

THE MASTER PLAN FOR THE TOWN OF RYE, NEW HAMPSHIRE

RYE 2035

PLANNING TODAY FOR
TOMORROW'S FUTURE

DRAFT

Adopted by the
Rye Planning Board
_____, 2025

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Note: The Rye Beach Village Precinct within Rye has its own land use and zoning policies. While an important part of Rye, the Precinct operates quasi-independently and has its own Master Plan that guides future land use and growth. Some municipal services are shared between the town and the Precinct such as Fire and Police. However, Rye 2035 largely focuses on the areas of town outside the Precinct.



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Rye 2035 Master Plan

Rye 2035 was created through the efforts of many Rye residents, stakeholders, and others over several years. Our community helped shape the direction of the Master Plan and we are grateful for their input and participation. We are especially grateful for the efforts of the following:

- ▶ The Master Planning Steering Committee (MPSC): Ann Fox, Kathryn Garcia, Howie Lazerowich, Patricia Losik, Joe Leverone, Gregg Mikolaities, Peter Moynahan (Chair), Rob Patten, Joe Persechino, Danna Truslow, Rob Wright (Former Chair)
- ▶ Kimberly Reed, CFM, Planning and Zoning Administrator; Kara Campbell, AICP, Land Use Assistant
- ▶ Liz Kelly, Steve Whitman, and Crystal Kidd of Resilience Planning and Design; Christine Bunyon and Julia Maine of FB Environmental; Jenn Rowden and Madeleine Dilonno of Rockingham Planning Commission
- ▶ Matt Scruton, Rye Town Administrator and Town Department Heads
- ▶ Participants in all Rye 2035 Community Outreach activities and MPSC meeting attendees who provided the community input from which this plan was created.
- ▶ The Rye Planning Board (2024 Members), Patricia Losik, JM Lord, William Epperson, William MacLeod, Kevin Brandon, Steven Borne, Peter Moynahan, Don Cavallaro, Robert Eberhart, John Shaw

Introduction

RYE 2035 is the result of a community-wide planning initiative that took more than two years to complete. The intent of this effort was to understand the town as it exists today, to learn more about residents' desires, and to work together to plan for Rye's future. The resulting Master Plan provides a way for Rye to guide physical and community change over time, and serves as Rye's long-range visionary planning document for the next decade. Rye 2035 will be used to guide decision-making related to how the community will steward its natural resources and built environment now, and in the future.



Rye 2035 will serve as a “road map” for fostering a desirable, inclusive, and resilient place to live, work, and visit. Rye’s vision for the future was informed by robust public outreach and community engagement over several years. The vision is written as a broad, aspirational statement to help readers envision what Rye will be like in 2035. The vision and the actions identified in the implementation section provide the road map for creating a future our community wants to experience. Implementing Rye 2035 through the collaborative efforts of residents, property owners, municipal volunteers, and other partners will bring the Plan to life over the coming decade.

Over time, Rye 2035 will have a positive impact on residents, the local economy and local businesses, community character and vibrancy, the quality of the transportation system, the diversity of housing opportunities, the quality and longevity of public facilities and services, and Rye’s overall resilience.

Rye’s vision for the next 10+ years is to:

Strive towards becoming a resilient and sustainable community while fostering community connections, supporting diverse housing choices, strengthening our local economy, providing equitable services, protecting the environment and natural resources, and maintaining a semi-rural character.





WHAT IS A MASTER PLAN?

New Hampshire law requires municipalities to adopt a master plan in order to regulate land use and development through the adoption of local ordinances. NH statute RSA 674 charges municipal Planning Boards with updating their Master Plan “from time to time” with updates recommended every 5-10 years.

The previous Rye Master Plan was updated in sections, and some chapters have not been updated since 2013. Others have been updated more recently. Rye 2035 is the first comprehensive re-write of the Master Plan in many years.

A Master Plan serves many functions including the following:

- ▶ A policy document necessary to support municipal decision making, investments, zoning ordinances, land use regulations and resource protection.

- ▶ A forward looking and aspirational vision of the land use pattern and how the town can improve its operations, management, services and respond to the needs of the community efficiently and effectively.
- ▶ A living document that can respond to changing conditions, emerging challenges, and address community and environmental priorities.
- ▶ A tool to advance support from federal, state, and regional agencies for grants and funding opportunities for capital improvements, resource protection, and protection against coastal hazards.
- ▶ A guide to serve as the basis for capital improvement planning, and a legally defensible foundation for community actions, new or amended policies, and regulatory changes.

