



January 2020

Hello Readers of the Rye Civic News,

First of all, Happy New Year and I hope you had a safe and enjoyable holiday.

It was about eleven years ago when Alex Herlihy restarted the Rye Civic League to help residents be better informed and encouraging participation in managing our local government services.

When I went to my first Civic League meeting, Alex's e-mail went to about forty people. Last month's Civic News went to over 1320 people, over 620 people opened the e-mail, with 273 people clicking on at least one of the 90 links for additional information. Those people who clicked for more information average between two and three links per newsletter. So, the last newsletter had over 685 instances of people consuming more information.

If the Town decides to have our Town Deliberative Meeting on January 30<sup>th</sup>, we will have our annual Budget and Warrant Article presentation (on zoom). We tell the story behind the budget and provide color/background on the different warrant articles (2020 [Warrant](#) and [Budget](#)). Prior to the voting, we will update the Warrant Article presentation, provide a digestible warrant articles table and printable "my voting sheets".

So, why a first annual letter? The Civic League continues to be criticized for both taking sides and not doing enough. It is a thin line and it is almost impossible to not oscillate from side to side.

For over a decade, I have been assembling the monthly Civic News. This effort consumes at least eight hours a month, not counting the meetings I attend and all the other Civic League content. For those of you who have not read my book "[Consuming Government](#)" (shameless plug), it's because my hobby has become trying to get our democracy functioning better. While I also do a lot on the national and state level, I chose to invest most of my available time in helping Rye do a better job at managing the government services we buy.

There has been some progress, the Town actually posts outdoor signs announcing Deliberative Meetings and elections, and there has been a fifty percent increase in voters at the Town election (prior to the 2020 registration surge).

Take a moment and think about what you pay in Rye Taxes (Town, School, County) then add your Rye Water District (RWD), Rye Beach Village District (RBVD or Jenness Beach Village District (JBVD) district taxes. If you don't know what your Rye tax bill is, this table will help.

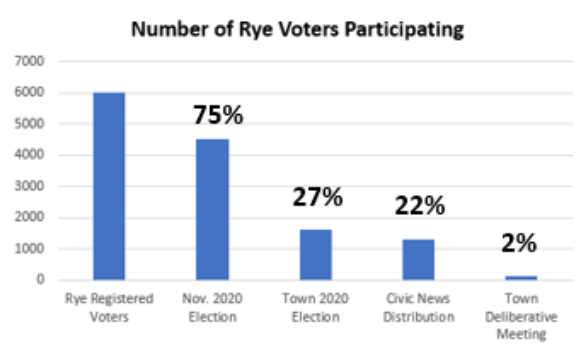
	Home Assessed Value			
	\$ 500,000	\$ 750,000	\$ 1,000,000	\$ 1,250,000
Government Services Purchased	\$ 5,110	\$ 7,665	\$ 10,220	\$ 12,775

Now, ask yourself, would you walk into a store, spend that amount of money and hope you are getting good value? As you at least get the Civic News, you are in a better position than most who do not get the Rye Civic News.

All of us should be very grateful to the over 100 residents who serve on Boards, Committees and Commissions. I counted what is on [this sheet](#). There were 38 elected positions, 48 appointed positions and 16 alternates. There are some who serve on multiple boards and this does not include the RTCC or the Telecom Tower Location committee,

plus another nine volunteer boards for RWD, RBVD, JBVD. See the [RCL's Citizen's Handbook](#) for what all these town Boards, Committees and Commissions as well as town departments do. That works out to about 1.7% of registered voters who currently serve Rye.

For multiple reasons, Rye currently faces a multitude of challenges, I will address them below, because it is going to take more than these 100 or so people to address and tackle our largest challenges. There are lots of smart, educated, talented and busy (like me and the other 100+) people in Rye, but many are not participating as actively as they might or could be in vital aspects of "civic life". Here is a snap shot for which I used the 6004 November 2020 registered voters, so keep in mind that fewer people were registered last March.



