

A Chronological History of the Rye Master Plans  
Leading to the 1985 Master Plan

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From a historical perspective, it is interesting to note that both the Rye Conservation Commission and the Rye Historical District Commission, were the first Town boards to undertake the task of developing a Master Plan.

States Statutes governing the development of a Master Plan – NH RSA, Section 674:2 – dates back from 1983. Prior to that, community planning was governed under a different set of statutes, Section 36. It appears that prior to 1983, it was not mandated for a Town to adopt a Master Plan, though the development of a Master Plan was governed by States Statutes and while it made sense for a community to plan for more orderly growth. NH RSA, Section 674:2 says that for a town to have a Zoning Ordinance, Historic District, or Capital Improvements Program (all of which Rye has) it must have a Master Plan. Per the RSA, at a minimum a Master Plan must have a Vision section and Land Use section.

In 1978, in an effort to protect Rye's natural resources in light of population growth and development, the Rye Conservation Commission took action by hiring a forester, Phillip E. Reynolds, Ph.D. to prepare a Conservation Master Plan for the Town of Rye, New Hampshire. [Click here for 1978 Conservation Master Plan](#)

Population growth for Rye, as recorded in the 1985 Master Plan, was 10.4% from 1970 to 1980, and 25.8% the prior decade (1960-1970).

**The 1978 Conservation Master Plan** is a comprehensive report, which provides extensive descriptions of Rye's natural resources, including marshes, cedar stands, and woods, as well as assessments and recommendations. It can be characterized as a Natural Resources Inventory, and this, before Rye had a master plan. It is approximately 250 pages long. As described in the Preface:

The project was undertaken as an effort to aid, facilitate, and accelerate communication and coordination of the various Rye public groups and citizens involved with and concerned with preserving, developing, and properly utilizing Rye's unique, irreplaceable, and often fragile natural resources.

The author catalogues a wide range of conservation problems/needs that he was made aware of through his personal contacts, public meetings, and on-site inspections. This inventory of concerns is still relevant today – some 40+ years later:

- (1). Land use planning or its lack
- (2). Public land management and coordination
- (3). Trends in open space

- (4). Condition and trend of urban shade trees
- (5). Landscaping and beautification needs for urban streets and public places
- (6). Wetlands encroachment
- (7). Public access to natural resources
- (8). Enforcement of existing environmental laws
- (9). Environmental awareness of public officials
- (10). Protection of rare or scare plant species
- (11). Wildlife habitat needs and condition trends
- (12). Urban roadside conditions (including salting)
- (13). Interest in a Town Forest
- (14). Needs for technical and educational assistance to land owners.

The 1985 Rye Master Plan makes reference to the 1978 Conservation Master Plan, and summarizes some of its recommendations, however, thereafter, and more specifically in the 1998 and 2006 Master Plan, there is no mention of it. The following is copied from the 1985 Rye Master Plan:

Rye's Conservation Commission has traditionally become the responsibility of open space preservation. In 1978 it hired a consultant, Philip E. Reynolds, who prepared a lengthy Conservation Master Plan for the Town of Rye, N.H. The plan report presents excellent descriptions of the natural resources of Rye. It recommended four priorities, as follows: Preservation and protection of the Bellyhack Bog – Berry's Brook watershed; Preservation and protection of the Cedar Run – Brown's Pond – Burke's Pond ecosystem; Protection of the Fairhill Marsh rare cedar stands; Acquisition of the Beach Grove adjacent to the Town Cemetery. This plan provides an excellent beginning for open space preservation planning, particularly as information resource. However, the plan did not target many specific parcels for acquisition strategy. It is recommended that the 1978 effort be followed-up with a study particularly targeted to specific tracts, with highest priorities given to the Bellyhack, Bailey Brook and Fairhill Marsh areas identified in the 1978 plan (Open Space).

The 1978 Conservation Master Plan has been in storage at the Rye Public Library. It is now available on the Town of Rye website, Rye Conservation Commission [webpage](#) – thanks to Janice Ireland, Executive Assistant to the Select Board, who scanned the document.

There are many lessons to be learned from the 1978 Conservation Master Plan and many discoveries to be made. As a result of my reading Reynolds' report, I have become attuned to the need of protecting Atlantic white cedars in Rye; Fairhill Marsh rare cedar stands (what was then and what is there now); identifying Atlantic white cedars throughout Rye, specifically on Route 1A. And this is just for starters.

**Master Plan Prepared by the Rye Sounding Board Submitted to Planning Board, June 1982.**

This was an initiative carried by members of the Historic District Commission, starting in 1979. Alex Herlihy, who was both a member of the HDC and a member the "Rye Sounding Board" provided me with a copy of the 1982 Master Plan.

Charles Tucker, when he was acting as a City Planner/Regional Planner (1966-1979), was consulted to provide guidelines on how to prepare the Master Plan. Charles Tucker provided a set of nine (9) guidelines on how to formally – and legally – prepare the Master Plan. In short, the role of the Planning Board was to set up the citizen’s committee – Sounding Board – to prepare the plan. Here is the description of the Sounding Board in the Introduction:

A Sounding Board is a group of volunteer citizens working for their community in conjunction with the Planning Board, to help plan for the growth and change taking place in that community. The Rye Sounding Board was organized in 1979 and has a core of about 10 people from the original cross-section of 100 townspeople who were invited to participate.

By all means, the plan was done following all the required steps: questionnaires sent to all taxpayers in town; an in-depth study of town needs, incorporated the work of a water quality study, interviews with town officials and boards, conversations with citizens, projections of current trends in Rye and regional, and close consultation with professional planners from the Rockingham Planning Commission.

The plan was submitted to the Planning Board in June 1982.

### **The 1985 Rye Master Plan**

In a prior article, I have provided an extensive summary of the 1985 Rye Master Plan. It was stated to me that the author, Town Counsel, Michael Donovan, was not interested in the work of the Sounding Board – the 1982 Master Plan - as he undertook the task of preparing the 1985 Master Plan. I have not found a reference to the 1982 Master Plan in the 1985 Master Plan.

[Link to article - 1985 Rye Master Plan](#)