Since Rye 2035 is a long-range planning document, tracking and communicating the status of its implementation to the public at regular intervals is important. Making such a commitment will enable Rye 2035 to inform land use regulations and other policy decisions, infrastructure investments, and other initiatives in Rye more effectively. Rye 2035 also sets the stage for more detailed capital planning, area planning, strategic conservation, and policy planning that will be focused on during implementation.

OUR PLANNING PROCESS

Rye 2035 was developed during a multi-year planning process. The major phases of this work included:

- ▶ **VISIONING** - In 2021, the Planning Board (PB) appointed a Long Range Planning Sub-Committee (LRPC) to explore the idea of a comprehensive Master Plan Update through the lens of a “visioning” framework.

During 2021, extensive municipal and community outreach was conducted through several surveys, a public workshop, and via email, all the while being diligent to protect public health and safety during COVID. The town's Planning webpage and newsletters, Rye Civic League news, Planning Board and LRPC minutes, and Rye Magazine consistently informed Rye residents. From this process, a draft vision framework was developed. By January 2022, the LRPC voted unanimously on a strategy to undertake a comprehensive update of the town's Master Plan focused on a draft Vision Statement, and organizationally aligned with a themed based approach.

► **MASTER PLAN STEERING COMMITTEE** - In 2022, a Master Plan Steering Committee was formed to guide and inform this master planning process in Rye. The Committee included representatives from the Planning Board and other town boards and committees. The Committee's work was supported by town planning staff and consultants, and together they formed a project team.

► **EXISTING CONDITIONS ANALYSIS** - Informed by this earlier work, in 2023 the project team completed an analysis of the community's many land uses, natural and cultural resources, housing, and infrastructure, to better understand the current conditions in Rye. A variety of topics, existing data, observable trends, and specific issues were identified and explored during the analysis. These findings provided a foundation for the creation of Rye 2035 to ensure a data-driven plan. The appendices include the full "Existing Conditions Analysis"

report, which provides a deeper understanding of Rye today and the emerging trends and issues likely to impact the future.

► **OUTREACH AND ENGAGEMENT** - In 2023 and 2024, the Master Plan Steering Committee coordinated a variety of outreach activities to raise awareness about this planning process and to collect feedback and direction from the public. The goal was to provide as many opportunities as possible for the public to participate in the ways that they were most comfortable with. Participation opportunities were held at different times of year and times of day to attract different demographics. The public feedback provided remains the backbone of Rye 2035. The Outreach and Engagement Report is included in the Appendix and summarizes all community input collected during the planning process. It provides a compilation of all public comments submitted for each outreach activity.

► **RYE 2035 PREPARATION** - The final phase of this project included refining the vision based on all that had been learned, developing a future land use strategy, and drafting implementation actions. The Master Plan was then written, formatted, and presented to the public in early 2025 for additional feedback and refining prior to adoption by the Planning Board.

CORRESPONDING INITIATIVES

RYE HOUSING ANALYSIS

As the Town began work on the Rye 2035 Master Plan, a planning initiative focused on Rye's housing needs was also launched. This work was funded by a New Hampshire Housing Opportunity Planning Grant and was completed with assistance from the Rockingham Planning Commission. The scope of this initiative focused on gaining a deeper understanding of the various demands placed on the housing market, and how those demands are impacting the supply and affordability of homes in Rye. The data and findings from the [Housing Needs Analysis](#) informed the creation of Rye 2035.

RYE BUILD-OUT ANALYSIS

In 2023, the Town partnered with FB Environmental to complete a [baseline buildout analysis](#) for the town. The analysis assessed the development potential, and likely development patterns, that will emerge in Rye given the current land use regulations. This resulted in conversations about whether the outcomes aligned with Rye's vision and desired future land use pattern. Two additional build-out scenarios were then completed in 2024 to visualize how changes in Rye's land use regulations could impact the development and land use pattern over time. These scenarios were used to inform the Future Land Use Strategy. and actions identified in Rye 2035.

ENGAGEMENT ACTIVITIES

Over a period of two years, the Town of Rye reached out to the community in a variety of ways to collect feedback virtually, in person, and at public events. This built on the outreach the Long-Range Planning Committee conducted during the visioning phase of Rye 2035.

