

**RYE TOWN CENTER COMMITTEE
MEETING
WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 18, 2019
5:30 P.M. TOWN HALL**

Members Present: Chair Karen Stewart, Mae Bradshaw, John Mitchell, John Loftus, Kaitlyn Coffey, Victor Azzi and Selectmen's Rep; Phil Winslow.

I. Call to Order and Pledge of Allegiance

Chair Stewart called the meeting to order and led the pledge of allegiance at 5:30 p.m.

II. Public Input - None

III. Plan/Estimate Update from Phil Corbett, CMA Engineers

Phil Corbett, CMA Engineering, presented the members with a rendering of the project and updated the Committee on the progress. He explained that the rendering is what was used for the basis of the cost estimate, with itemized specific additional alternates. With all the add alternates the project would be around \$1.3 million.

Phase One:

The high priority was from the Library to the Junior High School. It included the connection past the Junior High School, adjacent to the field and crossing. It added a lot of benefit and improved the whole project. Phase one also included the crossing in front of the church.

Multiple phases cannot be submitted on a TAP application, so the Committee will have to decide which plan will be submitted.

Mr. Corbett recommended starting with Phase One and talk through the cost estimates. The project was broken down to the base alternative.

- Base Project: Starting at Library to Wallis Road, installing the sidewalk and bike lanes, reconfiguring the road, adding the crossings, doing the bare minimum for lighting improvements, using cobra head lighting \$477,000.
- Alternate One: Remove the cost of the cobra head lighting and adding ten decorative lights: an additional \$160,000.
 - There is a need to install additional lighting.
 - Every crosswalk requires lighting.
 - The existing crossings do not meet federal requirements.
 - Up stream of each crossing there needs to be four lights.
 - All wiring for the lighting would be underground.

There was discussion regarding raised crossings and speed bumps. There are effective treatments that can be used for traffic calming affects. They are very effective and aesthetically

pleasing, but they tend to be controversial for motorists. Concrete pavers are proposed for crosswalks in this plan, which allows for a different texture.

Site amenities were described as bike racks and benches. Some landscaping improvements were proposed. To add the pocket park would be an additional \$400,000.

There was debate on including the pocket park and moving the monument versus having the decorative lighting. It was the consensus of the Committee that the decorative lighting would add more value to the aesthetics in keeping with the historic nature and characteristics of the District. There was further discussion regarding an alternate proposal of adding an additional seven lights. The project is currently proposed with two lights at each crossing. There would be four lights at the Lang Road intersection.

There was extensive detailed discussion regarding what should be submitted in the TAP grant application, as well as, presented to the voters as the final plan.

A three-dimensional color rendering will be done to present to the voters.

In summary, Chair Stewart asked Mr. Corbett if he could get an opinion on the lighting. Are the additional seven decorative lights sufficient to define and give historic character and charm to the corridor, knowing that they are still going to be in dispersed with the cobra head lights, or is it just adding more lights to the tune of \$84,000? If it is not a benefit, then the Committee would like to cut this out of the plan.

Member Mitchell felt that the additional seven lights would not do much to define the center of town. He also had concerns with the raised crosswalks. He felt that they would disrupt the traffic flow and did not feel that they were necessary. He asked if the Committee was deciding these kinds of points at this time.

Mr. Corbett explained that they could define what they are and then work that out through the design process. The problem is that the Committee has to decide if they're going to carry that as a cost or not. If it is shown as just paver crosswalks and is included in the \$85,000, it is misleading. They could change the locations of the crosswalks. What is presented to the public and what will go into the TAP Grant application has to match as closely as possible.

Member Mitchell recommended going with the base plan as proposed and adding the sidewalk to the Town Hall bringing the project in at \$960,000. He would like to see the \$85,000 put toward the lighting not raised crosswalks. Selectman Winslow agreed.

Motion by Mae Bradshaw to provide a warrant article that describes in general terms of providing safe sidewalks, bike lanes, installing appropriate lighting and landscaping in the Town's Historic Center, for a price not to exceed \$960,000, with the Town's portion not to exceed 20% of that figure and the remainder coming through the Alternative Transportation Program (TAP) Grant. Seconded by John Mitchell.