Event	Number	Percent	Comment
Rye Registered Voters	6004	100%	Many registered for election
Nov. 2020 Election	4512	75%	
Town 2020 Election	1608	27%	Estimated number
Civic News Distribution	1320	22%	
Town Deliberative Meeting	145	2%	Averaged over past few years

Just about three times as many residents voted in November than in the March Town election. The two percent of voters who attend the Town Deliberative meeting (only about 1% are there for the full meeting), heard the discussion and finalized the wording of warrant articles which determine the direction and spending of the year to come (Land Use Ordinances can't be changed at the Town Deliberative meeting).

The election edition of the Civic News gets between 50% to 60% of the distribution opening the Civic News, so just over 650 may have read the Civic News. The Portsmouth Herald barely covers Rye anymore, so that leaves the Select Board newsletter. Reading the Select Board Newsletter is better than not reading it, but it is always painful for me to read. It is not that there is hardly anything I don't already know, it's more of how information is presented and more importantly what may not be said. That deeper detail is where we hope the Civic League can help fill in the gaps on a monthly basis.

The RCL Board is doing all we can. If you would like to have more people choosing to spend time to better manage all of the local government services they purchase every year you could help with:

- Joining the RCL Board.
  - o With more people, we could be doing more
- Contribute to the RCL. Only 6% of distribution has contributed the \$12 a year we suggest
- Get more people reading the Civic News
  - o Are there voters in your home not getting it?
  - o Have you ever asked your neighbors or others in Rye if they get the Civic News?
  - o Less than 1/3 of people who voted in November get the Civic News
  - o Use this [video](#) of PTA, REF and the RCL (only one person attended)

Share this [Civic News Signup Link](#) and your friends can sign themselves up to get the Monthly Civic News e-mail and other RCL deliverables. Write me directly ([civicnews@ryecivicleague.org](mailto:civicnews@ryecivicleague.org)) if you would like to see how you might help produce the content. Come to the RCL monthly meetings the last Wednesday of the month(currently zoom).

Some residents have removed themselves from distribution. The RCL board is human, but even more so, we are understaffed. I personally would read most of what the late Peter Crawford wrote, but too many times, I just did not have the time to review or read, nor did we have others who could have edited. Some of what I have written, said or done outside of the Civic League has led some people to stop getting the Civic News. This is their choice, but they are thus people who have selected to have less information. The same is true of those who say they are “all set” and don’t need to sign up for the Civic News. I doubt they are attending meetings, reading meeting minutes, listening to recorded videos and analyzing budgets.

The role of the RCL is not to champion any one issue. The only time we step in is when the Town is not responding or representing the voters. I now make it clear at Public Meetings when I speak for the Rye Civic League or as a private citizen. All of us at the Civic League are both civic minded journalists and resident tax payers of Rye.

The mission of the RCL is to have better informed and engaged residents. As a RCL Board member, I lead by example. That is, I am informed and participate in the management of where our taxes go (Town, School, Water District, and County).

The Civic League currently can’t be doing more without more help. However, many of the challenges facing Rye can only be addressed if more voters step forward to move things forward. Our three person Select Board, current structure of the Town staff and the volume of activity required of the Land Use Boards (Zoning, Planning and Conservation), make it unrealistic to expect much more until more people get involved.

Yours truly,  
Steven Borne, Rye Civic League President

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**This second “letter” should be considered as the view and opinion of me as an individual.**

As at every Civic League monthly meeting after our business meeting we have an open public forum on town issues.

Dear Fellow Rye Citizens,

All that you read below has been shared/communicated with the town, in some cases multiple times in public meetings. My personal aim is that this will motivate more residents to choose to get involved and champion or help address some of these common challenges.

Scan and pick one of these to read. If motivated feel free to read other sections.

### **The Future of Rye**

Rye needs to decide if we are going to continue along the current path of becoming more of a retirement community or if Rye will invest in having Rye be more of a balanced community (young and older people).

Balance is not million-dollar homes and lower income units packed around Route 1. If Rye wants younger families, then much more needs to be done to create starter houses for younger families.

