

RYE, NH TOWN HALL, SUMMARY OF OPTIONS AND KNOWN FACTS

(Prepared July 10, 2012 by the Rye Civic League)

Much of the information in this summary was obtained from the AG Architects Report, available on the Town web site under the Selectmen's Office Department.

HISTORY OF THE TOWN HALL PROJECT

The Rye Town Hall has a long history. It was constructed as a church in 1839, and transformed to its current use in 1873. The first floor reflects renovations largely made in 1974, while the large hall on the second floor was divided by partitions in 2002-2004, negating its use for various town functions. It was used for functions through 1985, when the Town started to move offices upstairs. Through 1985, this area (now referred to as the "Great Hall") had been used for dances, graduations, wedding receptions and plays.

Structural and space needs study

In 2011, the Town approved, 610 to 455, Article 14, which approved the expenditure of \$40,000 for a structural study of the Town Hall, including analysis of space needs and the impact of "21st century technology" on those needs.

A report dated February 8, 2011 by AMEC Earth and Environmental, Inc. asserts that, while in generally good shape, the supporting structure for the Town Hall roof does not meet current code requirements. AMEC recommends reinforcement with steel plates, and estimates a total cost for the work of \$76,763.66. The AMEC report does not directly address the issue of whether increased snow loads resulting from improved insulation in the attic would make the roof unsafe. However, the Selectmen have asserted that reinforcement of the roof structure should be done prior to any insulation of this space. The AMEC report asserts that the foundation is adequate.

Late in 2011, a survey was distributed to town residents and only 187 responses were received, out of a Town population of 5298 according to the 2010 census. Ranked on a scale of 1 to 5, with 5 being most important, the surveys indicated strong support for maintaining the Town Hall's historic character, but mixed support for restoring the Great Hall for public use:

	<u>1</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>4</u>	<u>5</u>
Importance of retaining historic character	24	8	21	32	95
Importance of restoring Great Hall to public use 50	25	47	21	39	

When asked whether there was something that they wanted to see improved in the interior or exterior appearance or function of Town Hall, 142 of 180 responded no, however of those providing detail, the largest number (9) specified "larger and more modern public space and offices."

AG Architects was retained, and during December 2011 and January 2012, presented three times to townspeople its analyses of the space needs and evaluation of the feasibility of using the space over the fire trucks at the Public Safety Building to fill Town space needs. The AG report concluded that expansion of the Town Hall space was needed and asserted that the Town's requirement necessitated an increase in Town Hall space from its current 6168 square feet to 15,090 square feet.

The AG report does not provide any cost estimates, however at one of the public sessions, its representative acknowledged that \$200 per square foot would be approximately correct for both new construction and renovation of the existing space. This would mean a total cost of approximately \$3 million. Some town residents are estimating a cost of \$5 million once architectural design and furniture costs are included.

The AG report failed to address in any detail the impact of 21st century technology on space needs. It rejected the option of using space above the fire trucks as being at least as costly as expanding on the current site. In addition, it cites the inconvenience resulting from splitting functions between two facilities.

According to the AG report, the number of Town employees working at the Town Hall is projected to increase only modestly through 2030.

	-----Current-----		-----Projected 2030-----	
	Full time	Part time	Full time	Part time
Assessing	1	1	1	1
Building Dept.	1	1	3	1
Finance/Asst. Adm.	1	1	2	1
Planning	1		1	1
Recreation*	3		4	
Selectmen	1		1	
Sewer		2		2
Clerk/Tax Collector	2	1	3	2
Town Administrator		1	1	
Treasurer		1		1
Trust Funds		1		1
Total	10	9	16	10

*AG report incorrectly lists 10 part time rec. employees as working at Town Hall

While the AG report breaks out space by department, both in the current and proposed buildings, much of the increase in the space requirements is due to meeting rooms and increases in ancillary space such as staff facilities, rest rooms, stairs and elevators, and mechanical areas. Inexplicably, despite the inclusion of 1050 square feet for corridors and lobbies, there is an additional 30% adjustment of 3482 square feet for “circulation and walls” that far exceeds that in the analysis of the current facility. The net result is that the square feet per employee increases dramatically in the proposed new facility.

