

Planning for the next updates of the Master Plan

Opinion: Dominique Winebaum

As a Rye resident who has been closely following and commenting on the Master Plan and its updates since 2011, I would like to share my knowledge – and ongoing concerns – with all who care about planning for the future of Rye.

Budgeting sessions during this past November – Select Board and Budget Committee – are indicative of past trends in regards to planning for updates of the Master Plan, namely taking a piecemeal approach.

In short, what was presented and approved is to budget a “Visioning Session” in the spring, and this under the category of the “printing budget” of the Planning Department. As simply stated by the Planning and Zoning Administrator, “we haven’t had a Visioning Session since 2002” to justify the increase in the “printing budget,” which also illustrates the approach in “planning” for the next update(s) of the Master Plan.

Prior to “planning” for an update of the Master Plan, it is worth taking a look at the Rye Master Plan. Please understand that “Visioning” is only the starting point and that all chapters, but for the “Coastal Hazards and Climate Adaptation” chapter, in all likely hood should be updated given the lack of any adequate public visioning since 2002, not to mention that additional chapters needing to be created in order to have a Comprehensive and Strategic Rye Master Plan (the CIP is still referring to the 2013 Master Plan).

<https://www.town.rye.nh.us/planning-department/pages/master-plan>

A Master Plan Steering Committee should have been formed/created and made up of members serving on Town boards (CC, ZBA, BC, HDC..., as well as two members of the public, in order to plan for the next updates of the Master Plan. This is certainly the perfect opportunity to “start from scratch,” so to speak, in terms of planning – an approach that encompasses the community at large (as was done with the 2006 Master Plan created from the 2002 visioning) as opposed to simply following “directives” from the Planning Department, as represented by the Planning Administrator as “we” and “the Planning Board.”

This concept of “Visioning” is much needed, however, not as presented and to be executed. In 2016, the Select Board approved funding for the creation of a new chapter (Coastal Hazards and Climate Adaptation) as well to amend 3 chapters – Natural Resources, Transportation, and Land Use. This included two “Visioning” sessions with the second one attended by only 6 people. Funding was provided via a grant (\$ 8,500) with an additional \$11,500 approved by the Select Board, for the 2017 updates. The new chapter and the updates to existing chapters were not proof read by the Planning and Zoning Administrator until a core group of residents intervened and provided extensive corrections and additions.

Proper planning for the updates of the Master Plan via a Steering Committee would provide a clear and detailed plan regarding which chapters need to be updated – and added – which would also include budgeting over time and via the CIP for all the updates – not just the Visioning part. The format of the Master Plan, as was discussed during the adoption of the Coastal Hazards and Climate Adaption chapter, should be made more reader and user friendly as there is currently both redundant and outdated content . Ideally, a different entity than the Rockingham Planning Commission (RPC) should be contracted to execute the updates to bring fresh ideas and competencies to help the process and result succeed. Town support is also key – residents should not have to beg for drafts to be posted on the Town website as in the past – there is a lot that can be done to increase interest and participation via online public networks.

Time should be taken to re-visit this “proposal” to contract the RPC which should also be part of a CIP item (as was the case with the LDR) in 2019.