

Dear Members of the Select Board and Town Administrator, Becky Bergeron,

My letter, re: “my position on the Long Range Planning Committee and the updating of the Rye Master Plan” is on the Consent agenda. I hope that it will be pulled out of the Consent agenda for discussion and I am asking that it be included in the meeting minutes, along with this statement I am going to read.

Planning for Rye’s future – professional planning leadership & strong community engagement

1. The Planning Board’s plan is for the Town to hire a consulting firm/consultant to do a complete and comprehensive rewrite of the Master Plan, via a theme-based approach, based on the “Vision Framework.” Even though there was a huge effort including many residents as part of the Visioning, the results of the Community Survey and Municipal Survey, the Dream Board, and the 19 additional online Visioning Workshop input forms were not tabulated or analyzed in developing the “Vision Framework” and themes. By this I mean that the approximately 250 resident response forms were essentially not incorporated, summarized or considered as part of the Vision Framework.
2. In my opinion, the “Vision Framework” as drafted does not lay the groundwork for a sound and smooth path forward; the so-called “themes” were drafted prior to the Visioning Session. No existing conditions baseline/report was developed, namely what are the existing conditions with regard to population, housing, land use, transportation, etc. (Inventory), that should inform the Visioning process. A credible Consulting firm may need to collect different data according to their approach, along with an existing conditions baseline/report, in order to lay the groundwork for a comprehensive update of the Master Plan.
3. At the first Long Range Planning Committee meeting on April 5th, after the Committee had been dissolved on February 1st by a member who is now the new Chair, 12 minutes into the meeting, the new Chair came to the swift conclusion to hire a Consultant and made the proposal to reach out to Julie LaBranche, who worked with the Committee over the past year, to assist the committee in writing an RFP/RFQ, for a complete rewrite of the Master Plan. Additionally, the Chair stated categorically “we don’t want the consultant to review the results of the surveys.” Excuse me...
4. The Town’s reliance on the services of Town Counsel, Michael Donovan, for planning and town legal matters over 30+ years (Michael Donovan wrote the 1985 Master Plan) has created a void in terms of internal or even external professional planning expertise and has been very costly, and with I would argue, at times, questionable outcomes.
5. Eric Maher, the new Town Attorney, may not be as available as the former Attorney, Michael Donovan who is still active with Rye land use matters. Our Planning and Zoning Administrator is a Rye resident, which I believe is a conflict given her role in

spearheading land use regulations, not to mention the additional cost of hiring consultants/attorneys to assist her in her many of her tasks.

6. I am requesting that all the detailed results, as mentioned above, municipal survey, community survey, what people at the Visioning wrote on the dream board, and the 19 responses from the online Visioning Workshop forms, be made public on the Town of Rye website, prominently. They have not been made public to date. It was money that the taxpayers spent with residents involved devoting time to the process. The Town should provide a link to the detailed results on the front page of its website, under “News” – no prominent announcement has been made under the “News” section to direct the public to the LRP webpage and its Master Plan Visioning content with prominent visibility going forward so residents can be informed and engaged including through the use of social media.
7. I would also request that meeting minutes that were originally posted on the Town of Rye website prior to 2017, be made available again in their electronic form. This to provide access to recent history, i.e., land use regulations efforts via meeting minutes. Not having this very recent history and record available online creates a significant gap in knowledge and continuity.
8. A Master Plan Steering Committee (including residents who are not serving on boards) would provide a wider yet range of expertise and knowledge, something I have been advocating for 2+years.
9. Likewise, the hiring of an in-house or contracted professional planning firm with multiple qualified resources should be given serious consideration to provide much needed assistance and expertise in planning for the next update of the Master Plan; in assisting with the currently planned complete re-write of the Rye Zoning Ordinance so as to streamline the process and make sure it takes into account emerging trends; in helping draft new regulations to expand on the “pump-out” ordinance to better protect the Parsons Creek watershed; to create a yearly and continuous implementation process for all land use related actions; to create an electronic platform for all documentation within the building, planning and zoning departments; to assist other departments and boards with planning requests; to write RFP/RFQ/grants; to assist the building department with land regulations compliance; to be up to date and current on best practices, legislative and regulatory changes just to name important tasks requiring much needed professional planning assistance and expertise.

Thank you,
Dominique Winebaum

April 11, 2022

