

From: Rye Town Center Committee (RTCC)
To: Historic District Commission
CC: Select Board
Re: New Town Offices

November 22, 2021

Thank you for sharing the proposed designs for the new town offices. The members of the RTCC have considered and discussed the plans. Overall, we feel the pace of this project has left the town public in the dark, and even this committee is somewhat clouded about final proposals. It is our understanding that the project has gone out for bid and we are therefore discouraged that our collective opinion may not be heard despite our committee's charge to create cohesion among town-owned buildings, to maintain a charming town-center atmosphere and to be mindful of taxpayer impact.

We are heartened that the issue of the windows is still open for discussion; it is our strong opinion that for consistency among town-owned buildings, the windows and casings of the new town offices must be white, not black as proposed. In addition, the windows should be cased with a minimum 5/4 by 4 nominal flat casing and window mullions should be in both the top and bottom sash, not just the top sash as proposed.

The RTCC would have, if time and process permitted, shared the additional feedback and recommendations that adhere to the existing New England architectural vocabulary and would thereby improve the exterior look of the building and increase the charm of Rye's historic town center:

1. Do not remove the chimney to accommodate a lavatory window that no one will look out. The chimney gives height to the right side of the building. The ATM can be removed, and brick put in its place. The chimney can be painted white with a black band at the top.
2. The front ridge should be broken into two levels. It is unsightly as it exists.
3. The front of the main building, which is currently in the same plane as the left side of the building, should be pulled forward 4" pronouncing where it meets the left side as viewed from the road; this will complement a dropped ridge on the left side of the building.
4. A single door at the front – instead of the proposed double door – would be more in keeping with Colonial architecture. In addition, a double door will be more costly to purchase and install and is more likely to not seal well, resulting in heat loss.
5. The proposed addition out the back over-masses the existing structure.
6. The interface of the proposed roofline from the addition and the existing ridge is not complementary.
7. The rooflines are incompatible: the existing building gable is approximately 6/12 pitch. The addition has an opposed pitch of 12/12.
8. Windows and casings should be white.
9. Windows should have a built-up exterior sill, minimum of 2"; 12 over 12 mullions would look much better than what exists or is proposed.

10. The speed of this project precludes design modification as well as the thoughtful exploration of economical building materials for the exterior and the roof that would give this building an appropriate and historical feel. The result is likely to be an unsightly building in the town center, generating community dissatisfaction akin to that of the Public Safety Building.

Finally, the Rye Town Center Committee hopes to partner with the Historic District Commission in the future. We know that new HDC guidelines will soon be available to guide building projects such as this. In the meantime, and in response to the proposed town building plans, we offer the following reminders of architectural standards that should be considered by all involved in preserving – and advancing – the historic character of the Rye Town Center:

SIZE, SCALE AND MASSING

When adding an addition, it is commonly agreed that placement, size, scale and massing are critical elements for ensuring that a new addition is subordinate to the original structure. The National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior, states:

- A new addition should not be highly visible from the public right of way; a rear or other secondary elevation is usually the best location for a new addition.
- The new addition should be smaller than the original building - it should be subordinate in both size and design to the historic building.
- Typically, a compatible addition should be smaller than the building in both height and footprint.

ROOF FORMS

The roof form is one of the most important features that contributes to the character and architectural style of a contributing structure. In each case, the slope of the roof, overall size and the orientation of the roof plane are individual features that contribute to the overall character.

CHIMNEYS

Chimneys are an important architectural detail that contribute to the architectural integrity of the structure and the overall roof form and ridgeline of a roof. Non-functioning chimneys should be preserved as an original historic detail of the building.

DOORS

Doors, especially front doors, are important architectural elements that give scale to a building and along with window locations and groupings, provide visual interest from the street. Historic doors are often noted for their size, materials and finish. Because the wrong style of door can impact the overall character of a building façade, changes in doors and door frames should be designed and constructed to maintain the architectural integrity of the historic building façade.