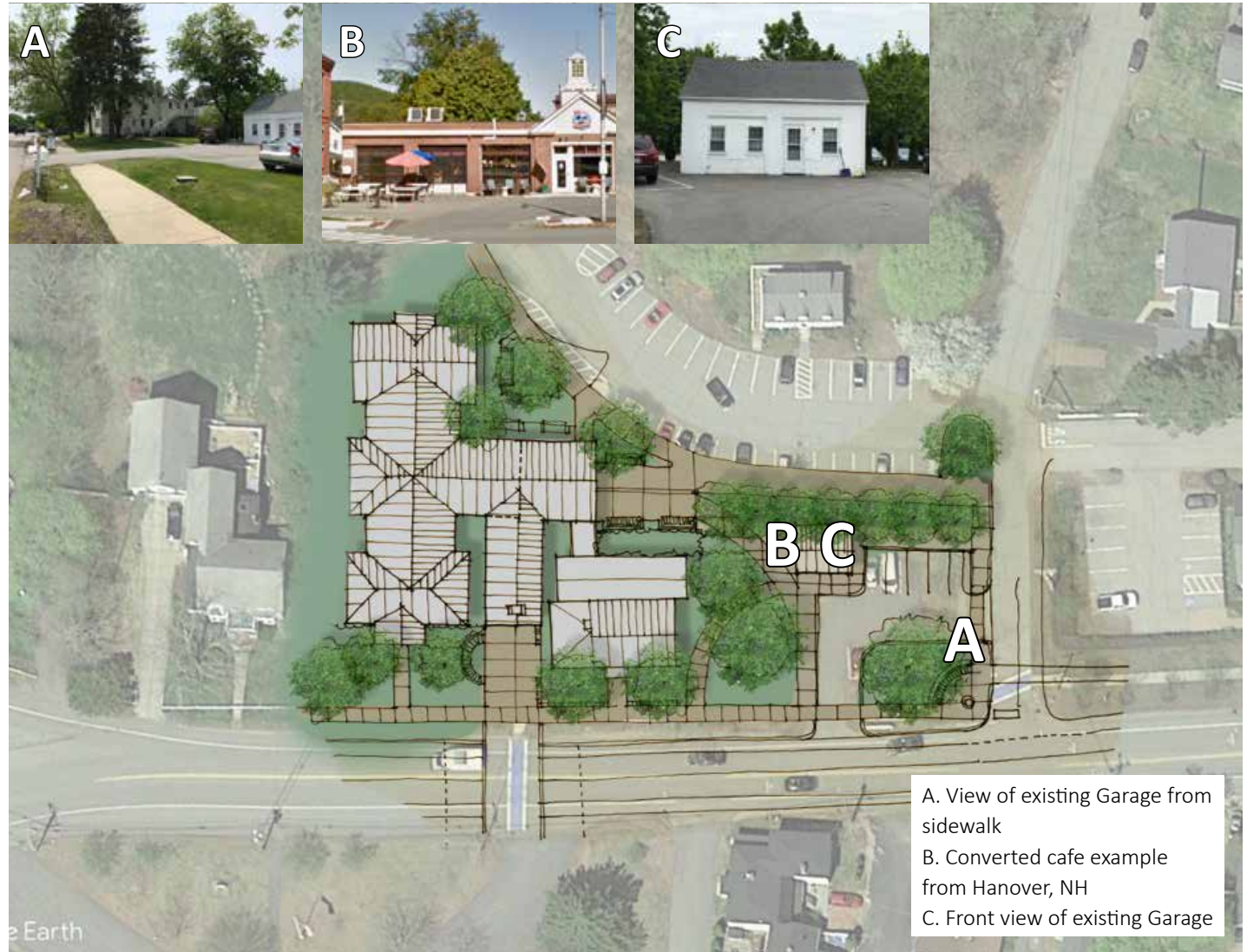
Building Use & Design

Parsonage Garage Possibilities

The Quintessential Cafe?