	Employees	-----Total square feet-----		--Square feet/employee--	
		Before	After	Before	After
Assessing	2	232	640	116	320
Building Dept.	2	554	1,410	277	705
Finance/Asst. Adm.	2	264	350	132	175
Planning	1	177	225	177	225
Recreation*	3	354	900	118	300
Selectmen	1	353	225	353	225
Sewer	2	208	250	104	125
Clerk/Tax Collector	3	451	1,100	150	367
Town Administrator	1	276	275	276	275
Treasurer	1	65	100	65	100
Trust Funds	1	67	100	67	100
Meeting Rooms		407	2,424		
Storage		738	200		
Staff Facilities		244	817		
Corridors and lobbies		983	1,050		
Rest rooms		114	374		
Stairs and elevators		416	768		
Mechanical		169	400		
Circulation and walls		96	3,482		
Subtotal	19	6,168	15,090	325	794
Additional storage**		981			
Total	19	7,149	15,090	376	794

*AG report incorrectly lists 10 part time rec. employees as working at Town Hall

**Of this, 250 sq. ft. is in the Town Hall belfry, the rest is off site.

The March 2012 Election

The 2012 election presented two Warrant Articles: Article 10 and Petitioned Warrant Article 27.

Initially, as presented to the Town Deliberative Session on February 4, 2012, Article 10 read as follows:

“To see if the Town will vote to raise and appropriate the sum of one hundred thirty-five thousand dollars (\$135,000) for the purpose of **completing** design development and cost estimates for the proposed renovations and addition to the Town Hall 1839 building. This appropriation is in addition to the operating budget.” (emphasis supplied)

During the Deliberative Session, it was revealed by the Selectmen that the \$135,000 would not purchase a completed design. Rather the design phase was proposed to be extended to two years. After amendments, Article 10, as presented to the voters read:

“To see if the Town will vote to raise and appropriate the sum of one hundred thirty-five thousand dollars (\$135,000) for the purpose of **furthering** design development and cost

estimates, **placed under the direction of the Board of Selectmen with the advice of the volunteer Capital Improvement Plan Committee**, for a proposed **renovation and/or** addition to the Town Hall 1839 building. This appropriation is in addition to the operating budget.” (emphasis supplied)

At the Deliberative Session, Selectmen Musselman assured the voters that the \$135,000 remained the correct figure despite of the change in scope. Nevertheless, an amendment was offered to change Article 10 to read:

“To see if the Town will raise and appropriate the sum of **\$20,000** for **studying a range of options in preparation for possible** renovation and addition to the Town Hall 1839 Building.” (emphasis supplied)

This proposed amendment was advised against by Town Counsel and ruled out of order by the Moderator as it changed the purpose of the article. Thus no vote was taken on this amendment.

At the same Deliberative Session, Petitioned Warrant Article 27, after amendment, was ordered placed on the ballot:

“Prior to funding the completion of the design of the potential multi-million dollar expansion of Town Hall, shall the Board of Selectmen address the space needs of the town employees, boards and commissions by comprehensive pro and cons analysis of all possible options? This could include publicly or privately owned property or renovation of existing facilities, for example

- Town Hall
- Public Safety Building (7,000 square feet build-out on second floor)
- Rye Recreation facilities
- Rye Recycling Center facilities
- Former Police Station

In addition to possible locations, the Board of Selectmen must consider the number of employees and the number of square feet per employee of similar facilities in other U.S. towns, and the reasons, if any, why the needs of Rye may be different.

In the March 13, 2012 election, Article 27 passed overwhelmingly, 1070 to 268. Article 10, however, failed to pass by a wide margin, 484 to 830.

Post-election developments

At its March 26, 2012 meeting, the Board of Selectmen voted to proceed with a geothermal heating and cooling project for Town Hall. Of the total cost of approximately \$164,000, all but approximately \$22,000 is being paid for by a federal grant. The geothermal system is now operational and serving to cool the Town Hall. While the system’s size was determined by the current Town Hall’s requirements, the possibility of the Town Hall being expanded or renovated was taken into account.

At its June 11, 2012 meeting the Board of Selectmen took up two letters submitted by Rye Civic League chairman Alex Herlihy. The Board of Selectmen announced that the square foot per employee analysis mandated by Article 27 could not be performed inasmuch as the task would require an architect, and that the failure of Article 10 left the Town without funding. It also rejected Mr. Herlihy’s suggestion that the Town move forward with energy efficiency improvements using surplus 2012 funds, indicating that the failure of Article

10 precluded any such expenditure, and that insulation of the attic would require prior reinforcement of the roof structure to avoid the danger of a collapse due to the increased snow load.

