

Where do we stand about updating the Rye Master Plan?
An Investigation by Dominique Winebaum

This is a sequel to an “Opinion” I wrote for the December Civic News (and which was emailed to different Town boards) regarding the next update of the Rye Master Plan. [CLICK HERE](#). It is recommended that a Master Plan be updated every 5 to 10 years.

As per New Hampshire state law (RSA 674:2 I), “The purpose of the master plan is to set down as clearly and practically as possible the best and most appropriate future development of the area under the jurisdiction of the planning board, to aid the board in designing ordinances that result in preserving and enhancing the unique quality of life and culture of New Hampshire, and to guide the board in the performance of its other duties in a manner that achieves the principles of smart growth, sound planning, and wise resource protection.”

For more information on statutory guidelines regulating the Master Plan in NH: [CLICK HERE](#)

Over the past decade, the Planning Board, under the guidance of the Planning and Zoning Administrator, and at times, with the assistance of the Rockingham Planning Commission, undertook a number of updates of the “2006” Master plan, which was adopted in 2007, and which was done in accordance with the RSA requirements to amend a master plan. With the exception of 2015, the Planning Board has been in a continuous mode of updating the master plan from 2011 through 2018.

- 2011-2014. Master Plan (2013): update of all chapters and the addition of a new Energy chapter (from the Energy Committee).
- 2016-2018. The addition of a new Climate Adaptation and Coastal Hazards chapter (2017) and update of three chapters: Natural Resources, Land Use, and Transportation (2018).

The Rye Master Plan does not properly reference and include the 2011 Rye Recreation’s own comprehensive Master Plan, which was prepared by Marty Klenke, Strategic Reach Consulting, LLC, and in collaboration with the past and present members of the Rye Recreation Commission. [CLICK HERE](#)

The present Rye Master Plan: [CLICK HERE](#)

Master Plan (2013)

It is unclear why the whole Master Plan was updated in 2013; the efforts began in 2011, less than 5 years after the adoption of the 2006/2007 Master Plan. Moreover, the public was not invited to participate. The Vision chapter was revised by the Planning Board members as opposed to seeking public input via Visioning Sessions. As per RSA requirements, “A vision

section that serves to direct the other sections of the plan. It shall contain a set of statements which articulate the desire of the citizens affected by the master plan” (RSA 642:2, II. a). To be noted, the changes made to the Vision chapter were minimal and mostly grammatical. The Vision chapter fails to refer to all sections of the plan. The creation of a new chapter, Energy, was done without a Visioning.

New Chapter and Update of 3 chapters (2016-2018)

In 2016, two Visioning Sessions were planned in order to create a new chapter and update three chapters (\$20,000 budget). The Visioning Session for the Climate Adaptation chapter was attended by approximately 35 people. The Visioning for the update of the three chapters, Natural Resources, Land Use, and Transportation, was attended by only 6 people and the meeting was “cut short” precluding the public to provide comments regarding the Natural Resources chapter. See 2016 Master Plan update schedule [CLICK HERE](#)

Even as the Natural Resources (NR) chapter was amended in 2018, the “Visioning Session in 2002” remains the main resource summarizing the issues facing the Town of Rye and its residents’ “vision” for the future. To be noted, there is a recent section under the Visioning in the NR chapter relating to climate change.

In my prior article for the Rye Civic News (December), I made the recommendation to take a different approach in regard to the membership of the Committee overseeing the next update of the Master Plan. Furthermore, someone has to take responsibilities for the project as a whole, past, present, and future. Thereby, and it is my opinion, there is a need to create an ad-hoc committee, a Steering Committee, as other towns do, which would:

- Thoroughly review the Master Plan to identify gaps/deficiencies
- Quantify related budget needs
- Establish an implementation plan with specific, measurable, attainable realistic and timely (SMART) goals
- Establish review cycle/process for future updates

Clearly, Master Plan fatigue is palpable among planning board members, to say the least, and the membership count to undertake yet another update (as was discussed at the December 2020 Planning Board meeting) is/was in the low range of two members. Each member of the Planning Board (including alternate(s)) serves on a sub-committee of the Planning Board, such as Technical Review Committee, Rules and Regulations, Long-Range Planning (Master Plan), as well as on the Capital Improvement Program Committee, in addition to the monthly meeting and occasional site-walk meeting.

At the November Budgeting Sessions, the Planning and Zoning Administrator provided a one liner when it came to justify an increased printing budget which was questioned by Selectman Winslow by stating that *the Planning Board* wanted to have “a Visioning in the Spring” and that the Town hadn’t had a “Visioning since 2002.” There was no formal proposal presented (RFP)

for this budget item. Moreover, there was visioning beyond 2002: 2004-2005 for the “2006” Master Plan and the 2016 Visioning Sessions. [CLICK HERE](#)

As seen in the past, 3-4 years is a lengthy time to update a Master Plan, while some of the updates are not real updates as mandated by the RSAs. Case in point, it appears (from my own investigation) that the plan for a “Visioning in the Spring” is to fulfill the need for the Rye Conservation Commission to go ahead with the creation of a Natural Resources Inventory (NRI) document (as per the RSAs) as the Vision for the Natural Resources chapter is outdated. Even though a NRI is long overdue, it should not drive the next update of the Master Plan, especially as it has been presented. Clearly, the Rye Master Plan with all its updates is not up to date. Additional chapters are needed as well, such as an Executive Summary and an Implementation Chapter, to name a few.

As stated by a HDC member at a recent Historic District Commission meeting, the Town Center is a “corridor,” which is not what the public wished for during the Visioning Sessions in 2004-2005, and also as expressed by the public during the Rye Community Design Charette held in 2019.

We will promote additional opportunities to foster regular and multiple social interactions for all members of the community to include but not limited to: pedestrian paths, bikeways, and traffic-calming and mitigating features along town roads within and leading to the Town Center. We envision pocket parks and gardens for all to enjoy and a few apartments built over small retail establishments. The additions of a cafe and general store in our Town Center will increase our opportunities to foster a sense of community. This will be unified by human-scale density and architectural style honoring the historic buildings and character of much that already exists. (2013 *MP, Vision, p. 1-1*).

The Introduction of the “2006” Master Plan called for “An Invitation to Community Planning in Rye.” The Rye Community Design Charette in 2019 to “help craft vision of Rye’s future” (*Seacoast Online June 1st, 2019*) was attended by approx. 170 people. Indeed, Rye residents were eager to participate in community planning about the future of our Town center. The next update of the Master Plan should be a complete update given that the Visioning in the 2013 Master Plan dates from 2004-2005 Visioning sessions. The Climate Adaptation and Coastal Hazard chapter (2017) is possibly the only chapter that will not require updating.

Dated: February 1st, 2021