During the tour, several charrette team members were drawn to the small garage building next to the Parsonage. Drawing on examples like the adapted gas station in photo B, the team imagined a small cafe with outdoor seating in the summer and warm drinks in the winter. Some further notes suggested:

- Having limited menu focused on coffee and quick bits
- Acting more as social space
- Refurbishing one of the garage doors to open up on warm days- adaptive reuse in action



Building Use & Design

Town Hall & New Building

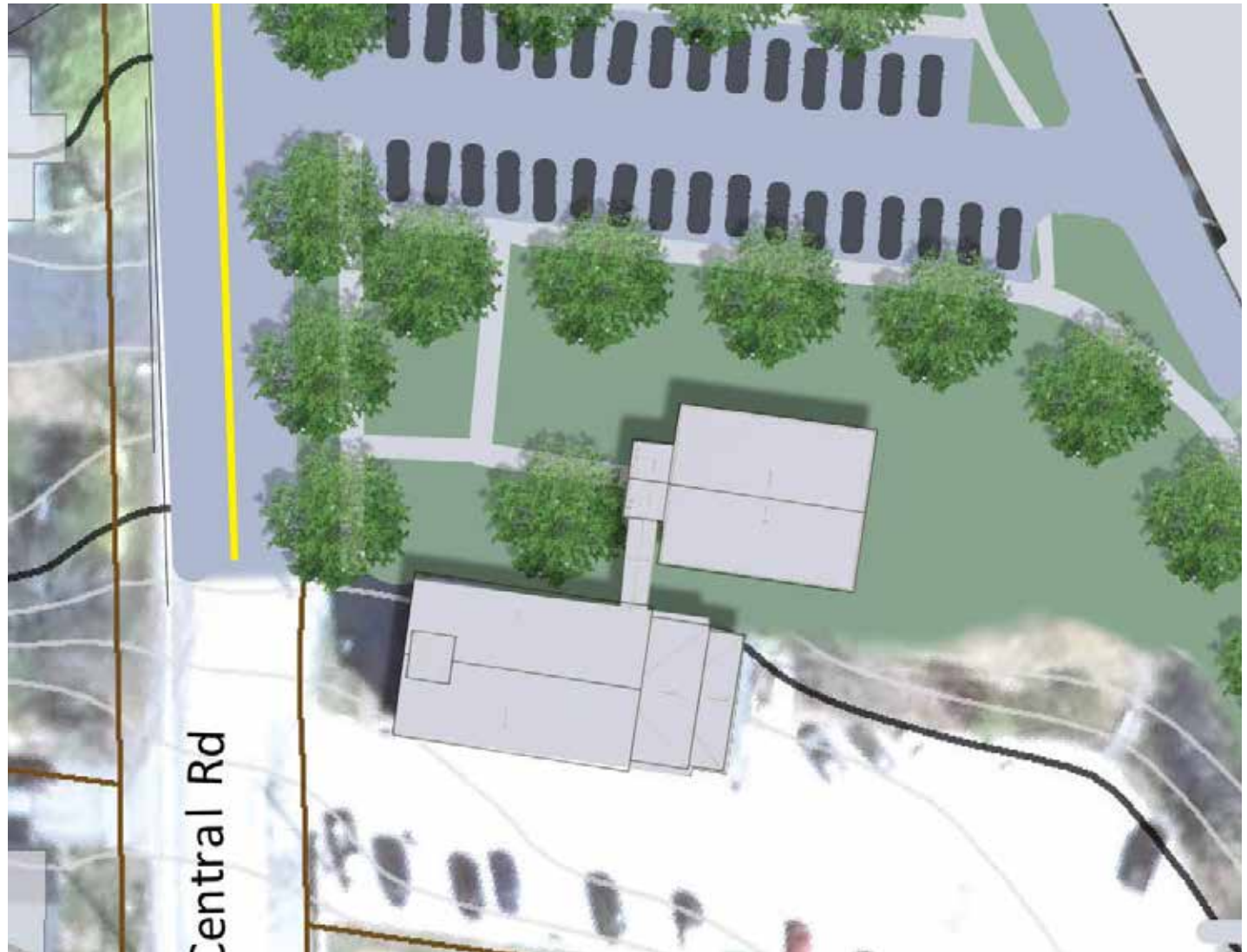
Uncovering History

The tour through the Town Hall was filled with historic details about the building, which was raised from one story to two in more recent times.