Getting the Word Out

A project website (Rye Future), fliers, an email sign-up, periodic e-newsletters, and an online feedback form were all used to keep the public informed throughout the planning process. The Rye Future website featured all three of the municipal initiatives taking place in 2023 and 2024 (Housing Analysis, Build-Out Analysis, and Master Plan) and received a total of 2,285 visits. Regular announcements on the status of the project were provided to all municipal staff, boards, and committees.

The Town of Rye Facebook pages, the Rye Police page, the Rye NH Community Forum Page, the Rye Public Library page, and personal Facebook pages were used to promote the project. Rye 2035 t-shirts were made as well as Rye 2035 pens (which were donated) were distributed at local businesses, town facilities, post office, and other locations. A large poster display was set up at the Deliberative Session, and posters were placed at the Town Hall, Library, Town Annex, Public Works Department, Transfer Station, and the Rye Elementary School.

At each monthly Planning Board meeting, the Master Plan Steering Committee chairs provided an

update of the Rye 2035 planning process to the board and public.

Tabling

Committee Members and Town staff helped to get the word out about this community planning effort by tabling at community events, such as the July 4th Celebration, the Rye 400 Celebration, and at the deliberative session. This provided an opportunity to connect with individuals in the community, discuss the project, and collect contact information for future communications.

Emails and Newsletters

A project email subscriber list was created, and the public Town of Rye email subscriber list was used, to get information out to interested residents and property owners. Articles were regularly submitted to the Stroll Newsletter, Rye Civic League News, and the Town Newsletter.

Community Forum Event and Online Tool

An in-person, evening community forum event was hosted at the Rye Junior High School in February of 2024. An online version of the community forum event was also made available for a month during February/March of 2024. 320 responses were collected through these mechanisms. The purpose of these in-person and online alternatives was to share the findings of the Existing Conditions Analysis and to solicit feedback from the public.



How Rye's Planning Efforts Fit Together



IMPLEMENTATION ACTIONS

Rye Today

Rye is one of the few coastal communities in New Hampshire. Its unique seaside and semi-rural character is beloved by the residents of our community. Compared to surrounding towns, Rye has a relatively low density of development, reinforcing its quaint and small-town feel. It has many wonderful natural spaces along the coast and inland, beautiful beaches, historic structures, community organizations, and people that contribute to what makes Rye, Rye.

While these characteristics make our town a desirable place to visit or call home, we are faced with significant constraints and challenges that will require creative and

collaborative solutions in the years ahead.

Over the next decade, Rye will need to act on the following issues:

LIMITED HOUSING DIVERSITY AND SUPPLY

The lack of available and affordable homes is limiting who can live in Rye, impacting our community. This then impacts the composition of the community, the health of the local economy, municipal services, and the quality of life for many residents. An inclusive community has housing options for a variety of people of varying incomes at each stage of their lives. This should include young individuals and families, and also those in need of additional

care or smaller housing units as they age.

BECOMING AN AGING COMMUNITY

The realities of becoming an aging community includes an increasing need for services, new housing options, and transportation solutions.

THE SEASONALITY OF RYE

The seasonality of Rye impacts full-time residents, municipal operations, and the demand for services. Rye's residential and economic seasonality contribute to some of the existing housing challenges and are coupled with the threat of climate change and the related impacts of natural hazards.





NATURAL HAZARDS AND CLIMATE CHANGE

During the 2023/24 winter alone, two significant coastal storms damaged properties and infrastructure in Rye. It has become increasingly apparent to many residents that planning for sea level rise, salt marsh migration, and investments in our community's infrastructure will be necessary to increase the community's resilience.

TRANSPORTATION LIMITATIONS AND CHALLENGES

Like many other communities in the region, Rye also has a very automobile-dominated transportation system, but that is changing. With the completion of the Seacoast Greenway, and increased interest in pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure, residents are envisioning an improved transportation

network that addresses today's deficiencies and better aligns with the community's goals for the future.

BALANCING NATURAL RESOURCE PROTECTION WITH DEVELOPMENT NEEDS

Rye has significant constraints to development. These include inland and coastal wetlands, groundwater rise, conserved properties, a need to protect surface and groundwater resources, a lack of water and sewer infrastructure in many areas, and other features that make development less feasible. Many of these limitations are simultaneously valuable characteristics that give the community its distinct charm and appeal.

