

PLAN NEW HAMPSHIRE Application for the Town of Rye

QUESTION 1: *How would you describe the community project for which your group or town is asking Plan NH to provide assistance?*

Please provide any appropriate information about the site's or area's geographical location, limits, and historic significance, current use or unique features.

Please indicate who owns or controls the use of the project site or area. How would the project enhance the health and vitality of your community?

Community Project Overview:

The Town of Rye seeks assistance evaluating its Town Center for its best uses in meeting the needs of its citizens. Rye faces a number of decisions that could be better made if they were viewed in the broader context of their inter-relations and in respect to the geographic and social center of Rye. As detailed in this application, piecemeal approaches to the Town's needs and resources have been rejected by voters in recent years. The Town needs Plan NH's services to help it formulate a comprehensive and cohesive plan for the Rye Town Center

The Rye Master Plan (written in 2006, updated in 2013, chapter updates in process) states:

Our vision for Rye Town Center recognizes it as the foundation upon which the Town has grown. We will protect, preserve, and reinforce its character and integrity. There will be a palpable sense of community for residents as well as visitors. Many of the components of that vibrant town center are in place: Town Hall, library, safety building, school, a traditional New England church, veterans' memorial, cemetery, and historic district. We will promote additional opportunities to foster regular and multiple social interactions for all members of the community to include but not limited to: pedestrian paths, bikeways, and traffic-calming and mitigating features along town roads within and leading to the Town Center. We envision pocket parks and gardens for all to enjoy and a few apartments built over small retail establishments. The additions of a cafe and general store in our Town Center will increase our opportunities to foster a sense of community. This will be unified by human-scale density and architectural style honoring the historic buildings and character of much that already exists.

Rye Recreation and Rye Public Library have strategic plans and are starting to move forward independent of a coordinated town-wide discussion. The Select Board has spent considerable time (seven years) and funds (over \$350K) looking to improve the working conditions of employees at Town Hall. In the past the second floor or "Great Hall" is where residents voted, hosted plays and entertainment and other activities, but all that space was converted to town employee office space and eliminated a central meeting location. The Deliberative Town meeting is now held at the Junior High School.

We hope an unbiased bird's eye view of potential options to maximize current assets and guide future investments will unify town-wide discussions, resident acceptance and accelerated decisions towards an improved Town Center. We hope the Plan NH report will allow the Town and its

component parts (Town, School, Library and others) to coalesce around a rational plan with sequential steps for investments.

DESCRIPTION:

The area of study will be the center of Rye, defined as the area starting on Central Road near the town cemetery through its intersection with Washington Road, northeast along Washington Road to Washington Road’s intersection with Wallis Road at the Grange Park traffic island. This area contains the majority of Rye’s municipal buildings (Town Hall, former Police Station, Public Safety Building, Public Library, Parsonage Apartments, Town Museum, Junior High School, as well as significant private properties such as the Congregational Church, former TD Bank building and numerous historic homes. The Town cemetery, War Memorial, Parsons Field and the entrance to the Town Forest are also located in this Center area. This area also comprises the majority of Rye’s Historic District.

The center of Rye is approached from three directions: from the West, starting at Hunter Run, from the South coming up Central Road and from the East, approaching the merger of Wallis and Washington Rd. Each approach contributes to the Center’s “feel” and presents a separate impression. There are stone walls and open space past Hunter’s Run, Rye Cemetery along Central Road and a few businesses that precede the “Y” merger of Washington and Wallis Roads.

HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE:

This Town Center area comprises the majority of the Rye Historic District. The homes in this area are primarily colonial type architecture, with some houses dating to the 1700’s. This is mixed with houses and buildings built over the last 250 years that range from colonial to traditional in the architectural scope. Foundations range from stone, concrete block, and poured concrete. Various types of fencing are mixed in with historically significant stone walls. Clapboard is the prevalent siding material, but not all is wood. Roof-scapes are generally asphalt or fiberglass shingle. This area is overseen by the Rye Historic Commission and is subject to its own chapter in Rye’s Zoning Ordinance. There are also homes related to the founding families of Rye throughout the town that also have historical significance. As these historic homes are sold, the historic exteriors are often maintained while the interiors are significantly renovated. Rye residents value the historical significance of the town.

