Department of Public Works

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Date: October 22, 2026
To: Rye Select Board
From: Jason Rucker
Re: FY2027 Budget Request – Establishment of Deputy Director of Public Works Position

The Department of Public Works respectfully requests the Select Board's support for establishing a Deputy Director of Public Works position as part of the FY2027 municipal budget.

The Department's operational, administrative, financial, and regulatory responsibilities have expanded significantly, while its management structure has remained largely unchanged. The Department currently relies upon a single management position to oversee essential municipal services, personnel administration, infrastructure investments, regulatory compliance, and emergency response.

This request is intended to address an organizational deficiency, improve management accountability, establish continuity of leadership, and protect the Town's substantial investments in public infrastructure.

Scope of Departmental Responsibilities

The Public Works Department operates with 10 full-time and four part-time employees and an annual departmental budget of approximately $2.9 million. Its responsibilities include approximately 45 miles of municipal roads, five principal municipal buildings, winter maintenance, drainage and stormwater infrastructure, fleet management, municipal facilities, and Transfer Station operations.

In addition to overseeing daily departmental activities, the Director is responsible for managing numerous complex capital improvement and infrastructure projects.

A few examples are:

- FEMA Disaster Recovery: Administration of federally funded infrastructure projects involving Harbor Road Bridge replacement and scour repairs, Harbor Road Seawall reconstruction, and coastal storm damage restoration. Responsibilities include coordination with engineering consultants and government agencies, project documentation, reimbursement administration, financial oversight, permitting, and compliance with federal funding requirements.
- Washington Road LTAP Project #43735: Management of engineering design, NHDOT coordination, historic preservation consultation, public engagement, project funding, and construction planning.
- Capital Improvement Program: Development and administration of roadway paving, drainage improvements, fleet replacement, municipal building rehabilitation, procurement, and long-term infrastructure planning.

- NHDOT Infrastructure Improvement Projects: Ocean Boulevard Route 1A Revetment Replacement and Ocean Boulevard Route 1A Culvert Replacement. Responsibilities include coordination with engineering consultants and government agencies, project documentation and municipal coordination.
- Personnel and Regulatory Administration: Recruitment, employee supervision, disciplinary proceedings, labor agreement obligations, contract administration, budget development, and federally mandated MS4 stormwater compliance.

These responsibilities require consistent administrative attention, technical coordination, financial management, and timely decision-making.

Absence of Engineering and Human Resources Support

An important consideration is that the Town of Rye has neither a dedicated municipal Engineering Department nor dedicated Human Resources staff. Consequently, the Public Works Director assumes substantial responsibilities that, in larger municipal organizations, may be distributed among engineering, project management, and human resources professionals.

Although the Town retains outside engineering consultants, those consultants do not replace the Town's obligation to manage contracts, coordinate project development, evaluate recommendations, monitor expenditures, oversee construction activities, and ensure that municipal interests are protected.

Similarly, recruitment, employee relations, performance management, disciplinary matters, and collective bargaining responsibilities require considerable management attention without dedicated municipal HR support.

The combination of these functions places significant demands on a single management position and limits the time available for direct field oversight, employee development, and proactive infrastructure management.

Management Continuity and Operational Vulnerability

The Department currently has no formally designated second-in-command with the authority and capacity to assume department-wide management responsibilities during the Director's absence.

While the Highway Foreman provides essential supervision of highway operations, that position is already fully committed to daily field activities, equipment deployment, roadway maintenance, and winter operations. Assigning additional department-wide financial, administrative, personnel, and regulatory responsibilities would detract from these essential functions.

The Director routinely works 51–60 hours per week, with administrative obligations, engineering coordination, personnel matters, and project management requiring daily attention. Competing responsibilities have contributed to administrative and project delays and additional weekend workloads.

Furthermore, Public Works provides essential emergency services throughout the year. The Director maintains 24-hour availability to coordinate coastal storm response, flooding, roadway emergencies, and infrastructure failures, including during evenings, weekends, holidays, and periods of leave.

Reliance upon a single management position creates unnecessary vulnerabilities in departmental oversight, emergency coordination, financial administration, and continuity of essential municipal services.

Organizational Consistency and Succession Planning

The Town has recognized the importance of management continuity and delegated leadership through deputy-level or equivalent positions within Recreation, Fire, Police, Code Enforcement, and the Town Clerk's Office.

However, the Public Works Department, despite its broad operational responsibilities, significant infrastructure investments, regulatory obligations, and emergency response requirements, operates without comparable department-wide management support.

The proposed Deputy Director would establish a defined chain of command, provide qualified leadership during the Director's absence, preserve institutional knowledge, and strengthen long-term succession planning.

This request is not based solely upon the organizational structure of other departments, but upon the demonstrated need for management capacity appropriate to the responsibilities and operational demands of Public Works.

Proposed Deputy Director Responsibilities

The Deputy Director would provide management-level support across departmental operations and administration. Responsibilities would include:

- Coordinating daily operations and providing departmental leadership during the Director's absence.
- Supervising delegated personnel functions, including recruitment, performance management, and employee development.
- Managing assigned capital improvement projects, engineering consultants, contractors, and construction activities.
- Assisting with FEMA project administration, financial documentation, procurement, and regulatory compliance.
- Supporting budget development, expenditure monitoring, capital planning, and emergency response coordination.

The position would be filled through an open competitive recruitment process to ensure candidates possess appropriate public works, infrastructure management, and supervisory qualifications.

Financial Considerations and Recommendation

The Department recognizes that establishing an additional full-time management position represents a financial commitment and that municipal resources must be allocated responsibly.

However, the financial evaluation should consider more than salary and benefits. The Town has substantial investments in infrastructure, equipment, municipal facilities, and federally funded capital projects. Effective oversight of these resources requires adequate management capacity to maintain schedules, monitor expenditures, satisfy regulatory obligations, and protect public funding.

The absence of qualified management redundancy creates risks involving project delays, administrative deficiencies, missed funding opportunities, and disruptions to essential services. While these risks cannot presently be assigned a specific dollar value, they are legitimate considerations in evaluating the Department's organizational needs.

Establishing a Deputy Director is not simply an increase in departmental staffing. It is an investment in management accountability, operational continuity, succession planning, and responsible stewardship of municipal resources.

The Department respectfully requests the Select Board's support for establishing a Deputy Director of Public Works position in FY2027, subject to development and review of an appropriate job description and compensation proposal.