This reality, and the need to balance the significant and often conflicting needs of resource protection and future development, have resulted

in a Master Plan that aims to allow for development while minimizing sprawl, and finding an appropriate balance that also contributes to the community's resilience. Looking forward, it is important to remember that Rye does not have the land or financial resources to allow inefficient patterns of development.

Meanwhile, Rye is a wonderful coastal destination and a desirable place to live, work, and play for so many residents and visitors. To build on this strength and address these key issues, the community will need to work together through a transparent and collaborative implementation process. This is the only way to move forward and ensure that future development, investment, and stewardship reinforce the community's identity by making Rye 2035 a reality.

The Burden of High-Amenity Communities

Rye is fortunate to have a coastline that provides numerous beaches, state parks, and other recreational opportunities. This natural landscape and the amenities it provides attract visitors and future residents, and the influx of visitors and new residents brings economic opportunities. However, for many communities like Rye, this pattern often results in some serious drawbacks including increased pressure on existing infrastructure, growing inequality, and dramatic increases in housing costs that force long-time residents out. Fiscal health, public discourse, and community well-being all can suffer because of these challenges.

In May 2023, an important report titled “Amenity Trap” was released by Headwaters Economics, and it speaks to Rye’s experience as a destination community. To address these challenges the report suggests the following:

HOUSING: For Rye, the most promising solutions are those that bring together the local economy and housing strategies. Many communities are pursuing both regulations and incentives that can increase the supply of residential housing for those at all income levels by promoting modular



construction techniques, limiting short term rental properties, and addressing local opposition to density.

INFRASTRUCTURE AND PUBLIC SERVICES: Identifying financing mechanisms for Rye that share costs with visitors can also ease the burden on residents. Creative solutions may include tourism taxes, municipal budgeting, financing with bonds, and public-private partnerships.

FISCAL POLICY: Reinvesting tourism-related revenues into programs that offset the negative impacts of tourism and promote economic diversification may also improve Rye’s long-term fiscal health.

NATURAL DISASTERS: Rye should continue to work

to diversify its economy and revenue streams to enable disaster risk-reduction investments. Emphasizing resilience in housing and infrastructure policies will ensure that residents, homes, and businesses can resist and recover from disasters. This can include encouraging durable housing that can survive disasters, innovations that can protect neighborhoods from flooding, and planning that can improve the effectiveness of first responders.

About the [Amenity Traps Report:](#) Headwaters Economics is an independent, nonprofit research group whose mission is to improve community development and land management decisions.

Rye 2035 Framework

The **Rye 2035 vision** is supported by **five themes**, which were selected during the visioning phase of the planning process. These themes were determined from public input collected through the visioning workshop and survey. Each of the themes anchor the document, serving as focus areas for community-wide action. Each themed chapter also features a series of key planning concepts and examples that are intended to be educational, and will help inform the implementation of RYE 2035.



— EACH CHAPTER EXPLORES:

- INVENTORY AND TRENDS
- KEY ISSUES
- COMMUNITY FEEDBACK
- EMERGING PLANNING CONCEPTS
- CASE STUDIES
- FUTURE PRIORITIES

Future Land Use

Rye's Future Land Use Strategy focuses on preserving the town's semi-rural character by minimizing development sprawl and the fragmentation of the remaining undeveloped and unprotected natural areas. To accomplish this, the Future Land Use Strategy recommends that a large portion of the future development activity be clustered on Route 1, a smaller amount be permitted in the Town Center, and that new regulatory strategies be conceived for the distribution of future structures in the remaining residential and coastal areas.

OVERVIEW

Rye's Future Land Use Strategy is intended to be an illustrative companion to the Vision statement, providing a visual overview of how land use change, new development, infrastructure investment, and resource protection will be guided over the next 10 years and beyond. The strategy includes a future land use map that identifies distinct areas throughout town. Through this planning process, future land use characteristics were determined for each area and answers several questions.

- ▶ How will development be guided in each area?
- ▶ What needs to be planned for in the different parts of town?
- ▶ Are there desired changes?
- ▶ Are there qualities that should remain the same?

The Future Land Use Strategy was shaped by significant public input, careful analysis of the existing conditions in the

community, lessons learned from the 2024 Buildout Analysis Report completed by FB Environmental, and the need to accommodate future development and redevelopment activity.