The appendix includes brief summaries of the key buildings in this area.

CONTRIBUTION TO HEALTH AND VITALITY:

A well-planned Town Center will greatly enhance the health, vitality and cohesiveness of the area and a sense of community among Rye’s citizens. The Town Center is the heart through which most all of Rye flows, physically and socially. Utilizing buildings for their most suitable uses and providing adequate space for use by town employees and residents brings an enhanced quality of life to Rye. In addition, a safer and more “user friendly” Town Center will benefit all who use town buildings and pass through the Town Center.

While not the primary focus of our application, safety for pedestrians and other users of the Town Center could be improved as building issues are sorted out. Resident traffic in this area is mostly to the Rye Public Library, Town Hall and Safety Building. During the school year there is additional congestion at the beginning and end of the Rye Junior High School day. Church activities are mostly the Sunday services and a handful of annual events. A Farmer's Market had a six year run in the Church Parking lot on Wednesday afternoons. The History Museum and library share a parking lot and experience foot traffic.

The only sidewalk in the area is the sidewalk that extends from the front of the library, past the Parsonage Apartments across Olde Parish Road, a path in front of part of the Public Safety Building and a sidewalk adjacent to the library parking lot. Bicycles must use the road shoulder. There is a steady stream of recreational cyclists and runners through this area. There is considerable drive-through commuter traffic impacting this area on weekdays.

Rye has sporadic cell phone service throughout the town but all public facilities in Rye center have accessible WIFI.

Question 2

Part I: *What changes are occurring in your community that are having an impact on how you think about your future?*

Part II: *How could this project address one or more of them?*

Note: In the responses below, the first statement addresses Part I of the question; the bulleted statement addresses Part II:

HOUSEHOLD COMPOSITION AND DEMOGRAPHICS:

Over the past 15 years the population of Rye has increased only 3.1% as compared to 7.6% for the state overall. From 2000-2015 the number of Rye children fell 38% and number of adults aged 18-44 fell 32%. During the same period, those aged 45-64 rose 27% and those aged 65+ rose 70%. Over 80% of Rye homes are owned, 2/3 of which only have one or two residents. (Source: Peter Francese, NH-based demographer, Feb 2017). Rye has become a splintered community, without a lot of cross-generational programming, which has resulted in a less cohesive town. There are very clear classifications: seniors, families, summer residents, and vacationers. These demographic shifts create more demand for senior services from Rye Recreation and the public library, police & fire response, and public works while decreasing demand in our two schools.

- This project might help identify ways to attract younger families to town, while providing needed services to seniors. It might also find ways to bring the community closer together as a whole.

SOCIOECONOMICS:

Rye is becoming a more affluent community. Increasingly, families seem to be turning to expensive “specialty” programs and club sports, such as Seacoast United. This shift has resulted in a decreased demand for Rye Recreational youth sports and programs and has somewhat divided the community.

- This project might identify opportunities to improve Rye Recreational participation and/or ways to lift the community spirit.

REAL ESTATE:

Rye has the most expensive real estate in NH. Small/vacation homes are being repurposed for larger full-time residences and vacation homes. New higher end homes are also being built that appear to be occupied by older residents and retirees for second homes. Fewer mid-priced homes are being built so fewer families with children are moving into town. A multifamily development with some affordable units has just been approved on Airfield Drive which may provide more affordable-mid priced homes.

- The Plan NH Charrette might suggest ways to add new and perhaps affordable housing in Rye center, increasing the vitality of that area.

NATURAL RESOURCES:

Among residents, there is increased awareness of our water resources and quality of drinking water due to emerging PFOS issues and the Parson Creek's Studies. Additionally, demand for additional water use has increased with recent growth and there may be a need to evaluate a more comprehensive approach to town sewer needs.

