

Date: 23 Dec 2019

From: John Loftus, Rye Resident

To: Board of Selectman

Dear Selectmen,

On the 17th of this month I was asked by the Town Administrator to meet and chat regarding “the Swap/Exchange of the Parsonage and the property at 500 Washington Road. I’d like to get your thoughts on the project and discuss how you see this opportunity.” I respectfully declined as I perceived my position on the RTCC (Rye Town Center Committee) would be a conflict of interest within a closed meeting.

Instead, in the public forum tonight, I offer the following for your observation and consideration:

1. Article 35, from the 2019 Warrant, which was passed by the voters states: “To see if the Town will vote to **require** the Selectmen to develop a plan to renovate the Town Hall to better accommodate the staff office needs, to make the Town Hall ADA compliant, and **to keep the Town Hall on its historic site**, in the center of Rye.” **Suggestion** – The word **require** appears to have been left in the dust, even before the advent of the new TD Bank/Parsonage swap proposal. Article 35 is precise in its instruction to the B.O.S. and voters should have an explanation as to why funds are being expended elsewhere, and how much funds have or are planned to be expended outside the charge. Further the wording “**to keep the Town Hall on its historic site**” implies more than just a building but the current occupants as well.
2. In 2014 - 2015 residents paid approximately \$257,000 to the architectural firm of SMP for detailed plans and construction documents for renovation and additions to the Town Hall Building. Through 2019 we are closing in on having spent almost \$400,000 regarding the Town Hall question. In 2018 residents paid approximately \$10,000 for a “Historic Structure Report”, which certified the building and foundation in good repair. The two reports (SMP and HSR) are quite at odds with each other in terms of remedial work needed to the foundation, and the structural requirements needed going forward with any change of use, and/or renovation. For some reason it appears that the Historic Structure Report has been taken prima facia, as the final answer, while dismissing the more thorough SMP findings and recommendations. This in my opinion is a foolhardy approach and needs to be better vetted and understood. **Suggestion** - Form a sub-committee, from the RTCC committee, where there are at least 3 people with engineering degrees, to speak with both entities, and present the findings to the B.O.S. **Disclosure** - I am a member of the RTCC. Tonight, I speak as a resident, not for the committee.
3. One of the Town’s most pressing needs is to reconcile the need for proper office space for our town employees and further to become ADA compliant. How do we do that when there has been, and continues to be, wide variation on the path forward? **Suggestion** – I encourage the B.O.S. to start thinking in terms of 50 years not a 5-year plan, or worse yet, an immediate plan to “get something done”, as I continually hear put forward. Voters need to be allowed to speak their mind with clear

choices presented, not ambiguous parameters, and no final plan that brings this to a conclusion accompanied by a total cost. Further, I would suggest that there is a need to understand that saving the old town hall building is completely different from renovating this building for a 21st century office space. This point has been articulated by Joe Tucker and others. If this is looked at from two perspectives and two different needs, it makes it a clearer choice for voters.

4. If we save the old building as a piece of Rye History, and then renovate the building back to what it was purchased for in the 1800's, namely a meeting house, there then becomes a sense of purpose, which fulfills the needs of a portion of our electorate. **Suggestion** – A renovation without town offices, could be done over a period of years, and would allow private funding, mixed with town funds as approved by voters. Further the building could be used as an adjunct of the museum to further showcase Rye's extensive history and natural resources. This would allow the Town to proceed immediately with the current needs, i.e. a workable town hall solution.
5. The cheapest and most efficient way to retain our town offices in one place, in a historic building is to start fresh, not try to hermaphrodite a building into something it is not! **Suggestions** – Consider:
 - a. Adding onto the existing town hall will over mass the site and reduce sight lines to and from Washington Road and Central Road.
 - b. The additional elevator tower configured by the historic study/Barba Associates and proposed last year, visually and architecturally impairs the very architectural features of the current building that are trying to be saved. Further the tower was located over the geothermal pipes where they enter and exit the building, a fact overlooked by everyone, until I brought it to the attention of Ms. Barba.
 - c. Notice that Barba Associates independently came up with a plan to remove the last (rear) addition to town hall, where I believe the foundation condition poor at best, and not without need of repair as put forth in the Historic Structures Report.
 - d. Any addition to the existing building should be subservient to the structure and follow along with the existing architecture. Past proposals have not! Reason alone for reviewing Item 3 above.
 - e. If the TD Bank swap materializes, then consider the value in the land, not the building. Adding onto a 50-year-old building, built on a slab, with cheap commercial construction practices, a building with no historic charm in the middle of the Historic District makes little sense in terms of long-range planning.
 - f. Plans like dividing up the Great Hall into 3 meeting areas via movable partitions seem incredulous to me without a study of the acoustical geometry of the room, and the existing materials relationship to reflection, refraction, and reverberation. This is a good example of why you, the B.O.S. need help.
 - g. Create a committee with members who have an understanding of construction, engineering, and architecture to assist the B.O.S. This is long overdue. Too much credence has been given to residents with no construction experience, who have continually tried to slant the data for one outcome, i.e. to save town hall. With a fresh perspective, we can perhaps do both, with proper guidance; It's time to look at both saving the old building and another path forward for town offices.

6. The RTCC committee has been charged with certain tasks, and they are not being allowed to focus time and energy as so charged, i.e. to complete their overview of the Town Center before important decisions are made. **Disclosure** – I do not speak for the RTCC here, but as a member of the committee with an independent opinion.

In conclusion, I am available and willing with my expertise, thoughts, or opinions, to help bring this longstanding debate to conclusion. I may not have all the answers, but I have at least some.

Respectfully Submitted,

John Loftus

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