

**TOWN OF RYE SELECT BOARD
MEETING**

**Monday, March 11, 2024, 5:30 p.m.
Rye Town Hall & via Zoom**

Select Board Present: Chair Tom King, Vice-Chair Bill Epperson, and Selectman Bob McGrath

Others Present: Town Administrator Matt Scruton and Asst. Town Administrator/Finance Director Becky Bergeron

I. CALL TO ORDER

Chair King called the meeting to order at 5:38 p.m.

**II. NON-PUBLIC SESSION (1) per RSA 91-A:3, II (c) Reputation
(2) per RSA 91-A:3, II (l) Legal Advice**

At 5:38 p.m., Tom King made a motion to go into Non-Public Session per RSA 91-A:3 II (l) Legal Advice. Seconded by Bob McGrath. Roll Call: Epperson – Yes, McGrath - Yes, King - Yes.

At 6:32 p.m., Tom King made a motion to come out of Non-Public Session. Seconded by Bill Epperson. Roll Call: Epperson – Yes, McGrath – Yes, King - Yes.

Motion by Tom King to seal the minutes of the non-public session just held. Seconded by Bill Epperson. All in favor

6:30 p.m. RECONVENE PUBLIC MEETING

III. CALL TO ORDER AND PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

Chair King reconvened the public meeting at 6:37 p.m. and led the Pledge of Allegiance.

IV. ANNOUNCEMENTS

- A.** The Town Municipal Election will be held Tuesday, March 12, 2024, 8:00a.m. – 7:00p.m., at the Rye Elementary School
- B.** The Easter Egg Dig (hunt) will be held at Wallis Sands State Beach on March 23rd at 9:30 a.m.
- C.** A trip to Switzerland, Austria and Bavaria scheduled for November is being offered through the Recreation Department. More information may be found on the Rye Recreation website.

- D. Chair King acknowledged Moderator Robert Eaton’s sixteen years of service to the Town. Moderator Eaton will be retiring from the moderator position and the Town Election will be his last official day of duty.

Select Board Statement:

While we acknowledged Town Moderator Bob Eaton last month during our Deliberative Session, tonight seems like the right moment to once again express our deep gratitude since we are on the eve of another town election. Since 2008, Bob has navigated countless elections and challenges with unwavering dedication. He’s overseen critical town matters and been a leader in helping us navigate through complex election laws and other matters. Navigating the complexities of parliamentary procedures, local traditions, and the ever-evolving legislation is no small feat; yet, he has done so with grace and expertise. Bob’s ability to maintain order, facilitate discussions, and uphold the democratic process has been invaluable. His commitment to fairness, embodied by his opening statement at every session, has earned him praise from residents and officials alike. His respect for the process for the people has helped foster a healthy civic environment in Rye.

As Bob retires, his absence will be deeply felt. His many years of service to the people of Rye have set a remarkable example for our town. His contributions have made a lasting impact and we are fortunate he has been here for us in this crucial role.

Bob, we owe you a tremendous debt of gratitude and thank you again for your service to our community as town moderator.

- V. **PUBLIC COMMENT** – (at the beginning of the meeting, for any comment by any Rye resident on any topic. Requested time limit, up to 5 minutes each person.)
- **Alex Herlihy, 55 Lang Road**, spoke in regard to the town manager form of government versus town administrator. He encouraged people who have a complaint about something that is happening in town to get on the Select Board agenda to discuss it with them, instead of just putting it out on social media. He also encouraged residents to get involved by volunteering on town boards and committees.
 - **Suzanne Barton, Clark Road**, spoke to the Select Board about the water quality testing done by the Surfrider Foundation, which is currently being done at Sawyers Beach and Jeness State Beach. The Beach Committee is hoping to include testing for the Pirates Cove area. She spoke about the need for volunteers and donations to help with performing those tests. She presented the Select Board with information about the importance of water quality testing for everyone’s health and safety.
 - **Joe Cummins, 990 Washington Road**, spoke about the special warrant articles being presented at the Town Election. He made comment about the Budget Committee

meetings and public comments not being allowed. He also spoke about having public tennis courts in the community.

- **Police Chief Kevin Walsh** gave a brief update on the preparations the Department made in anticipation of the most recent storm event and the resources that were shared with other local departments.
- **Hugh Lee, 220 Pioneer Road**, spoke in regard to the possible impact the 2024 town budget will have on the tax rate.
- **Finance Director Becky Bergeron** made a statement in regard to the media attention that has been given to the 15% increase in taxes. She noted that 72% of the overall tax rate is not in control of the municipality. That means that only 28% of the total tax rate applies to the municipality to provide funding for items; such as, infrastructure, public safety, and administrative services. In looking at the comparatives from 2022 to 2023, the majority of the 15% increase does not come from the municipality:
 - State Education – 2022: \$1.04 – 2023: \$1.41 = 36% increase
 - Local Education – 2022: \$3.20 – 2023: \$3.66 = 14% increase
 - County taxes – 2022: .67 – 2023: .70 = 4% increase
 - Municipal – 2022: \$2.07 – 2023: \$2.26 = 9% increaseTherefore, out of the 15% tax increase for 2023, 82% is not related to municipal spending. More importantly, it was a significant increase, but Rye still maintains one of the lowest tax rates in the State.