- The project is unlikely to address water quality/sewer needs.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT:

Rye values its heritage and, in keeping with this town value, has remained relatively consistent. New town leadership presents opportunities for openness and change in harmony with the Historic District.

- Timing of this project coincides with new thinking. This is important because recommendations resulting from this process are more likely to be executed and implemented, rather than being debated over for years.

BUILDING USE:

Changes in building use are converging: The Parsonage Apartments' lease expires next year; the old trolley station is available; the TD Bank space is for lease; renovation/expansion of the town hall remains unresolved; the junior high will become a Grade 5-8 middle school in Fall 2019..

- This project could help set residents' vision for the town center and guide the Town in use of these buildings/parcels. It will help identify highest/best use of town land, determine future use/upgrades of buildings for town activities that will encourage civic participation, and overall add vitality to a quiet town center.

COMMERCE:

Rye has become an increasingly popular vacation destination. In the summer the town is bustling with visitors who support local businesses, but the vibrant summer atmosphere halts after Labor Day.

- This project might identify 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 as previously mentioned.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT:

The master plan refers to space for more "social interaction". It also calls for land development attractive to those looking for a good sense of heritage and limited expansion of the historic district.

- Plan NH might uncover 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.

RECREATION:

An increase in cyclists throughout Rye has resulted in unsafe "sharing of the road" and there are no safe bike lines for children to ride to/from school. Additionally, the demand for road walkability has increased.

- The Charrette might identify options for increased walkability/cycling to/from the town center.

Question 3

Four Distinct Sectors

Your town has four distinct, yet inextricably-linked sectors: Social, economic, environmental and governance. What vision does your community have for each of these and what kinds of recommendations (for the target area or project) coming from the charrette process could support these visions – as well as the Vision Statement that is in your current Master Plan.

ECONOMIC:

Although Rye has many small businesses and services, they are not centrally located. This scattered approach to business does not lend itself to a community feel in regard to a town center. There are a few restaurants, a couple of coffee/breakfast/lunch places, a gas station, high end furniture stores, a clothing store, a dentist, and business services; most of these businesses are holding their own and have been in operation for several years. The local population is enough to support these businesses. There are no businesses in the center of town, other than Sotheby's real estate, which is obviously not a gathering spot, and a former bank that now sits for lease.

Our taxes are generated from property values that have increased over the past years. Rye continues to have one of the lowest tax rates in the state, due in a large part to our high property values. The average home value in Rye (7/1/2018) was \$750,218. With only around 5,000 residents, we purchase a high amount of government services per person compared to other communities.

As stated in the master plan, the goal is for small retail establishments in the town center.

SOCIAL:

Rye has an eclectic social mix. There are still families who are descendants of the town's founding families. Their history is collected by the Rye Historical Society in our Town Museum, which is located in the center of town just across the Rye Public Library's parking lot and many parcels of conservation land were once owned by these families.

Rye has a population of 5,254 and 2,823 housing units (7/1/2018). Rising property values and associated taxes threaten the ability of tradesmen, families, municipal and service workers and senior citizens to afford homes in Rye, although such diversification enhances Rye's appeal to potential homeowners and enriches our community.

We have a large retired population, many of whom are using their life skills to serve on Town boards, committees and commissions. The all-volunteer Senior SERVE organization provides transportation to those seniors who no longer drive. Due to changing demographics in NH, we have a declining group of young families. Our strong school systems and neighborhood environs located throughout Rye continue to be attractive to this audience. For now, the school population has been decreasing. This change in demographics prompted a 2017 warrant article to look at how Rye school buildings are currently being used and explore the possibility of changing or repurposing their use.

The summer population increases the town's population by 30% from approximately May to September.

Over 95% of the year-round population holds a high school diploma, at least 50% graduated from college and approximately 20% have graduate or professional degrees.

