

Your support has made a difference!

At the September 12, 2024 Board meeting, Pease Development Authority (PDA)* withdrew its recent proposal to build a retail strip mall in the parking lot of Rye Harbor. In order to avoid forfeiting the federal COVID-19 relief funds, the PDA is requesting that the Executive Council approve the transfer of funds to the Port of Portsmouth building project.

PDA stated they would initiate a transparent, public effort (including Rye Harbor users) as part of an expedited master planning study for Rye Harbor usage. This means they are not done with proposals for building retail businesses at the harbor. It is clear that PDA wants to generate more revenue at Rye and other harbors and ports.

At the meeting, a PDA Board member repeatedly asked those speaking in the Public Comment section: Do you support other businesses at the harbor? This is a question without a simple yes or no answer. The State of New Hampshire RSAs state that Rye Harbor is first and foremost a marine facility for commercial and recreational activities, and serves as a safe harbor for the Isles of Shoals. The harbor is not designated for non-marine related retail purposes.

One of the speakers at the meeting was financial expert Beth Tuttle, who, with her husband, owns one of the shack businesses. She documented misinformation circulated by the PDA Board concerning the Rye Harbor budget, fee structure and expenses as well as detailing what is known and not known about the economics of the harbor.

Any community located on the water with its ports and harbors is a very desirable place to live. Residents of those communities can find that the things they love best are targeted by those in positions of power looking to profit. This leads to gentrification, higher prices and the loss of public access to the water. It's obvious that PDA would like all Ports and Harbors in NH to maximize profits.

As reported by French explorer Champlain in 1606, over 200 native peoples were settled around Rye Harbor and soon thereafter European settlers came to Rye and continued the use of the harbor, first dredging it in the 1790s. The harbor is about 36 acres at high tide and the stone jetties were built in 1940 with a passageway between them of 344 feet.

Rye Harbor is and has always been a small working harbor. Commercial and recreational boats are stored in the parking lot next to Ocean Blvd. Fishermen store their gear on the commercial side of the harbor. The harbor is full with 161 moorings, including Near Shore ones, for a mix of boat types. 60 of those moorings are for commercial fishing. Some consider this to be an eyesore. Most believe Rye Harbor is one of the most picturesque harbors on the Atlantic coast.

While this meeting has slowed down the process, it is critical that we stay engaged throughout this newly announced master planning phase, to preserve the harbor that we love.

Additional reporting on the meeting can be found at the link below: www.nhpr.org/nh-news/2024-09-12/rye-harbor-project-stalled-as-officials-pledge-to-gather-more-public-input

For those wishing to view a recording of the September 12th PDA Board Meeting click here: https://townhallstreams.com/stream.php?location_id=63&id=62168

*The Pease Development Authority (PDA) was created in 1991 to oversee the transition of Pease Air Force Base to civilian use.

In 2001, The State of NH took the management of its ports and harbors away from the Department of Resources and Economic Development (DRED) and gave it to PDA, a state recognized entity. That year a Department of Ports and Harbors was established within PDA and the Port Authority was renamed to 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 led to the recently withdrawn proposal for a strip mall 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.

We welcome your questions and comments. Please send to: saveryeharbormarinefacility@gmail.com

The Committee to Save Rye Harbor Marine Facility (CSRHMF)