At its June 25, 2012 meeting, the Board of Selectmen approved the expenditure of \$26,750 for a new roof on the Town Hall. The prior roof has been leaking.

At its July 5, 2012 meeting, the Rye Heritage Commission discussed the various options for the Town Hall and the possibility of using each of the five town facilities indicated above. It also voted to again request that the Board of Selectmen proceed with registering the Town Hall with the New Hampshire State Register of Historic Places. At its June 11, 2012 meeting, the Board of Selectmen rejected registration prior to the completion of renovations.

At its July 9, 2012 meeting, the Board of Selectmen announced the formation of a Town Hall Space Needs Ad Hoc Study Committee. Members are:

Priscilla Jenness, Selectman
Michael Magnant, Town Administrator
Cynthia Gillespie, Finance Director
Kim Reed, Planning and Zoning Administrator
Dennis McCarthy, Public Works Director
Gregg Mikolaities, Appledore Engineering (Civil Engineering Consultants)
Paula Merritt, Historic District Commission
Mel Low, Planning Board
Elizabeth Yeaton, Town Clerk
Curtis Boivin, Planning Board
Ned Paul, Budget Committee
Phil Winslow, Historic District Commission
Peter White, Heritage Commission
Tom McCormick, CIP Committee
Paul Goldman, Budget Committee
Peter Casnet, Sewer Commission

TOWN FACILITIES SUMMARY

Town Hall

The Town Hall is a two story structure totaling 6168 square feet in size (exclusive of the belfry). An additional 981 square feet is devoted to the storage of records for departments currently located at the Town Hall, including 250 square feet in the belfry and additional space at the Old Police Station and the Public Safety building. There are 10 full time and 9 part time employees working at the Town Hall.

The AG Architects report details the square feet for each of the various departments. The upstairs is generally the most commodious, with the Selectmen's Office taking up 353 square feet, but occupied most of the time by only one secretary, and the part-time Town Administrator occupying 276 square feet. Conversely, the Recreation Department has 3 full-time employees crammed into 228 square feet (354 square feet with storage, prior to the loss of a closet to the geothermal system).

While the Selectmen disagree, Peter Michaud of the State Register of Historic Places, believes that no reinforcement of the roof structure is required before insulating the building, and that storm windows could easily be added, improving energy efficiency.

The extent to which the new geothermal system may be able to handle an expansion of Town Hall space, with both the new and old space well insulated, is unknown. However, the poor energy efficiency of the Town Hall (approximately \$10,000 expended on heating oil annually) indicates that the new system may support a modest expansion of the Town Hall.

The Great Hall occupies a large portion of the second floor of the Town Hall. Converting it to its prior configuration would mean moving the current occupants (Selectmen's Office, Town Administrator, Finance, Assessing, and Sewer) elsewhere, a total need of nearly 2000 square feet. If the first floor meeting chambers (407 square feet) were eliminated and meetings moved to the Great Hall, some of the lost space could be recouped.

Proposals for a Senior Center and a Community Center at the Recreation Area are advanced from time to time. The CIP Plan has an approximately \$1.4 million Community Center for the Recreation Area. At least one iteration of the Community Center includes an indoor basketball court that could serve multiple purposes.

In addition, there have been discussions of using the second floor of the Public Safety Building as a Senior Center.

It may be possible for a single large area to serve multiple uses. Thus, long-term decisions on the Community Center and Senior Center should be considered in conjunction with the evaluation of the restoration of the Great Hall.

The Heritage Commission is discussing ways to obtain an analysis of meetings occurring at the Town Hall and various other town facilities, such as the library.

The Town Hall is located on 1.37 acres. An adjacent .84 acre parcel, consisting largely of the parking lot for the Congregational Church, is owned by the Town.

Public Safety Building

The Public Safety Building was constructed in the middle of the last decade. It serves both the Police and Fire Departments, and is 15,327 square feet in size on a 2.17 acre parcel. It is located approximately 1000 feet from the Town Hall, making walking between the facilities possible, but not particularly convenient.

The structure of the Public Safety Building was designed to handle the load of a second story above the fire trucks. However, according to AG Architects, it is sufficient to support a floor loading of only about 85 pounds per square foot. That would be sufficient for offices, but not for heavy boxes of records.