Both summer and year-round populations are served by and utilize the Rye Public Library (RPL) which is located in the center of Town. RPL is a much loved institution in the town and in addition to being a community center for miscellaneous events, hosts music performances, a speaker series, book clubs, numerous youth programs and a bike repair kiosk. Though its operating expenses are provided by the taxpayers of Rye, it receives private donations and bequests, as well as the support of its award-winning Friends group, which enable it to address a wide range of residents' wants and needs. The Library just issued its 2018-2023 Strategic Plan and is currently exploring the possibility of an expansion to better serve Rye's residents. Rye Recreation also has a Strategic Plan.

Rye's median income is above that of the state and county. Despite this demographic, approximately 3% of the population live at the poverty level. It is most startling to know that almost 10% of Rye's citizens 65 years or older live in poverty.

Per the master plan, the vision for Rye is a palpable sense of community. One of the goals of the charrette is to identify ways to realize this vision.

ENVIRONMENTAL:

The town is located on the Atlantic shore and has the longest coastline of any New Hampshire town. It includes four of the nine islands known as the [Isles of Shoals](#). It is home to four state parks: [Jeness State Beach](#), [Rye Harbor State Park](#), [Wallis Sands State Beach](#), and 135-acre [Odiorne Point State Park](#), home to the Seacoast Science Center. Rye also has four Town beaches: Sawyer, Cable, Foss and Wallis Road Extension. All its beaches and parks are well-loved and used by its citizens year round, but especially during the summer months.

Wetlands account for 60% of Rye's land mass. We have an established Conservation Commission that works with NH DES and Rye's Boards and Departments to protect them to the best of the Town's abilities. The residents recognize and support the work of these groups as evidenced by a 2003 warrant article for \$5 million and a 2013 warrant article for \$3 million passed by Rye voters to acquire conservation properties. The town owns 448 acres of conservation land and holds over 200 acres of conservation easements.

There are educational programs with Rye residents to better understand the history and value of our open space. Adjacent to the Town Center (across from Rye Junior High and behind the aforementioned TD Bank property), is the Rye Town Forest, some 190 acres of conservation land and trails which abuts the Rye Recreation lands.

Rye has its own water source controlled primarily by the Rye Water District (RWD). Additionally, Aquarion Water Co. supplies water to Rye Beach. Portsmouth (northern Rye) serves homes RWD

does not (There are three wells in Rye that can supply RWD now and a fourth currently being investigated. Aquarion also has a well in the Jenness Beach Precinct. Some residents draw their water from their private wells.

Our water supply is threatened, but is not yet compromised, by the presence of a superfund site, the Coakley Landfill, located in on the Greenland/Rye border and the Grove Road Landfill located near one of the Town's wells. These sites are continually monitored.

Rye faces a significant threat from rising sea levels. We are a FEMA permitted town and address issues involving sea rise in our land board meetings and by participating in county, state and federal programs.

The master plan calls for pocket parks and gardens in the town center.

GOVERNANCE:

Like most New Hampshire towns, we are governed by our Select Board with a Town Administrator and department heads, elected officials on boards such as planning, zoning and budget, etc. and ad hoc committees and vote in accordance in SB2. Running a town with mostly volunteers presents challenges, particularly when the same group people are on many of those committees. In the past, old thinking has been the driving factor in many discussions and considerations. We often operate in silos, each department or committee optimizing their own budget to handle their day-to day responsibilities. So sub-optimal temporary solutions often win over what could be smarter, more integrated investments with a longer term return on value. However, we recognize this shortfall and have implemented a constantly improving Capital Improvement Plan to prioritize our town-wide needs on a yearly basis. What we now need is an operating mindset that helps us build a better functioning town center that works for all Rye's citizens.

Internal to Rye, there are three precinct districts. One is Rye Water District that maintains an office at 60 Sagamore Road. They also own capital equipment operated and separately maintained from the Town. There are two beach precincts, Rye Beach Village District (RBVD) and Jenness Beach Village District (JBVD). RBVD owns a building and currently leases space to the second Rye Post Office (the Rye Beach Post Office) as this precinct does not have mail delivery service. Residents in RBVD are served by a Sewer and the Sewer Commission office moved out of Town Hall to the RBVD building a few years ago. RBVD also maintains a separate Zoning Board of Adjustment. While precinct residents vote for the at large Budget Committee, they also are represented by their own Budget Committee member.

