

TOWN OF RYE

TOWN HALL SPACES NEEDS COMMITTEE

MEETING July 25, 2012

Selectwoman Priscilla Jenness called the meeting to order at 6:00 p.m. and requested all to stand for the Pledge of Allegiance. She expressed the Selectmen's delight that so many members of the committee not only accepted the call to serve, but accepted with enthusiasm. This made them happy because the task will be daunting at times. She proceeded to introduce the members of the committee: Priscilla Jenness, Chairman of the Board of Selectmen; Mike Magnant, Town Administrator; Cyndi Gillespie, Finance Director and Assistant Town Administrator; Dennis McCarthy, Public Works Director; Beth Yeaton, Town Clerk/Tax Collector, employee representative; Mel Lowe, Planning Board member; Gregg Mikolaities, engineer and member of the original Space Needs Committee; Paula Merritt, Historic District Commission member; Curtis Boivin, architect and Planning Board Member; Ned Paul, Budget Committee Member; Phil Winslow, Chairman of the Historic District Commission; Peter White, member of the Heritage Commission; Tom McCormick, Planning Board member; Paul Goldman, Chairman of the Budget Committee and Peter Kasnet, Sewer Commissioner. The Selectmen had invited several others to join. Lucy Neiman was still considering becoming a member depending on what would be asked of her. Martin Klenke and Keriann Roman said they would like to be kept up to date but would be unable to serve as members at this time.

Mrs. Jenness explained this was a Selectmen's committee and the members would be electing their own officers. This will be done later in the evening. There will be no alternate members to this committee and no subcommittees will be allowed. This committee will dissolve in March after the Town Election. Any vote taken by the committee will be by Rye residents serving on the committee. Non-resident members, Mike Magnant, Cyndi Gillespie and Dennis McCarthy serve in an advisory and informational capacity. She read the Charge to Members included in each member's binder. She also read Article 27 from the 2012 Town Deliberative Session. She passed out a report of the 12 Town owned properties with buildings and a bit of each parcel's history and possible use as space to conduct Town business.

Of major importance is the question of saving the curved staircases at the front of Town Hall and the Great Hall or continue using those spaces for offices. The body split up into two groups to tour Town Hall. Mike Magnant led the tour of the upstairs while Beth Yeaton conducted the tour of the downstairs. Upon completion of the tours of Town Hall the meeting was moved to the Public Safety Building. Selectwoman Jenness asked members and spectators to park in the rear of the building because if offices were put in over the apparatus bays, the rear would be the entrance for the public. The front would remain for fire and police business.

Fire Chief Skip Sullivan led the group on a tour of the upper level of the apparatus bay at the Public Safety Building. Discussion ensued regarding many issues to be considered to convert the space for offices and the costs associated with doing so. Some of these issues were adding dormers for space and natural light, heating and cooling, septic system upgrades, elevator access to the upper level, weight concerns and noise abatement. Some expressed concern about public access in and out of the driveway when emergency vehicles are leaving the building.

Both members and spectators were ushered to the Emergency Management meeting room in the basement to continue the meeting. Nominations for Chairman, Vice-Chairman and Clerk were called for. Ned Paul was nominated for chairman by Paul Goldman, seconded by Mel Low. All voted in the affirmative. Greg Mikolaities was nominated by Beth Yeaton for vice-chairman. He stated that his wife would strongly object and he would prefer someone else serve in that capacity. Paula Merritt nominated Curtis Boivin for vice-chairman. The motion was seconded by Tom McCormick. All voted their approval. Beth Yeaton was nominated as clerk and was approved.

Chairman Paul stated that, due the limited time available for the committee to come up with a final recommendation, he would like to establish a time line for the project. Beth Yeaton suggested waiting until the next meeting when members would have a clearer picture of the task before them.

Peter White asked if all the reports and studies in the member packets have been tested and are accurate. Gregg Mikolaities, who served on the previous committee, said all the reports and studies seemed fine. The problem came when the architectural rendering was done and the public thought it was the actual plan being proposed. In his mind it was too soon for those types of drawings and it was not part of the previous committee's charge.