Rye's Future Land Use Strategy aims to balance the resource protection needs of the community with housing, economic, recreation, transportation, coastal resilience, and other needs identified by residents and captured in Rye 2035. It is important to note that Rye's Future Land Use Strategy may take more than a decade to fully implement. To make this strategy a reality, expansion of municipal infrastructure and services must be thoughtfully located, well-constructed and maintained, and collaboratively funded.

Overall, Rye's Future Land Use Strategy:

- ▶ Identifies the function and feel for the different areas in Rye, and their future priorities for planning, zoning, and investment.

- ▶ Creates an environmentally sensitive, fiscally responsible, and efficient land use pattern that the town can support with infrastructure and services.
- ▶ Balances future development opportunities with conservation and coastal resilience needs.
- ▶ Protects water quality and quantity from the negative impacts of development and climate change.
- ▶ Reduces traffic congestion and encourages additional safe modes of travel.
- ▶ Provides a range of housing alternatives for existing and future residents.
- ▶ Contributes to the social fabric and character of the community by providing recreation opportunities, community spaces, trails, and access to nature.

Rye's Vision for the next 10+ years is to:

Strive towards becoming a resilient and sustainable community while fostering community connections, supporting diverse housing choices, strengthening our local economy, providing equitable services, protecting the environment and natural resources, and maintaining a semi-rural character.

FUTURE LAND USE MAP

Town of Rye, New Hampshire

Map created for planning purposes for master plan and build-out analysis development



Data Sources: NH GRANIT, NHD, Town of Rye, NWI+, CAI, RP&D, FBE

Coordinate System: NAD 1983 State Plane New Hampshire FIPS 2800 (US Feet)

