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For discussion – Option is to create zoom discussions of these points. Contact civicnews@ryecivicleague.org and if there is demand we will organize.

Political Events, Warrant Articles and Concerns Before Rye

Government Boards 2010 - 2020

How this document began - the original draft was prepared by Alex Herlihy for use in his new history of Rye to help tell the story of the most recent decade in the town's history. He then thought it might be useful as a means of civic education, so it first went to the Civic League board and then to some town officials to edit. The goal was to have a document that is non-partisan, but also raises all major concerns that have been expressed over the last decade.

Context - Most of these concerns have been around for a decade or much longer. All of them have been raised by town government boards as well as citizens at those board meetings where considerable discussion has taken place. After streaming of town government meetings began in 2014, those discussions are a matter of public record. (It is not practical for board minutes to include all of what was said at a given meeting.)

It is recognized that not every resident shares the same concerns. The effort to resolve many of these issues have appeared as warrant articles submitted by the town as well as petitioned warrant articles from citizens. The results of those votes appear in the Annual Report of the year following the town election, the second Tuesday in March.

Additions and edits welcome.

1. Town Hall – after ten years of debate, the town hall will remain. What is the best way to repair, renovate and preserve it? How to best renovate and make accessible the auditorium on the 2nd floor for needed town space the way it was used before 1986 with a capacity of 225? What is the plan in which town employees will move to the former bank building? i.e. the departments that work closest with each other should remain together, etc. What renovations of office space will be made for employees remaining at town hall in first floor office space?

2. Other town buildings - need of better usage, re-location, upgrade/more space: recycling center/DPW, Recreation buildings, Fire/Police station, schools, Library, museum, etc.

3. Water Pollution - Parson's Creek failed septic systems, Coakley landfill, (cancer clusters), encroachment near wetlands (fresh and salt) of individual dwellings and housing

developments, etc.

4. Climate change - rising ocean waters, storms, need new housing requirements near water, etc.

5. Housing Developments – better zoning to keep a balance between natural and human world, potential of continued encroachment into back lands with housing developments. Property owners and housing developers have also weighed in on their rights to develop their land. Within the bounds of town zoning.

6. Rye Schools – declining enrollment in Jr high, special needs strain budget, 5th grade now at Jr. high should help (2019), other issues

7. Dogs – removal of dog waste, to be leashed or not in public areas – selected beaches, Parsons Woods, etc.

8. Master Plan - Need Planning Board to update the master plan to serve as a guide for future housing development, etc.

9. Town center improvement – 2020 vote - new side-walk, planting, bike lanes and cross walks to slow traffic, center will be more welcoming to pedestrians; future plans may alter both ends of the center at Wallis/Washington merge and where Central begins at monument; this will slow traffic more and make war monument accessible. Restoration of former Parsonage building will enhance town center look

10. Aging population - Issues relating to seniors, does Rye Senior Serve need more support? What other programs are needed? Providing list of vetted, paid services (i.e. handyman, et al) to seniors, -average age in town is 50

11. Infrastructure – needed upgraded to bridges, roads, culverts, drainage, etc.

12. Lack of cell phone reception - especially along coastline/beach areas; current Wallis Sands area tower proposal to build cell phone tower: pros and cons

13. Lack of affordable housing - loss of Parsonage apts.; accessory “mother in law” apartments in existing houses; how many are affordable? New Lafayette. Rd. workforce housing will help, but more lower cost apartments are needed.

14. Beach issues - beach access or lack of it; surfing, crowded beaches, use of beach by businesses, traffic jams, lack of parking, trash, efforts to privatize beach by restricting parking to Rye residents only, etc.

15. Voter education - (Rye Civic League's monthly "Civic News" E-newsletter helps – approx. 500 open Civic News each month and in 2016 the number of Civic News readers who voted was about 570; over 700 who receive the Civic News don't open it and don't vote. Select Board quarterly hard copy newsletter; letters to the editor in Portsmouth Herald, etc.

Much more voter education is needed; about 1700 vote in town elections every March, but in presidential elections 3300 – 4200 votes; apathy/ lack of education relating to town issues is a real problem

16. Young people - lack of voting in town election, not paying attention to issues and attending meetings, not being reached through social media about town issues, etc.

17. Civic Education in Rye schools – town officials and Rye Civic League members could make annual scheduled visits to classes – working with school staff, integrate these visits into curriculum

18. Rye Water Dist. – governance, communication with residents of the district; voting on this large budget does Not occur in the town election; it is done in the old style (not SB 2) where voters have to show up at Water District annual meeting to vote.

19. Serving on town boards and commissions - lack of participation, many open positions, how to better communicate this need to participate?

20. Rye citizens learning from each other – need for neighborhood gatherings in homes for social and local political purposes as well as improved social media communication, etc.

21. Rye Civic League (revived 2009) - monthly E-newsletter (Civic News) on town government and beyond; monthly meetings to allow for residents to discuss town issues; creates and updates town government handbook, special forums on relevant issues, annual presentations on town budget, warrant articles and other relevant topics; sponsor annual Candidates Night; sponsor bi-annual state wide candidates night.

22. Select Board's quarterly Newsletter – hard copy sent to all 2250 households with articles from town government boards and beyond

23. Cluster development – less impact on land, more affordable because lots are smaller

24. Demolition of significant historic buildings – advisory role of Demolition committee (call for public hearings) etc. Most of demolition in last decade has been post WWII houses, but some historic structures have been razed. How to communicate the value of retaining historic structures?

25. tax rate and rise of assessed valuation on property – important issues have been raised here by property owners.

26. Land Conservation – over the years people have donated land to the town to protect natural areas and this has been managed by the Conservation Commission. Starting in 1999 residents have twice voted funds for an Open Space bond which has allowed the town to purchase easements from property owners. By this process the land owner protects the land from housing developments, but does not have to make it accessible to the public and they receive financial compensation, although at a lower rate than if they sold it for development.

Current Use – this is a state wide program by which property owners pay a much- reduced tax rate on ten acres or more of land that is not subdivided and is only used for agriculture forest management or is simply laying fallow. To change this tax status to the land becoming potential house lots, the owner has to pay a very steep financial penalty.

Public education about donation of land for conservation or sale of land for conservation easements

27. programs for youth – are there enough such programs provided by the town and beyond?

28. Rye Recreation – space needs, volunteers, do programs reach all in need? etc.

29. Planning and Zoning amendments – each town election, voters decide on warrant article amendments put forward by the Planning and Zoning boards. These are submitted after public hearings have been held on each amendment.

30. 2019, first time in 14 years Rye has a Select Board where longest serving member has served for 3 years

31. Enforcement – of zoning and building codes, etc.

32. Planning - One consistent theme has been the call for planning. i.e. look at all the natural resources and the threats to them; what can be done to protect them? What can residents do to rethink their relationship

with the natural world? Another theme has been the need to look at all infrastructure and all public buildings – what is the best and most efficient use of them?