Recommendations

- Return the upstairs to an open ballroom
 - Rye has a shortage of significantly sized spaces and this is waiting to be rediscovered and filled with people
- Move town offices to new 1 story building between existing building and public parking
 - The grade allows an accessible route from new building to reinvigorated upper level meeting space via new walkway and pedestrian bridge

While these recommendations would take funds, the Plan NH team encourages the town to think about these suggestions.



Building Use & Design

Creating Homes Close to the Village Center

Workforce Housing Close to the Village Center

Following the direction of thinking outside the box about existing assets, the charrette team imagined the 3.5 acres of the TD Bank lot transformed into a pocket neighborhood that could accommodate small homes of mixed price points with direct access to the village center.

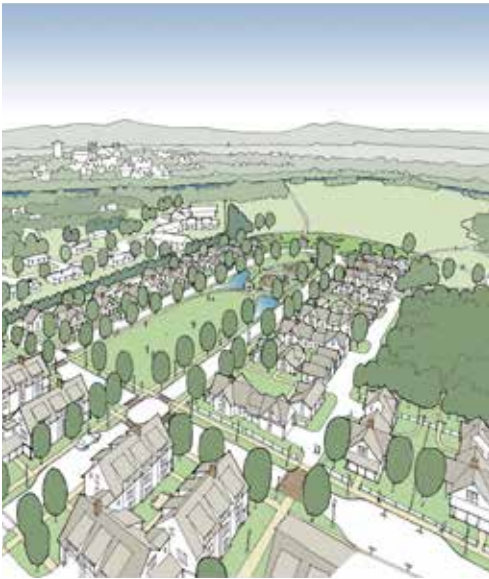
Considerations

- Currently private property which generates taxes, and that has economic value doesn't have to go away
- Existing limits on building will go away within a few years, so there is potential to think longer term
- Pocket neighborhoods are becoming more popular
 - Goal of making a *place* rather than a single building
 - More common in Northwest where "cottage clusters" are showing up
- Could include a mix of single and multi-family homes at mixed price points
 - Lower price point can still be nice!