Map by: C. Bunyon, FB Environmental, July 2024

Town of Rye

Town Boundary

Rye Village Beach District

Road

Waterbody/Coastal Waters

Tributary

Wetland

Conserved Land

Districts

Neighborhoods

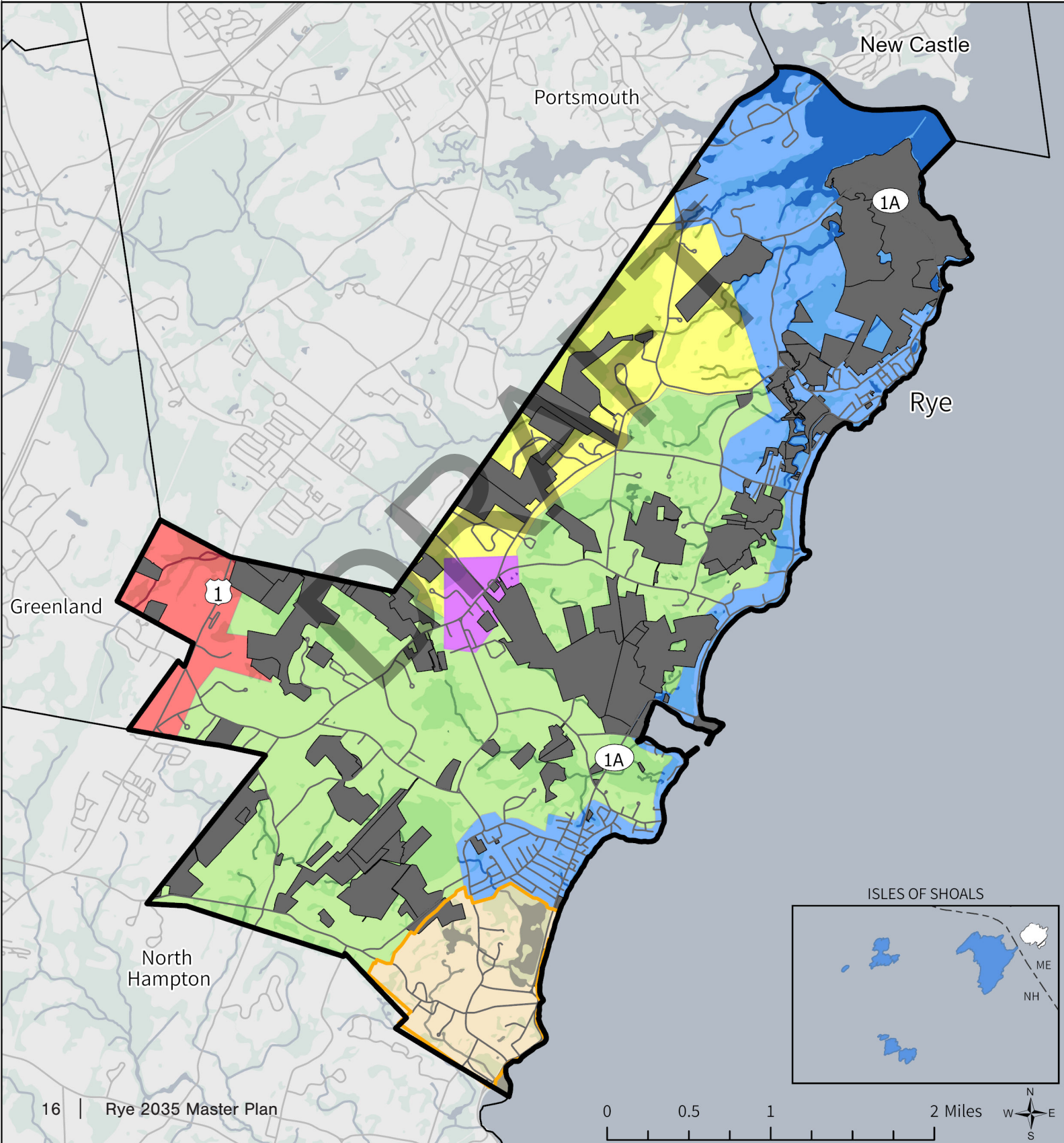
Route 1

Scenic Coastal

Semi-Rural

Town Center

Village Precinct



Future Land Use Areas

TOWN CENTER

The Town Center is a quintessential place in Rye, with significant history and character. There is a strong desire to keep municipal facilities as a core land use in the Town Center. Over time, this will require proactively planning and forecasting the space needs of the departments located here so they can continue to be accommodated in this area of town. The community has also expressed a desire to retain the historic character of this area while accommodating a mix of residential and municipal uses, and providing some targeted opportunities for small-scale business development and redevelopment activity. These land use related goals will require some zoning changes including an increase in allowable density.

It is envisioned that private water and septic systems will continue to be the infrastructure that serves this area. While it is possible that town water and sewer could be considered in this area at some point in the future, that is likely to be many years away. In the near-term, pedestrian and bicycle safety and connectivity infrastructure improvements should continue to be prioritized within this area along with new streetscape amenities, like lamp post lighting, that reinforces the distinct character of the Town Center.

ROUTE 1

Rye has a relatively small amount of land area available for future development. This is due to the pattern of existing development and other natural constraints, such as the presence of wetlands, steep slopes, and others. There is also a need to take development pressure off coastal areas, and the desire to protect natural resource and aquifer protection areas throughout town. This leaves few places for future residential and commercial development. The Route 1 area has been identified as a location that could accommodate a significant portion of the remaining development activity in Rye. To accomplish this, the community needs to present a clear vision and new land use regulations that will allow for new development at a higher density and in a mixed-use pattern rather than a sprawl development pattern. This enables Rye to meet its overall vision for the town.

Infrastructure investments that service the Route 1 area with water and sewer infrastructure provide the greatest potential for a space efficient land use pattern that retains the connectivity of the existing open space network. Pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure improvements should also be a priority to move people safely within the Route 1 area, and from this area to the Seacoast Greenway, Town Center, and beaches. Coordinated natural resource protection should also be a priority consideration, especially the protection and stewardship of Berry's Brook-Rye Harbor drainage area as defined by the US Geological Survey, which supports Rye's aquifer, 11 sub-watershed areas, and direct surface drainage into Little Harbor and Piscataqua River Mouth. Bailey Brook, one of the sub-watershed res, is a primary water supply area.





SCENIC COASTAL AREAS

The character of the many unique coastal areas along Rye’s coastline are defined by their distinct densities, mix of uses, and notable destinations such as Rye Harbor, Jenness State Beach, Wallis Beach, and Odiorne State Park. The priorities for this area all relate to increasing coastal resilience, adaptation, and mitigation efforts. This includes investments in Route 1A infrastructure. This is the portion of the community that is being impacted the most by coastal storm damage and sea level rise. It is also the location of Rye’s many salt marshes that protect inland areas, and these are forecast to migrate inland further over time. To accomplish the stated priorities for Rye’s scenic coastal areas, the community should focus on protecting and stewarding open space resources, retaining coastal access and recreation opportunities, addressing parking related issues, creating multi-modal transportation solutions, and supporting the economic vitality of this area.