The Planning Board and the Planning Administrator are working to conduct “Visioning sessions” to help guide an update to the Master Plan. While this is better than nothing it is not the best way to approach this.

While many have helped with the current Master Plan, Rye will be much better off to start over. Have you read the Master Plan? I have. It is [here](#) It is more a Master Statement, then a Master Plan and far from a Best-in-Class

Master Plan for a community with property value well over \$2B dollars. The biggest problem is there is no implementation plan. Who is going to be responsible for getting things done and when it should be completed by.

Bedford NH issued an RFP for \$163K to bring in outside resources to lead this effort. While Bedford has many more businesses, we should invest a proportional amount to have a best-in-class master plan. [Click Here](#)

See the Stratham Master Plan after looking at Rye's Master Plan. [Click Here](#)

### **More Responsible Ordinances**

Rye has changed incredibly over the last 50 years. In November 2018 the late Peter Crawford and Alex Herlihy assembled the content for [this presentation](#) looking at the last 50 years. Page 12 shows all of the developments from the 80's to the 2000's. The land is getting over saturated. While the Planning Board has yet to share the data, recent minutes confirmed my long held suspicion that the ZBA is getting more and more requests for relief for projects that infringe on the wetlands and wetlands buffers. This year the last ZBA case was number 46, with the ZBA meeting twice a month many times this past year. Many of the easier land to develop has already been developed.

There is a vocal number of residents who constantly waive the Property Rights banner. Owning property is an investment and it is not a privileged investment class that grants the holders rights to maximize value. All investments carry risks, and Rye needs to say too much, is too much. We don't have our Land Use Boards back. It is too difficult to say, yes we appreciate that you are willing to use high tech septs, implement multiple mitigation strategies and lots of other actions to "make this work", but x amount of total waivers, special exceptions, variances and conditions is too much.

This can flow out of a best-in-class Master Plan leading to reasonable new ordinances that reflect current realities and the citizens' desired future for Rye. Doing this will relieve some of the strain on our Land User Boards and the current quandary of not effectively monitoring and enforcing the mountains of conditions Rye has granted.

### **Facilities planning**

If you are upset with the way the TD Bank/Parsonage swap has played out, or the decade of stagnation with Town Hall, fifteen years of the Trolley Barn/Old Police Station not being utilized, or why our Transfer Station looks like a "dump", it all ties back to not being able to come up with a plan for what all of Rye (town, schools, recreation, library, transfer station, community groups.....) needs for space and to make sure we are utilizing our assets.

Rye is a wealthy community, but not everyone has wealth. In August of 2019, the Library had a consultant present to them and the Select Board ([Click Here](#) for slides). The bottom line is that to do what Rye needs, it should be through a combination of private donations and tax dollars. The best approach is to have a plan so donors know the town will not be back asking for more. It also helps the town maximize what we can do while keeping the tax burden flattish.

Myself and others have been pushing for this for over a decade. Thanks to Paula Tsetsilas, generous sponsors and lots of support, we were able to have the Plan NH Charette completed, but that was only a catalyst and limited in scope. Things that need to be considered:

- Transfer station sits uphill from our best water supply well and should be moved
- We may never have a true town center, so many communities have designed their "dump" to maximize community interaction
- If we do not commit to be a balanced community, we should not have two school buildings. Greenland has approximately the same number of K-12 students, but a budget that is about \$2M a year less. The main drivers are the costs associated with two buildings, our insistence on smaller classes and paying our teachers more.
- The Town has never looked at moving the current 2<sup>nd</sup> floor Safety Building usages to above the apparatus bay and opening up the second floor of the safety building and the large conference room and other space in the basement and ground floor to public uses. A reconfiguration would be required to address safety and security concerns. We did pay \$40K extra so the space above the apparatus bay could be available.

### **Fire trucks, Fire Fighters/Paramedics:**

Chief Cotreau has done a great job, looking at what Rye needs, researching and proposing plans. He did this for the Rye Fire Department equipment needs and has been executing on this plan. Step one was to replace the aging Ladder Truck, next is to procure a mini-pumper. The Chief also reported that on 11% of calls, the two people on duty are already on a call. To address this problem, he has proposed options to add additional staff and management.

