

Pease Development Authority Plan for Rye Harbor

The Pease Development Authority (PDA) was created in 1991 to oversee the transition of Pease Air Force Base to civilian use. This was successful. From the RSA, see third section

<https://law.justia.com/codes/new-hampshire/title-i/chapter-12-g/>

"There is hereby created a body politic and corporate of the state, to be known as the Pease development authority, to carry out the provisions of this chapter. The authority is hereby deemed to be a public instrumentality, and the exercise by the authority of the powers conferred by this chapter shall be deemed and held to be the performance of public and essential governmental functions of the state."

In 2001, within the PDA, a Department of Ports and Harbors was established. The Ports Authority was renamed of Department of Ports and Harbors (DPH). IN 2021 PDA began asserting power/decision making over the DPH, rather than accepting advice from DPH as had been the case. This assertion of power has led to the situation now found at Rye Harbor.

PDA is recognized by the state of NH, as a "quasi" (made to look like) state agency, but is not part of state government. The following information is from the PDA website: The PDA is an economic development, pro-business entity. The seven-member Board of Directors is appointed by the governor, president of the senate and speaker of the house. Other members are appointed by the city of Portsmouth, the towns of Newington and Greenland plus Strafford County. (Through its state Rep., Rye had requested membership on the Board but this was denied in 2023. The web site does not indicate who has supervision over PDA and its decisions.)

At a PDA board of Directors meeting in June of 2024, (see PDA web site for streaming of that meeting) it became known to the public that PDA had hired Appledore Engineering to devise a plan for development of Rye Harbor to build a retail installation in the parking lot opposite the shack businesses. This issue was discussed at the June 24th Rye Select Board meeting in which concerns were expressed by the public about the negative impact this retail installation would have on the businesses at the harbor, the day users of the boat ramp and the rest of those who use the harbor. (See Rye NH web site for streaming of this meeting.)

The Rye Civic league "Civic News" reported on the PDA proposal in its July issue, linking both the June PDA Board meeting and the June 24 Rye Select Board meeting.

On July 22 the PDA Ports committee held a work session in which Appledore Engineering presented its plan for new businesses at Rye Harbor. (PDA committee meetings are not filmed.) The plan calls for a raised platform on the edge of the parking lot, opposite the current shack businesses. The platform will hold four connected structures, housing eight units, each with 200 sq ft. It was not clear who would rent these units, but it was discussed at previous meetings that they would be retail shops, not necessarily marine-related. Hard copies of the proposed structure and a time line of implementation culminating with the awarding of a contract in early December were distributed.

After the Appledore presentation, the Ports committee asked questions and made comments at which point it was stated that the PDA intended to get rid of the shack businesses. The Public then spoke.

Opposition to the PDA plan:

Points made by the public at the July 22 meeting and by others who work at the harbor

- This plan is being driven by the state of NH to spend federal Covid money before the end of the year so it will not have to be returned. (\$775K in federal Covid funds for a project estimated to cost \$916K)
- The public asked - Why not put the money toward more gravel for the sinking parking lot as well as building up the seawall during storm surge and pilings and docking facilities upgrades.
- One non-voting member of the committee was opposed to the plan and criticized it as a done deal, without consideration of Rye Harbor users and the public.
- PDA plan appears to promote non-marine related businesses at the harbor
- Shack businesses: Why does the PDA want to eliminate them? They serve a vital marine function and the owners of these businesses have a heavy investment in those structures over the past 30 years.
- Parking and traffic flow: they are already a challenge at the harbor; this plan will make the situation worse. An expanded 30- minute parking area for the retail shops would interfere with use of the boat ramp. By law, overflow parking cannot use the commercial fishing area. More parking will be forced onto Ocean Boulevard, a dangerous situation.
- Boat storage: this is a vital need at the harbor. This plan will take away significantly reduce that harbor use which people depend on who have no other place to store their boats.
- Electricity issues and the environmental impact of new septic needs of this plan are not clear.
- Rye harbor is at full capacity in the height of season with 60 commercial dock permits issued
- At the meeting, the PDA distributed a schedule of implementation for the plan which culminates in signing a contract in early December. They also distributed schematic drawings of the proposed installation.
- The PDA did not put forth any overall vision for the upgrade of the harbor facility. Repair, maintenance, replacement, upgrades are the priority, not retail shops.
- NH State Statutes state that the purpose of its ports and harbors has always been to give full access to the water for a variety of marine activities.

The next meeting of the PDA board of directors is **Aug. 8 at 8:30 AM at 55 International** Dr., Pease, according to the PDA web site. Their office is on the right, just before the big intersection.

For further information and how you can oppose this plan, please contact:

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