SEMI-RURAL

This is the largest future land use area in Rye and it includes a mix of lower-density residential lots, and some large conserved properties with high conservation and recreation value. The Semi-Rural area is envisioned to remain the most rural area of Rye. This area is extremely important for surface water, habitat, wellhead protection, and aquifer protection. There are also concerns related to groundwater rise in Rye and this area covers the largest area of estimated impact. As a result, larger lot sizes and conservation subdivisions that preserve open spaces are considered more appropriate in this area to help protect these resources.

Accessory dwelling units (ADUs) are also envisioned as a lower impact housing strategy for this portion of Rye. One of the challenges is that Washington and Central Road run through the Semi-Rural area, and there is a strong desire to retain the character and view from these roadways as much as possible. For this reason, gentle density solutions have been suggested as a strategy to allow or incentivize the development of additional housing units that blend in well. These approaches provide ways to retain the character, scale, and function of this area while helping meet the community’s goal of providing a range of housing opportunities.



NEIGHBORHOODS

The existing neighborhoods along this linear corridor are defined by a higher density of residential development that is accessed by Wallis Road, Sagamore Road, and the many intersecting local streets. The community has expressed an interest in retaining the residential feel and function of this future land use area as Rye grows. Allowing for some additional residential units within or behind existing structures is envisioned where the land can accommodate this development or redevelopment activity. To accomplish this, the zoning will need to be reviewed and updated accordingly. Improving the transportation options along the roadways in this area, and strengthening the non-vehicular corridor connections to the schools and nearby conservation and recreation lands are also priorities.

Rye's Build-Out Analysis

To inform Rye 2035, a build-out analysis was completed. The timing and scope of this study were unique and are worth noting because they helped refine the future land use strategy and the Rye 2035 implementation actions.

A build-out analysis is a planning tool that identifies areas in a community with development potential. It projects future development based on a set of conditions (e.g., zoning regulations, environmental constraints, etc.) and assumptions (e.g., building footprint dimensions). The results of a build-out analysis can be used for planning purposes to help guide future development activities in the community, anticipate future demands on infrastructure, and identify specific areas for conservation.

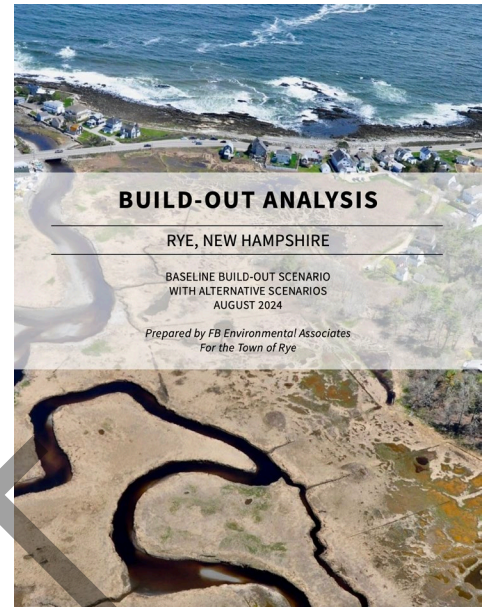
For Rye, a baseline build-out analysis was completed early in the Rye 2035 planning process. It identified that 11% - 14% (959-1,172 acres) of Rye's land area is buildable under current zoning regulations. Under current zoning regulations, it also projected that an additional 410 - 501 buildings could be constructed in the future, and the Single Residence zoning district was identified as the location for many of these new units. Many of the areas identified as accommodating future growth could be considered "backlands." These parcels are not currently accessible to development by existing roads and could only

be developed if a right-of-way or other access road is constructed. However, some of these developable areas also coincide with properties that are important for natural resource protection and salt marsh migration, and may not be places that can accommodate future growth.

Two alternative build-out scenarios were also completed once the Vision and Future Land Use Strategy had taken shape as drafts. This was an effort to better understand how regulation changes that are in line with the Future Land Use Strategy might guide future development activity. Both scenarios included increasing the setbacks from natural resources to provide better resource protection while continuing to accommodate growth at a higher density in targeted areas.

- ▶ The first scenario included moderate development density increases in the Town Center and along Route 1, and assumed that some or all of this development would eventually be served by public water and sewer infrastructure.
- ▶ The second scenario included greater development density in the Town Center and along Route 1, and assumed this development would be served by water and sewer.