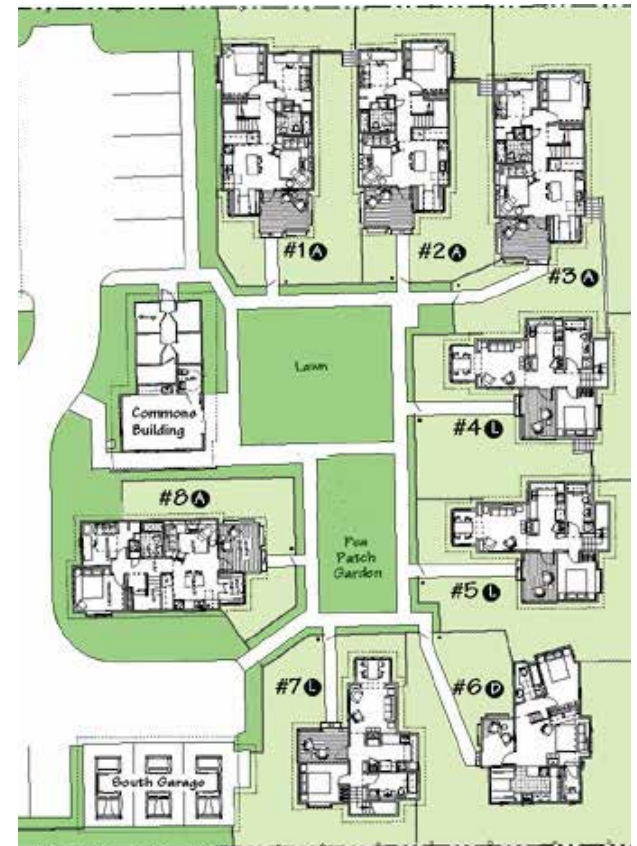


Building Use & Design

Pocket Neighborhoods



- Any development of this lot would require a change or variation in zoning
 - o Currently 2-acre per home, however 8 units an acre is what is considered affordable
 - o Example below shows twelve 1000 square foot units per acre for less than \$200,000 each
- Think about this as building a neighborhood, a small community with a walkable center that is part of Rye's Town Center – a great place for older adults who want to downsize, single young adults, new families and more.
- There is a community-minded owner currently

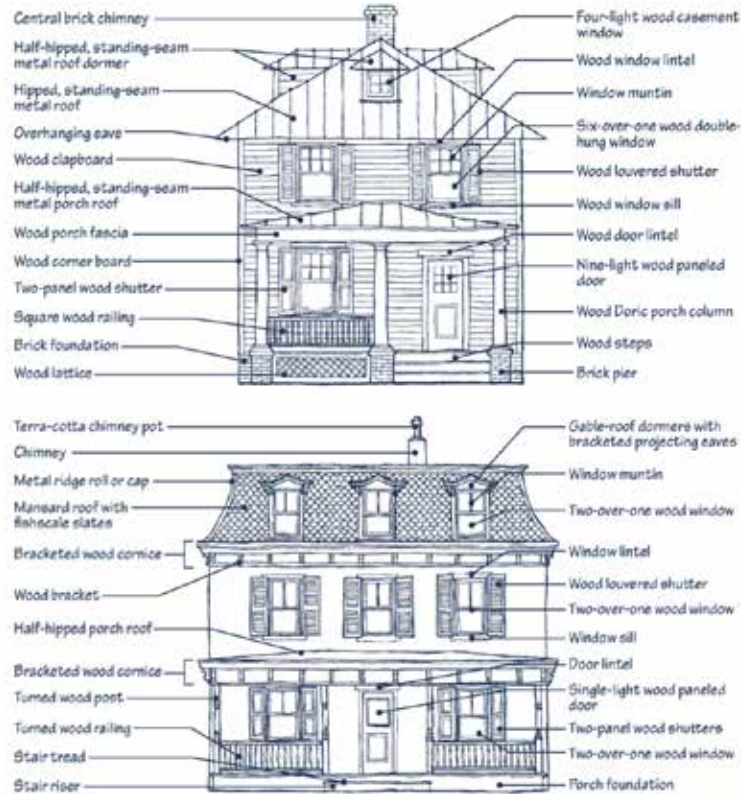


Building Use & Design

Historic District Guidelines

GLOSSARY OF ARCHITECTURAL TERMS

The following diagrams represent composite buildings, and provide a basic vocabulary of architectural elements and terms. Please refer to the individual Guidelines for additional information.



The Guidelines project has been financed in part with Federal funds from the National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior, through the New Hampshire Division of Historical Resources. However, the contents and opinions do not necessarily reflect the views or policies of the Department of the Interior, or the New Hampshire Division of Historical Resources, nor does the mention of trade names or commercial products constitute endorsement or recommendation by the Department of the Interior, or the New Hampshire Division of Historical Resources. This program receives Federal financial assistance for identification and protection of historic properties. Under Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, and the Age Discrimination Act of 1975, as amended, the U.S. Department of the Interior prohibits discrimination on the basis of race, color, national origin, disability or age in its federally assisted programs. If you believe you have been discriminated against in any program, activity, or facility as described above, or if you desire further information, please write to: Office for Equal Opportunity, National Park Service, 1849 C Street NW, Washington, DC 20240.