Member Loftus disagreed with only going to the \$960,000, due to the 80% benefit of the TAP Grant. He suggested staying with the base plan and then doing add-ons to bring the project up closer to the million dollars. He pointed out that he is not in favor of the raised crosswalks.

Mr. Corbett recommended having Scott Bogle from Rockingham Planning Commission weigh in on the project.

Member Bradshaw pointed out that there is a motion on the floor. She agreed to entertain a friendly amendment to change the price not to exceed the amount recommended to them by Rockingham Planning after their review.

Member Loftus agreed.

Member Azzi agreed.

Chair Stewart will contact Scott Bogle.

Mr. Corbett stated that he will show the sidewalk to the Town Hall on the plans that will be presented to the public for the deliberative session. He asked when the Committee will need the numbers for the warrant article with the changes and when the plan is needed for the deliberative session.

Motion by Mae Bradshaw to provide a warrant article that describes in general terms of providing safe sidewalks, bike lanes, installing appropriate lighting and landscaping in the Town's Historic Center, for a price not to exceed the amount recommended by Rockingham Planning, with the Town's portion not to exceed 20% of that figure and the remainder coming through the Alternative Transportation Program (TAP) Grant. Seconded by John Mitchell. All in favor.

IV. Update on Property Exchange in the Town Center

Read by Chair Stewart: Press for immediate release 12/16/2019

At Monday night's special publicly noted Selectmen's meeting the Board of Selectmen unanimously voted to sign a swap/exchange agreement of the Parsonage apartments for the property located at 500 Washington Road, former TD Bank, and to move this proposal to the March 2020 warrant for voter consideration. The 500 Washington Road property is under ownership of 500 Washington, LLC and its soul manager is Daniel Philbrick.

Chairman Phil Winslow opened the meeting by explaining that the Parsonage originally came under town ownership in 1995 for the purpose of expansion of the Rye Public Library. However, the expansion did not require the removal of the Parsonage, so in 1999 the Town voted to lease the building to The Housing Partnership for twenty years to provide affordable housing in Rye. In 2016, as the initial lease term on the Parsonage was drawing to a close, a committee was formed to determine the fate of the Parsonage. Two things were abundantly clear from the final committee report. (1) The Town did not want to manage or the tenants directly. (2) The Parsonage was in serious need of updating and repairs, as evidence by the LaCelle Report of 2015 by which it was estimated at least \$500,000 would be needed to bring the building up to standards. Now in 2019, as the agreed one-year lease extension of the original agreement is ending and The Housing Partnership is successfully transitioning residents to alternative housing, only three of the five units still remain occupied. The

Town has the dilemma of managing and maintaining an aging and deteriorating vacant building located in the heart of its Historic District.

In the meantime, a unique opportunity had been presented to the Town. Swap the Parsonage for the property located at 500 Washington Road. Daniel Philbrick, of 500 Washington Road LLC, has offered to exchange the former TD Bank building, along with its 3.71 acres of land abutting Parsons Field, for the Parsonage and Carriage House at Par.

Chair Winslow outlined the following major points as reasons the swap/exchange makes financial sense for the Town. (1) The Parsonage is in serious disrepair. The estimates for repairs was \$500,000 in 2015 and would likely be significantly more in 2020. (2) There is a serious space shortage at the Town Hall. A recent report from the architectural firm of Barba and Wheelock indicated an additional 2,700 square feet is necessary to house all the current offices and employees. The space at the bank is close to that amount. (3) Mr. Philbrick has committed to restoring the Parsonage back to its previous historic condition and investing a minimum of \$850,000 in order to do so. If the renovation at the Parsonage does not reach the \$850,000., the deficit up to that amount will be donated to the Rye Public Library.

The Selectmen are responsible for managing the financial affairs of the Town. In discussing the proposed swap at Monday night's special publicly noticed Selectmen's meeting, the Selectmen made it clear that they believe that their prudential responsibilities mandated that this opportunity to resolve a significant looming problem be placed before town voters. The Board made it very clear that no action will be taken on this agreement, unless the electorate votes positively on this at the March 2020 election. The decision is entirely in the hands of the electors.