Mike Magnant stated most of the studies were done at the request of the Selectmen.

Curtis Boivin noted, after reading the structural analysis, the building seems to be OK structurally.

Paul Goldman said the committee needs a clear picture of what they should be doing.

Ned Paul felt they should build upon what's already been done and move toward a new solution.

Curtis Boivin stated some needs are immediate such as ADA compliance. They need to determine the difference between wants and needs.

Ned Paul asked each committee member to bring to the next meeting their 5 key issues and their vision for the final recommendation.

Lucy Neiman asked Priscilla Jenness "What do the Selectmen expect?" She replied the committee needs to have a viable plan in place by November 1st so that a warrant article can be properly written to go before the townspeople.

Phil Winslow said the committee should look at several alternatives with cost associated with each one. He feels one location versus multiple locations for Town business should be studied.

Upon being queried about any money left over from last year's budget or excess in this year's budget to perhaps begin some of the more immediate projects at Town Hall, Cyndi Gillespie replied there was no money available.

Beth Yeaton asked Mel Low, who served on the previous committee, if those meeting were open and did the public attend them. He replied the meetings were open and no public ever attended them.

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Beth then addressed the audience and urged them, for the sake of transparency, to continue coming to the meetings. That way the public will have a chance to observe the deliberations, hear what subjects are discussed and understand how the committee gets to their final recommendation.

Curtis Boivin asked how often the group should meet; it would seem once a month would not be enough. Beth Yeaton suggested once every two weeks would be better. She expressed she has no expectation of a quick change. She sees a warrant article to further the project being presented next year and another one in 2014 to vote on a bond issue to go forward on construction. As she plans to retire perhaps in 2016, she doesn't expect to work in the "building" or whatever else is decided on. Phil Winslow stated the committee should make their vision known to the public as early as possible and get people involved in the plans. He also feels strongly that we look at projections for the future needs of the Town.

Paula Merritt said the final solution is going to be reached by the process of elimination. The committee needs to decide first about the use of the Public Safety Building's loft before looking at alternatives. Mel Low said the previous committee had already ruled out the use of the old Police Station.

When questioned when the next meeting should be held, Ned Paul suggested Wed. August 8th at 6:30 p.m. at Town Hall. Since this would work for most members, it was scheduled.

Public input was allowed at the end of the meeting. Chairman Paul asked for statements to be brief.

Peter Crawford began, stating he was pleased the charge to the committee seemed reasonable. It is important to keep Article 27 in mind, look at space per employee at other town halls and look at other locations.

Mae Bradshaw, who is chairman of the Heritage Commission, spoke to the fact that Town Hall is being put on the State's Registry of Historical Places. Once this happens, they will have access to studies which could help answer some of these questions. Beth Yeaton said she will make contact with other towns of similar size to Rye and inquire how many square feet are in their town halls and how many employees work in their building.

Steve Borne feels it's important that options be presented to the public. Burt Dibble wants the committee to focus on the historical aspects of the Great Hall. He also feels it is vital to increase awareness and visibility about the total project. Mae Bradshaw suggested a business plan for the Great Hall to perhaps generate revenue by renting out the space for presentations, social events and even weddings.

Martin Klenke asked why the Public Safety Building is not accessible to the public. Public Works Director Dennis McCarthy replied that ever since 9/11 security had gotten much tighter across the country. He has seen this tighter security in many Police and Fire Stations across the state.

Jo Ann Price stressed the need to get information out to the public by any means possible including television, internet and e-mails. She also suggested placing a copy of the committee member packets at the Library to get the info available. Steve Borne said the Civic League would help with publicity on their website. There will be a link to the Town's website where Beth Yeaton will post the minutes of the meetings. Victor Azzi questioned if the packets are available electronically. Cyndi Gillespie replied that they could be made available electronically.

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The meeting was adjourned at 8:47 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,
Elizabeth M. Yeaton