

## 1975 Citizens Petition Renovates Town Hall

2019 was not the only year that the Rye Town Hall was threatened with demolition. In 1975 the building was very underused, suffered from deferred maintenance and there was talk of building a new town hall. One section of the first Amendment to the US Constitution gives citizens the right to petition the government for a redress of grievances which also means for citizens to take action when they feel that government is not acting on an issue. Before 1975 the only modernized section of the first floor of Town Hall was the court room. To create needed office space, Marjorie Gifford, Donald J Cilley, Pat Holmes and Gilbert Rimbaud presented their plan at town meeting to support their petitioned warrant article.

The warrant article was approved by the voters to have \$28,000 of 1974 federal "revenue sharing" funds, plus another \$10,000 already set aside in 1975, to be spent on building space for the tax collector/town clerk, building inspector, selectmen and a new kitchen area. Some of the sub contracting services were donated by local professionals. Prior to that time the town clerk worked from home and the other employees and officials used a small room in the back of the fire station. This citizen action resulted in the office space you see in town hall today. In addition, new stair treads were added, the 2nd floor auditorium was painted and the parking lot was expanded. When the work was completed later in the year, 250 towns people gathered for a reception to admire their new space. All of this information was reported in the Hampton Union by Rye reporter/photographer Ralph Morang III, who in 1976 would become one of the founding members of the Rye Historical Society.

This is a great example of citizens, the legislative branch of town government, taking the democratic initiative and upgrading a space that benefited everyone. Their action gave the town hall new life and provided a bridge to the additional renovations we will see in the near future.

Alex Herlihy, adapted from the draft of a new history of Rye