Chair Stewart reported that Selectman Winslow stated publicly that he felt that the timing in the process is very unfortunate and he feels it is particular unfortunate to this Committee. The charge to the Committee, was in theory and as written, to consider and make recommendations to the Town about what future needs and plans might be. This is taking some of that ability and options away from this Committee. There were people at the meeting Monday night that felt very strongly that this is a great move for the Town and they hope that the electors vote in favor of it. There were also more people that felt that this is not holistic in nature and that's problematic. It is not strategic or taking into consideration a greater plan or objectives.

After some discussion, Chair Stewart stated that there was certainly some misunderstanding between the members of the Select Board and the Rye Town Center Committee about the Committee's role relating to the Town Hall. However, there was an understanding at the end of the meeting that the Committee will play a role still with determining the use of Town Hall.

Member Bradshaw pointed out that the Select Board's statement was very clear. They could not, with good conscience, not accept an offer for a \$675,000 property that abuts other land that the Town owns, increasing Conservation land, in exchange for a property worth \$325,000 and needs possibly \$850,000 in renovations to convert it to use to fill the gap of 2,700 square feet. How can the Select Board say "no" they're not even going to offer at as an option? The bottom line is that when there is that much disparity in value, the citizens are not going to vote \$850,000 to renovate the Parsonage of offices.

Member Azzi asked how the Committee will feel if the new owner of the Parsonage decides that the building is a tear down.

Member Bradshaw pointed out that the contract with the new owner is that he has to spend \$850,000 to renovate or restore the building to make it look good in the Historic District. He will be dealing with the Historic District Commission.

Chair Stewart interjected that this is not the time to debate the merits of the exchange because the Purchase and Sale was signed and will be going to the voters. The voters will decide.

Member Mitchell asked what will happen to the parking lot at the Parsonage.

Chair Stewart stated that it will be privately owned.

Member Bradshaw paraphrased from the purchase and sale

Use of Property: *500 agrees that it will use Rye property as a multi-family dwelling property of eight or fewer dwelling units. Rye agrees the detached Carriage House may be used as an office or a coffee shop and bakery, subject to all land use board approvals and required permits from the building department. Rye also agrees the main Parsonage building may be used alternatively as a multi-use building with no residential units on the ground floor, subject to receipt of all required land use board approvals and required permits from the building department.*

Rye further agrees that that Rye property is a non-conforming use under the terms of the Rye Zoning Ordinance. That the non-conforming use shall not be expanded. Rye agrees that the footprint of the Parsonage building may be expanded by not more than 20 percent, subject to receipt of all required land use board approvals and required permits from the building department.

The agreements of this section 11, shall be incorporated to the restrictive covenants in the deed conveying the property to 500 and shall go with the land.

Investment by 500: *500 agrees that it or its successors that are assigned, shall invest \$850,000 in the renovations of the Rye project. Said investment shall be documented by the submittal of receipts to Rye. If the receipts do not document expenditures of at least \$850,000., 500 or its successors or assigned shall donate the balance to the Rye Public Library. The investment by 500 shall be contingent upon 500 receiving the appropriate approvals for major improvements; including but not limited to, expansion of the property to adequately enclose both staircases, install an elevator, new chimneys and to improve all structural and mechanical elements.*

Chair Stewart stated that the Committee's charge remains:

Rye Town Center Committee Charge

The Committee is charged with weighing the various options presented by Plan NH and incorporating those to create a comprehensive plan for a Town Center (as defined from the Old Trolley Barn to Grange Park). The Committee shall evaluate the Plan NH Charrette, town owned assets, infrastructure in the Town, prior committee work and studies and work with various other town committees to achieve this plan. Further, the Committee shall prepare at least (1) warrant article from the overall plan for the March 2020 warrant.

After reading this, she stated that the Committee is still charged with coming up with a comprehensive plan for the town center.

Member Bradshaw pointed out that that the Committee was not ready to deal with assets in this phase of their work. Their focus for this warrant article was safety. She suggested that after the vote in March the Committee will know what the next step is.

The Committee reviewed and edited the draft warrant article that they will be presenting to the Board of Selectmen on Monday night.

Motion by Karen Stewart to adjourn at 7:53 p.m. Seconded by John Mitchell. All in Favor.

Respectfully Submitted.
Dyana F. Ledger