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ADDITIONS TO EXISTING BUILDINGS

Historically, the need for increased space was often addressed by constructing additions to existing buildings. Additions to existing historic buildings can provide increased space while maintaining the historic character of the original building and streetscape.

Consistent with *The Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation*, an addition to a historic building should be subordinate to the historic building and read as an addition. The subordinate appearance of an addition can be achieved through its placement, form, size, massing, materials and details. Traditional or contemporary design and additions to existing properties should not obscure, damage or destroy significant architectural material, and should be compatible with the design of the property and the neighborhood. Whenever possible, additions should be constructed in a manner that, if removed in the future, the essential form and integrity of the historic building would be unimpaired.

It is Generally Appropriate to:

- Locate additions at rear or side elevations that are subordinate to the historic building and consistent or compatible with the design of the property and surrounding neighborhood wherever possible
- Construct additions so that the historic building fabric is not radically changed, obscured, damaged, or destroyed
- Review Guidelines to better understand the historic context and appropriate design and materials
- Consult zoning requirements at the beginning of the design process



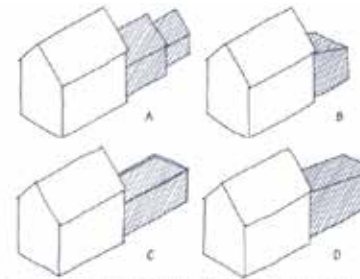
The addition to the left has a scale, proportion, overall form and window pattern similar to the existing building. The addition to the right is significantly larger than the existing building and is visually overwhelming and inappropriate.

Building Form & Massing

Building form refers to the shape of major volumes while massing refers to the overall composition of the major volumes. The form and massing of an addition should complement, but not necessarily match, the original building. For example, it is often appropriate to construct a smaller gable roof form at the rear of an existing gable roof building.

It is Generally Appropriate to...

- Construct an addition with similar form and massing to the existing building and buildings on adjacent sites
- Construct roof forms, wings, eels and bays and other projecting elements that are similar to those found on the existing building and the block of the proposed building



Example A: The two gable roof additions with decreasing roof heights and widths represent an appropriate composition with regard to form, mass and proportions to the original gable roof building. Additions with decreasing geometry similar to these are typical of historic construction.

Example B: The small shed roof addition is appropriate in some locations.

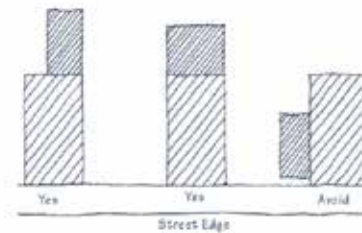
Examples C and D: The flat roofed addition and long shed roof addition are inappropriate for the original gable roof building. The length of the single mass competes visually with the original building.

Setback

An addition should be positioned to have the least visible impact to the streetscape. An addition at a front façade generally is prohibited and a rear addition generally is appropriate. An addition at a side elevation is rarely appropriate and, if proposed, should be located as far as possible from the street.

It is Generally Appropriate to...

- Construct the addition at the rear of the building or at a side elevation as far back on the site as possible
- Use landscape elements, such as walls and fences, to screen the addition visually



In this site plan, the visibility of the left and middle examples would be limited from the sidewalk and the street. The addition to the right is visible from the sidewalk and street and should be avoided, particularly at corner properties.

A Place For Everyone

Who is “everyone”?

A common theme the charrette team heard was that of cultivating a town that is multi-generational and serves everyone, “5-95”. Given the raising proportion of folks 65+ in Rye, and the wider region, it is prudent to consider the following when planning projects.