If we have this 11% problem, N. Hampton, Greenland and New Castle may have the same problem. When this happens, under our mutual aid agreement one of these towns or Portsmouth (from the station by the end of Lang Rd) will be on the scene before Rye staff can get to the station and then get to the scene. There may be coincidences when Rye staff would have been close enough to utilize one of the other five Rye Trucks, but trucks 2 to 6 can easily come from neighboring towns.

Our area is oversaturated with fire equipment. [Click Here](#) to see information I assembled in 2018. I compared our combined population with other NH communities of that population.

I tried to get the Chief to work on this before pushing for the new Ladder Truck, but his job is not to develop an area wide plan. We need to reduce the total number of vehicles and shift that spend to have more people on duty, balanced across our communities. Such a solution could provide better service and at the same or lower long term costs rather than having all equipment and staff funded by Rye.

### **Parsons Creek is polluted:**

Two decades ago, the State told Rye that Parson's Creek is polluted from the surrounding septic systems ([2000 Shell Fish Study](#)). The Town will tell you about all the Marsh restoration completed and the Septic Pump-out ordinance that is in place.

How effective has that been? Take a look at a table I put together and sent to the Select Board and Planning Boards last year.

The State says that any reading over 104 mpn/1000ml is contaminated.

**The 24,419 mpn/1000ml is as high as can be counted.**

<b>Data from Water Quality Reports</b>	<b>2017</b>	<b>2018</b>	<b>2019</b>
<b>Data Points</b>	<b>54</b>	<b>44</b>	<b>24</b>
Above 104 mpn/1000mL	33	30	17
% above 104 mpn/1000mL	61%	68%	71%
Above 1000 mpn/1000mL	6	16	12
% above 1000 mpn/1000mL	11%	36%	50%
Above >24,419 mpn/1000mL	1	10	4
% above > 24,419 mpn/1000mL	2%	23%	17%

Wondering what the 2020 numbers say? So am I. However, when I followed up with FB Environmental, the contractor conducting the sampling about getting the 2020 report, I learned that because of Covid, the State stopped testing.

Did Rye discuss this in Public Meetings? No.

When I raised this at Select Board meetings, did the Select Board discuss in public and act? No

Was using the one half of Beach Sticker Parking fees that can go to beach and pollution monitoring used? No

In December 2017 the State presented to the Select Board, and informed Rye, that while there may be or have been a few bad septic systems, the real problem is an oversaturation of leach fields for the land that is there and with rising water tables it will get worse. [Full Report](#).

Here is what it says:

*“Septic system density above .26 per acre causes problems, Parsons Creek Watershed is at .45 systems per acre. The problem is over saturated land. At this point, testing should only be to monitor progress or in our case the lack of progress. “*

While I have attempted to engage the Select Board and raised this with the Planning Board, there has been minimum discussion or action.

Here is the [2016 Parsons Creek Committee report](#). Not much of this has been implemented. Also go to the Town website and try to get a sense of our strategy, historical data and plans for Parsons Creek. I created [this location](#) on the RCL Website as I got tired of not being able to find information. If I didn't much of this would be lost the other information that did not move or is not linked on our current website.

#### **Time for a new Town Attorney.**

It is time for a change after thirty-seven years. I have been observing this Town Attorney for the past decade and I could list out a multitude of actions and in actions that lead to my opinion that we are better off moving on. Granted he has a wealth of institutional knowledge, but we are going to have get along without it at some point, so why not start weaning ourselves away now.

Here is what we paid the Town Attorney, I pulled this from the past three annual reports. We only have this information because a petitioned warrant article now requires the town to include this data in the annual report.

Year	Ammount
2017	\$ 86,171.20
2018	\$ 98,366.46
2019	\$ 131,225.17

#### **Other Topics:**

Yes, there are plenty other ones, but this is enough for now.

I have shared what I know, made suggestions, but unless more people choose to be more engaged and active in managing what happens in Rye, not much else is going to change.

Best Regards,

Steven Borne