- **Town Administrator Matt Scruton** concurred with Finance Director Bergeron's statement. He thanked the Select Board and the Budget Committee for working with the department heads to thoroughly analyze the needs of the Town in crafting the budget, as well as taking into consideration the tax implications. He encouraged residents to look at the work that was done in preparing the budget by reviewing the meeting minutes of the budget hearings or by viewing the livestreaming of those meetings. He thinks this will help the voters to make an informed decision when going to town vote.
- **Steven Borne, 431 Wallis Road**, spoke in support of the Budget Committee. He also spoke about developing a better process for providing information to the community in a way that is accessible and easy to understand. Mr. Borne noted that in looking at the tax rate, residents really need to look at the services that are expected and being provided by the Town. He encouraged the Select Board to consider moving the funds from the warrant article dissolving the Parsonage Fund to the Library, if it passes by the voters.

VI. AGENDA ITEMS

- A. **Parsons Field Application:** Jeff Tenley for Ignite Ministries requests permission to use Parsons Field from 6/26/24 – 7/3/24, 3:30 – 9:00 p.m. for a Community Outreach event

Jeff Tenly, representing Ignite Ministries, met with the Select Board to discuss his request to use Parsons Field for a Community Outreach event. This would be a four day community event which is being organized by a group of churches. The event is entirely free to the community and starts off with a children's carnival. Non-profit family assisted type organizations will be present. The local fire and police department have been asked to be present and display their equipment. There will be several family events that will take place over the four days. The intent is to provide the community with a free and safe event for all families.

There was discussion about the details of the event. The Select Board agreed that the requested dates would not work, as the July Fourth Celebration takes place during that timeframe, and it would also overburden the Town's resources.

Motion by Bob McGrath to not recommend approval of the Parsons Field application due to a conflict with fireworks preparation and fireworks display being planned by Recreation during this time period, as well as the Town's seasonal challenges. Seconded by Bill Epperson. All in favor.

B. Congressionally Directed Spending (CDS) Requests and Community Project Funding

Town Administrator Scruton recommended that the Select Board consider applying for CDS and Community Project Funds to help with the funding of the DPW fueling station, which is used for municipal vehicles. The deadlines for both applications are due in March.

The Select Board agreed that Town Administrator Scruton should submit the fuel station project to both entities. There was some discussion about the possibility of submitting a request for the Route 1 sewer line.

Motion by Tom King to authorize the Town Administrator to submit funding requests to the Congressionally Directed Spending Request and/or the Community Project Funding Request for a fuel island, location to be determined. If there is time to complete an additional application, the Board further authorizes the Town Administrator to submit a request for funding for the sewer lines along Route 1. Seconded by Bill Epperson. All in favor.

C. Public Works Director Jason Rucker – DPW Update

DPW Director Jason Rucker thanked the department heads and town administration for their response during the most recent storm event. He also thanked the DPW crew for their corporation, and hard work during the storm event. Director Rucker went on to give an update and status report on the scheduled maintenance and work of the Public Works Department over the next few weeks.

D. Eastern Half Marathon – event permit application

Police Chief Kevin Walsh noted that the Select Board has previously approved the event application for the Eastern Running Event which is scheduled for March 17th. He reviewed the organization’s request to change the running route.

The Select Board agreed with the request with Chief Walsh’s oversight.

VII. CORRESPONDENCE

A. Letter rec’d from Firefighter John Cots re: his retirement from the Fire Department

Fire Chief Mark Cotreau spoke about Firefighter John Cots who has served as a firefighter for over thirty four years, with twenty of those years being in Rye. Firefighter Cots is well-known throughout the State and surrounding communities for his service. His wealth of institutional knowledge has been invaluable to the Department. Firefighter Cots’ first day off the books will be April 1st. Chief Cotreau wished Firefighter Cots a happy and healthy retirement.

Motion by Bill Epperson to accept Firefighter John Cots’ retirement notice from the Fire Department and to thank him for his service to Rye. His last shift in fulltime employment will be March 26, 2024. Seconded by Bob McGrath. All in favor.

VIII. NEW BUSINESS

None

IX. OLD BUSINESS

- Chair King noted that NH DES does water quality testing at the beaches in Rye during the summer months. The Surfrider Foundation offered to draw samples at some of the Town’s beaches during the shoulder season. Surfrider will cover the cost of some of the samples and their volunteers transport the samples to the lab. The Beach Committee has been discussing the idea of doing additional testing. Chair King pointed out that during the budget season, funds were added to the budget for town funded additional testing. The Town now has to find people to take the samples and transport them to the lab. The Beach Committee is going to attempt to find volunteers who would like to be trained on how to take the samples and then transport them to Jackson Lab. The intent is to give an idea of the water conditions year-round.

X. OTHER BUSINESS

A. Meeting Minutes

1. **Meeting, Sunday, February 3, 2024, 5:08 p.m., Rye Jr. High School**

Motion by Tom King to approve the minutes of February 3, 2024 as written. Seconded by Bill Epperson. All in favor.

- Vice-Chair Epperson thanked Bob McGrath for updating the photos in the Town Hall building and Town Hall Annex.

At 8:20 p.m., the Select Board recessed the public meeting to go back into non-public session.

At 8:23 p.m., Tom King made a motion to go into Non-Public Session per RSA 91-A:3 II (c) Reputation. Seconded by Bill Epperson. Roll Call: Epperson – Yes, McGrath - Yes, King - Yes.

At 8:31 p.m., Tom King made a motion to come out of Non-Public Session. Seconded by Bob McGrath. Roll Call: Epperson – Yes, McGrath – Yes, King - Yes.

Motion by Tom King to seal the minutes of the non-public session just held. Seconded by Bill Epperson. All in favor

ADJOURNMENT

Motion by Tom King to adjourn at 8:32 p.m. Seconded by Bill Epperson. All in favor.

Respectfully Submitted,
Dyana F Ledger