Question 4

A. WHAT INFLUENCES MIGHT IT HAVE ON OTHER PARTS OF TOWN

The town center encompasses the primary Historic District of Rye's mainland with properties well maintained in a harmonious setting. However, it does not succeed as a community center of civic and social life, as it once did and which Rye now lacks.

The reasons for the lack of success is the absence of common meeting spaces with the opportunity for social engagement, such as a community coffee shop/tea house, music, art, and community events. Adding these elements would create a stronger sense of community, pride and collaboration to strengthen the social and recreational resources already present and underutilized. Additional commercial enterprises in the town center could compete with other Rye businesses and impact community use, so should be planned carefully.

B. HOW DO OTHER PARTS OF TOWN AFFECT THIS TARGET AREA

Commercial enterprises are scattered throughout Rye, with the majority of activity on Route 1 from Washington Road to Lagos Lone Oak Ice cream and includes the Air Park, which provides skate park recreation, an area of professional service offices and workforce housing. Additionally, Rye Harbor is the center of the town's for commercial fishing, lobstering and boating. The other area of commercial activity is along the beach on Route 1a in the Jenness Beach, Wallis Sands areas and at Foyes Corner on the north end of town. These areas serve residents and visitors and may draw community activity away from the target area. The beach in particular creates seasonal traffic through the target area.

The target area is essentially the geographic center of the Town of Rye which is the preferred travel route from one end of town to the other – east, west, north and south. Our junior high school students congregate in the historic school building which is connected to the Rye Recreation Fields through the Parsons Field and the Town Forest. The steady stream of traffic pouring through the center of town makes access to the Junior High dangerous for our children who walk and bicycle to and from school.

Currently, the most significant connection from the other parts of town to the center is the library which draws in people from all over town and is a social hub for events, including lectures and performances. The center is the hub of government services, affecting all parts of the town. It is also a religious center for some residents. The town forest connects the main recreation area near the Little League field to Parsons Field for walkers and bicycle users, but usage needs to be in keeping with its purpose as a conservation area as well.

Rye's beaches and harbor are alive with activity at least six months of the year and provide some revenue and commercial activity, but it also brings additional traffic to the target area. The working Rye Harbor and Goss Farm contribute to the defining characteristics of Rye as a rural coastal community, but are somewhat remote from the target area. The area near the Wentworth Golf Course is out of the way and apart with minimal impact.

The historic properties of the target area are enhanced by connection to Odiorne as the oldest community in the state's history. This sense of history is reinforced by the historic properties of Rye Beach, Wallis Sands, the Isles of Shoals and the houses along Washington, Wallis and Central Roads. Other pockets of town history such as the Cable House and the Brackett Massacre site, Pulpit Rock Tower and Abenaki Country Club potentially contribute to the historic perspective which is so well interpreted by the exhibits at the Town Museum in the center of the target area. Currently the only social community exists in private clubs,

schools and churches. The target area should be the social center of Town, given the buildings and services offered there and its location, but currently the Library is the only building/location serving in this capacity.

