

### **TOWN OF RYE WARRANT ARTICLE 33**

**\*\*Written by Paula Tsetsilas, Warrant Article author & mother of 3 school-aged children\*\*  
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*Shall the Selectmen authorize the creation of a Younger Family Housing Committee (“Committee”) that will explore whether the declining school population – which is expected to decline by 54% at Rye Junior High from 2011 to 2026 – can be reversed to maintain the vitality of our school district? This Committee should look to support Rye’s dedication to school excellence that complements our heritage as a quaint, coastal community. This Committee should consist of no fewer than 4 and no more than 12 members consisting of a mix of one realtor, one member of the Conservation Committee or other land preserving organization, one RES parent, one RJH parent, Selectman, and one member of each of the following committees: School Board, Planning Committee and Budget Committee, each appointed by its Committee chair; and 4 citizens at large members. The Committee should self-elect a chairperson. The Committee should commence its first meeting by April 14, 2017 and should submit a report identifying suggestions to increase school population and next steps for implementation to The Town Selectman and Long Range Planning Sub-committee by October 16, 2017. Upon submitting the report this Committee shall cease. Those interested should submit a brief resume to the Selectman no later than March 22, 2017 for Selectman’s selection by March 31, 2017.*

*This article is not recommended by the Selectmen (2-0)*

#### **Background**

The combined Rye elementary and junior high school enrollment is expected to decline 156 students from 2011-2019, representing a 33% drop. The junior high itself is expected to decline 54% in a 15-year period from 2011-2026. The reasons behind our declining school enrollment involve complex demographic and real estate trends:

- Nationally, couples are getting married older and are having fewer children.
- New Hampshire is tied as the 2<sup>nd</sup> oldest state in our nation and is the most rapidly aging state.
- From 2000 to 2015 number of Rye children fell 38%, and number of adults 18-44 declined 32%. During that same period those ages 45-64 rose 27% while residents ages 65 or older rose 70%.
- Only one in four women in our town are of the typical child-bearing age of 20-45.
- Rye’s average real estate sale of \$800,000 is \$300,000 more than neighboring Greenland and unaffordable to many first-time home buyers.

The idea of this warrant article is to present an option of reversing the declining trend to sustain Rye’s schools and keep the cost per student from escalating. Because so many of the above contributing factors are out of local control, housing seems a logical place to start.

### **What is the purpose of the proposed Committee?**

The purpose of this Committee will be to study the downward school enrollment trends, research and analyze the number of students needed to sustain our school system and a healthy community, identify buildable lots for new construction that is competitive to surrounding towns, and evaluate what changes may need to be made to the town's master plan or zoning ordinances to execute a younger family housing strategy.

The intent is not to overdevelop our semi-rural community or de-value current property values. It is to create housing that supports the future of our community while maintaining our quaint, Seacoast ambience. To date, Rye has not provided sufficient incentives through its land use policies to motivate developers to propose types of housing which combine affordability for young families with significant conserved open space as part of a development.

### **Why would Rye want to do this when the Town has spent 20 years maintaining its rural character?**

Rye has spent \$10 million over the past two decades to conserve land and conservation is a big part of the town's master plan. However, in doing so, we have failed to attract first-time homebuyers and young families. The consequences go beyond our schools. We should be asking ourselves, "Who will run our town government in the coming decades? Will we have enough children to offer competitive arts, music and sports programs? Won't voting always skew to the needs of the largest demographic?" We need a balanced community for a vibrant future. Furthermore, this Committee calls for a conservation advocate to ensure the town's semi-rural integrity is upheld.

### **Won't taxes go up if we bring more families into town and into our school system?**

The purpose of limiting residential development over the years has been to keep household taxes down as there is an outdated myth that families increase a town's taxes. This notion of a donor vs. receiver household is addressed in the documentary, "Community & Consequences." Additionally, this theory is shortsighted as young children will often want to return "home" as adults, building the next generation of a community.

### **Shouldn't the School Board first determine that having a low population is a bad thing? Shouldn't a study like this be done within the Planning Board? And, aren't we too early in this conversation to go right to a Committee?**

The School Board was consulted in writing this warrant article and feels that our cost per student must be examined. Moreover, the School Board is supporting a separate warrant article to study the use of School District buildings in the wake of lower Rye enrollments.

Declining enrollment is a town issue – not solely a School Board issue – and should be studied by an interdisciplinary team within various town departments, including the budget committee and planning department. Moreover, this conversation is not too early. It may be new to some members in the community but is one that has been discussed for many years in our schools. In fact, the conversation has gone on too long without action.