- Total population of Rye: 5355 (as of 2016)
- 60+ folks make up 30.2% (1615 residents)
- 65+ people account for 22.6% (1210 residents). Of those:
 - 65-74 = 47.4%
 - 75-84 = 33.1%
 - 85+ = 19.4%
- Of the 65+ cohort:
 - 32% live alone
 - 23.5% with depression
 - 28.6% have self-reported “ambulatory difficulty”
 - 20.7% with self-reported independent living difficulty

Tools and Recommendations

Tools readily available to assist in thinking about these things, based on AARP’s concept of *Livable Communities*:

- Outdoor spaces and buildings
 - Sidewalks and curbcuts, benches and shade trees
 - Homes/buildings with no threshold doors and other elements of Universal Design
 - Safe road crossings
- Home needs (variety in location, design, price point)
 - Co-housing, home-sharing
 - Accessory dwelling units (ADU’s)
 - One-floor living
- Transportation
 - A major issue that cannot be ignored
 - Service Link is a source for looking for ways to get about
 - Independent Transportation Network of America (started in Maine)
 - Volunteer drivers, shared rides, more
- Older adults as part of community (social engagement and inclusion)
 - Engagement
 - Social connections
 - Employment
 - Sports (tennis, pickle-ball)
 - Need places to active
 - Walking trails, parks
 - Need places to gather
 - Library, coffee, outdoor spaces
- Communication and information
 - 25% of 60+ did not use the Internet last month
 - Need alternative /traditional methods of communication
 - Snail mail, telephone, personal visits
- Community and health services (almost 12% 60+ did not have physical last year) (outside our scope)

Multi-generational Design

Parson's Field



Parson's Field is an incredible resource so close to the village center. Its connection down to the recreation fields and complex seems underutilized but easily improved.

Recommendations

- Wayfinding
 - Clearer and larger signs for trails and parking
 - Construction of a trail map/Info kiosk, perhaps in the parking lot to work around building restrictions in the field proper
- Public schedule of events, practices, and other uses
 - Whether online or on the kiosk, such a schedule would document the many uses of the field and make it easier for folks to plan

Wayfinding

“Our Past Will Shape Our Future”

Perhaps the biggest take-away for the Plan NH charrette team was how much care and involvement is already in Rye. The dedication is there to follow through with projects and bring out the best in the village center. Making sure everyone is on the same page and talking about the same things will be key to directing that energy to make positive change.

Big Ideas

- Sell the Trolley Barn and use the money to jump-start another project
- Start small - complete the sidewalk from junior high to the library and celebrate!
- The Parsonage
 - o Consider co-programming with the library
 - o Garage Cafe- could be low hanging fruit

A strong community is built when citizens ask “What can we create together?”

As for resources, there are a great many available. We encourage the Town to work closely with the Planning Commission and also the NH Division of Historic Resources to identify specific funds for specific projects.

You have great capacity to do great things. Listen to each other, and go for it.



Final Thoughts & Implementation

Moving Forward

Rye has people who live and work there who have tremendous talents and gifts to offer and the potential to create a great future for itself. This report includes recommendations and suggestions that the team believed would address some of the challenges Rye faces. These are just recommendations – it is now up to you to decide which you want to follow, and then lay out a plan.

And that means all of you. We recommend that an all call go out to the Town, so that anyone interested can come together for a general review of the recommendations and then a discussion about what's next.

Further we recommend that when different ideas from this charrette are developed and implemented, that right at the beginning, interested people are part of the planning and the actions to be taken. We recommend not just "input", but true dialog throughout.



At left: A flowchart showing how new projects can “get to yes” for residents. By focusing on community engagement at the start of the process, rather than trying to gain support once a ballot or warrant article is going to vote, more voices can be heard and their questions and concerns addressed.

Some online tools for increasing engagement include:

- Patronicity- acts as a crowdfunding platform for public initiatives- basically an online version of what the Hillsborough team did to raise funds for the charrette.
- coUrbanize - an mobile tool that helps make development projects more transparent. Includes a text-to-respond polling system that helps give voice to the “silent majority” that cannot attend conventional community meetings.

Final Thoughts & Implementation

PLAN NEW HAMPSHIRE

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