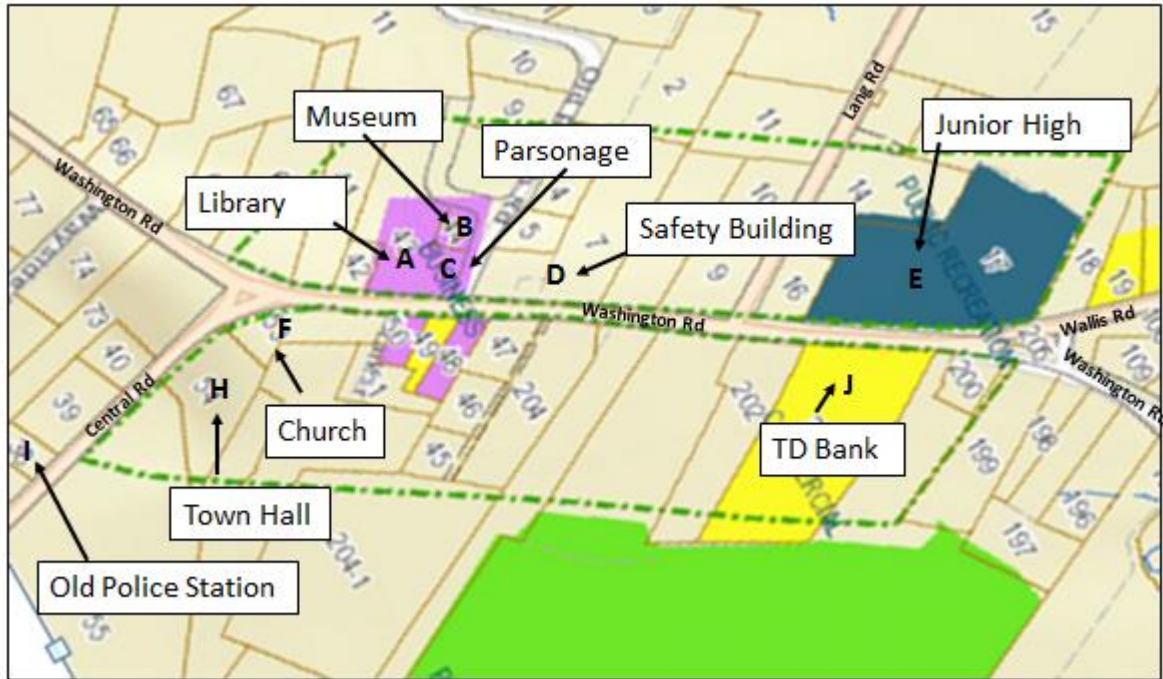
C. DOES THE TARGET AREA HAVE ANY INFLUENCE OR IMPACT ON BORDERING TOWNS?

The target area has minimal impact on bordering towns, New Castle, Portsmouth, Greenland and North Hampton. Each bordering town has an historic preservation connection to Rye, however. Rye's Town Forest and conservation land located in the target area are also likely used for recreational purposes by residents of the bordering towns and therefore generates some traffic from the bordering towns.

D. DO THE BORDERING TOWNS HAVE ANY INFLUENCE OR IMPACT ON THE TARGET AREA/PROJECT OR ON THE TOWN IN GENERAL?

The bordering towns produce some traffic through the impact area and likely through the beach areas, although some bordering towns have their own beaches. Neighboring New Castle has the option to send its 7th and 8th graders to Portsmouth Middle School or Rye Junior High. Rye is also a large tourist destination for beach goers and vacationers and sees overflow visitors and sightseers from Portsmouth. The majority of the beach goers are not Seacoast residents and the area also draws visitors from many adjacent states and Canada.

Appendix A:



| Reference | Property Address | Owner Name | Parcel Number |
|-----------|---------------------|---|---------------|
| A | 581 WASHINGTON ROAD | RYE TOWN OF - Public Library | 012-042-000 |
| B | 581 WASHINGTON ROAD | RYE History Museum - Independent of the Tow | 012-042-000 |
| C | 575 WASHINGTON ROAD | RYE TOWN OF - PARSONAGE APARTMENT | 012-043-000 |
| D | 555 WASHINGTON ROAD | RYE TOWN OF - Public Safety Building | 016-007-000 |
| E | 501 WASHINGTON ROAD | RYE SCHOOL DISTRICT - Junior High | 016-017-000 |
| F | 580 WASHINGTON ROAD | RYE CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH | 012-052-000 |
| G | 0 WASHINGTON ROAD | RYE TOWN OF - Lot in front of Church | 012-053-000 |
| H | 10 CENTRAL ROAD | RYE TOWN OF - Town Hall | 012-054-000 |
| I | 37 CENTRAL ROAD | RYE TOWN OF - Old Police Station | 012-038-000 |
| J | 500 WASHINGTON ROAD | 500 WASHINGTON ROAD LLC - TD Bank | 016-201-000 |

| | Reference Properties | | |
|--|----------------------|---|-------------|
| | 55 Recreation Road | Rye Town of - Recreation Buildings | 012-079-000 |
| | 461 Sagamore Road | Rye School District - Rye Elementary School | 018-040-000 |