According to AG, there are additional costs that would have to be incurred to utilize the space in the Public Safety Building. An elevator would be required, as well as stairs, to access the upper level. While the building adjacent to the equipment bays has a second story, according to AG, security constraints would necessitate separate access to a second story above the fire trucks. In addition, according to AG, there would be additional costs associated with providing dormers to a second floor of the Public Safety Building to provide light and permit access to the entire floor area.

AG concluded that building out the second floor of the Public Safety Building would be more expensive than providing the equivalent number of square feet through new construction. The AG analysis assumes that the entire second floor area of 6259 square feet is converted to Town Hall use and arrives at a cost exceeding that of new construction. No analysis was done, however, of construction costs for a partial build out of the second floor area.

Rye Recreation Facilities

The Rye Recreation Facilities consist of baseball and soccer fields, and a number of small structures, including modular units of 1152 and 728 square feet. One of these is long and narrow. Currently the Recreation Department has 3 full time administrative personnel working at the Town Hall, with some sharing of staff with the sewer and finance departments. There is some staff, even during the winter, at the modular units, which are heated with propane. At the peak time during the summer, the Recreation Department has 13 employees, plus contractors and volunteers.

At various times, the Recreation Department has advanced plans for a Community Center, ranging in size from 10,000 up to 50,000 square feet. While the expenditure is listed in the CIP Plan, the Community Center plan idea has not been pushed as it is assumed that it would not be supported by the Town given other priorities.

The three full time Recreation Department employees may be the most logical candidates to be moved out of Town Hall to a different facility, given that their function interacts relatively little with other Town Hall departments. However, the Recreation Department asserts that the existing modular units could not accommodate an additional three people.

It may be that a scaled back facility, smaller than the large Community Center contemplated by the CIP Plan, might permit the Recreation Department to be consolidated in one location. This could also permit the modular units, which are not particularly attractive and have limited lifetimes, to be removed.

The Rye Recreation facilities are located about 1.2 miles by car from the Town Hall. By foot, cutting through the Town Cemetery and using trails through the Town Forest, the distance is significantly less.

Rye Recycling Facilities

This is a 7.13 acre site located 1.1 miles from Town Hall. There are a large number of buildings totaling over 10,000 square feet, but these are not, for the most part, used as offices. It is believed that only the Public Works Director currently has an office, which is at this facility. While not directly related to Town Hall space needs, there are environmental concerns relating to run-off from the site which may require remediation. These costs, which may need to be incurred in the near term, may absorb funds that might otherwise be devoted to a Town Hall renovation and/or expansion

Old Police Station

This building is 2372 square feet, located on .28 acres just 300 feet from Town Hall, on the opposite side of Central Rd. Currently the building is used only for storage by various Town Hall departments. There is currently no working septic system or heat. The building dates from 1910, and is believed to have been used at one time by the trolley service that ran through town. Contamination from batteries is rumored to exist, as is contamination from fluids dating from the time that the facility was used as a garage. Those utilizing the storage space complain of mold.

While issues relating to the site might appear to preclude its use by Town Hall departments, the propriety of ignoring any issues and leaving the cleanup costs to future generations is highly questionable. Even if it turns out that remediation requires that the building be torn down and the land cleaned up, the resulting available land, located so close to Town Hall, could be an appropriate building site for storage or housing some Town employees, possibly minimizing architectural consistency issues that would likely arise from a large addition to the Town Hall building. .

NEXT STEPS

With the recent involvement of the Rye Heritage Commission in Town Hall issues, the formation of the Ad Hoc Study Committee and with the Capital Investment Program (“CIP”) Committee now starting its work, it is important that Town residents and members and officers of the various boards, commissions and committees become engaged in making their views known as the process unfolds.

Article 27 calls for a “comprehensive pro and con analysis.” Ultimately, the voters will need to approve any substantial capital investments relating the Town Hall, or indeed, any of the other Town facilities. The time to speak up is now. Even better, residents should get involved in helping to identify the questions, collect data points, and consolidate the information so that the decisions may be based on actual facts rather than surmise. The greater the citizen involvement, the more likely it will be that whatever decision is made will support the needs of the Town’s residents with a cost that is acceptable to the Town’s taxpayers.