Rye Building Images for Plan NH

Rye Public Library (A) – Site also shows Parsonage buildings and the Rye History Museum



RPL as seen from Washington Rd



RPL foot print



Parsonage Apartments (C) as seen from Washington Rd



Rye History Museum (B)

Public Safety Building (D)



Rye Congregational Church



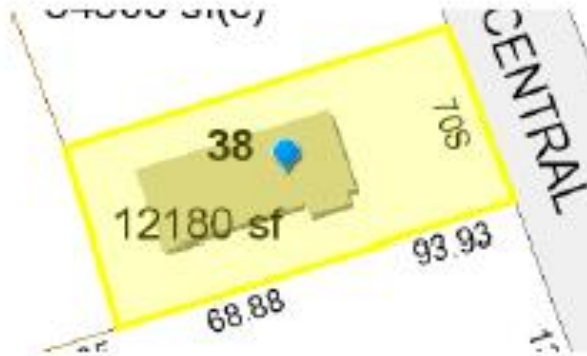
The entry property for the Church is owned by the Town of Rye



Town Hall (H)



Old Police Station (Trolley Barn "I")



TD Bank Building (J) on Washington Rd.



One of the Recreation Modulares at 55 Recreation Rd.



Rye Elementary School on Sagamore Rd.



Rye Junior High School (E) on Washington Rd.



Details can be seen online with the CAI AxisGIS <http://bit.ly/2ORFVkb> The application appendix includes pictures, short descriptions and a table of the buildings and homes in the area.

| Building | Summary |
|-----------------------------------|---|
| Old Police Station (Trolley Barn) | Decommissioned from Police work approximately 14 years ago. It is currently used to garage Rye’s Senior Serve Van and is in poor condition. 2017 vote allows Select Board to sell this building. |
| Town Hall | Built in 1835 as a church, it was later converted to a meeting hall and in the 1950’s to Rye’s Town Hall. The working conditions are not currently adequate for staff, nor ADA or building code compliant. Upstairs contains a former stage and performance space which, if reclaimed, would require improvement. |
| Rye Congressional Church | This white steepled church is a significant land-mark for the center of Rye. Privately owned, it utilizes some town owned land, which begins at the bottom of its front steps and goes to Washington Road. It also contains unused back acreage. Interior space appears significantly underutilized., Rye Recreation Department is the only town department that uses the Congressional Church for some activities. |
| Rye Public Library | One of the best utilized libraries in NH and a social hub for Rye’s citizens. The library currently is working on expansion plans. |
| Parsonage Buildings and Land | The Housing Partnership currently leases and maintains these two buildings for low income housing. The contract is about to expire (2019) and buildings are in need of repairs. The Parsonage septic system is located on library parcel. |
| Public Safety Building | Opened in 2005, this building houses the Police and Fire Departments. One of the most visible markers in this area, its large conference room and other space is seldom utilized for public activities. |
| Rye Jr. High School | Prominent red brick building currently for 6 th to 8 th grade students, but 5 th grade will be moving from Rye Elementary School for the ’19-’20 school year. |
| Old TD Bank Building & Acreage | Privately owned and its commercial use is restricted to use as a bank. It likely can be used for a municipal use, though this position is not without controversy. Voters rejected the 2018 warrant article to purchase the property. |
| Parson’s Field | Large field used for multiple events throughout the year. Deed restrictions require it to remain open space. |
| War Memorial | Only significant monument in this area. |
| Rye History Museum | On the same plot of land as library and Parsonage Apartments. The town owns the land, but the History Museum owns and maintains the building. |