Both scenarios indicated that a slightly smaller area of Rye



would be developable with an estimate of 10% - 12%, but that additional units could still be accommodated in all districts.

Ultimately, this build-out analysis for the Town of Rye indicated that due to extensive environmental development constraints (particularly wetlands), conserved land, and existing buildings, the Town of Rye has moderately low buildable area for future development compared to other New Hampshire communities. This further emphasized the need to carefully consider zoning and infrastructure changes that would encourage mixed use development activity in the Town Center, and to a greater degree in a development node on Route 1. It also emphasizes the need to carefully reconsider the zoning in the remaining semi-rural zones for the Rye 2035 Vision to be achievable.

Land and Development

An aerial photograph of a coastal town, likely Rye, showing a mix of residential housing, green spaces, and a beach area. The houses are mostly two-story structures with gabled roofs. There are many trees, particularly in the foreground and middle ground. A large parking lot filled with cars is visible near the beach. The ocean is in the background with waves breaking on the shore. The sky is overcast with grey clouds.

“ Rye needs housing for all income levels.”

– Rye community member during master plan outreach

INTRODUCTION

The Land and Development Chapter examines how future land use planning can address housing challenges, promote desired commercial activity compatible with Rye’s character, and support a people-centered transportation network. These topics are intertwined, and impact the lives of residents and the health of the local economy. Rye’s Future Land Use Strategy seeks to balance protecting the town’s unique character while meeting the evolving development needs of the community. For Rye’s Vision to be attainable, this must occur while also addressing the critical issues Rye faces related to housing, transportation, and the local economy.

The town’s development pattern is a complex network of roadways, homes, and businesses. These land uses are also interwoven with Rye’s rich landscape of natural and cultural resources—farms, forests, wetlands, historic sites, state parks, and beaches. Together, they give the town its distinct charm and appeal. As Rye grows, it aims to preserve this character while addressing emerging demands and issues.

The key challenges that need to be addressed to achieve this desired reality are:

- ▶ A lack of housing diversity, affordability, and availability,
- ▶ The reality of an aging population,
- ▶ Existing and emerging transportation limitations,



- ▶ Climate change and coastal resilience, and
- ▶ Protection of natural resources as development continues.

To address these challenges, the town will need to make thoughtful regulatory and infrastructure changes that promote equity, diversity, and economic vitality. Together, these changes will ensure that Rye’s future land and development decisions will continue to reflect community values, fostering a resilient and thriving environment for all.

DIRECTING OUR EFFORTS

Looking ahead, Rye’s goals for future planning efforts include:

- ▶ Reviewing zoning ordinances and land development regulations, and their enforcement, to minimize negative costs and impacts to the town, its resources, and to property owners.
- ▶ Adopting zoning ordinances and land development regulations that protect the town’s semi-rural character.

“ [There is a] tremendous demand for development, loss of open land, and unaffordable housing that has priced most young families out of Rye.”

– Rye community member during master plan outreach

INVENTORY AND TRENDS

Rye began as a rural farming and fishing community, but over time has transitioned to primarily residential land uses. Approximately 70% of Rye’s land area is accommodating residential uses today. Rye’s residential areas, along with other land

uses, such as municipal and commercial uses, are connected by 64 miles of roadways—municipal, state, and privately owned—primarily designed for motor vehicles. However, residents are expressing a desire for more diverse transportation options beyond just cars.

Twenty-five percent of the town is permanently conserved land. This includes upland areas, forestlands, and some of the documented wetlands. Rye’s wetlands cover 32% of the town and offer important ecological benefits and storm protection along the coast. Protecting the remaining wetlands will both influence and limit future development. However, without coordinated efforts to limit future development in environmentally sensitive areas, Rye risks being less resilient to future natural hazard events.

Rye’s recent Build-Out Analysis Report highlighted that, due to extensive environmental constraints, conserved land, and existing development, Rye has a moderately low amount of buildable land available for future growth. While this may feel like a constraint, it might benefit the town as it will require more creative approaches to development that are sensitive to the character of the community.

Rye is also experiencing housing challenges that are like those of many coastal New Hampshire communities including:

- ▶ A general lack of available housing
- ▶ Limited affordable housing for young families
- ▶ An aging population that has needs for housing alternatives

beyond the single-family home

- ▶ Limited water and sewer infrastructure for future housing development, and
- ▶ Increased demand for secondary homes and short-term rentals.

In August 2024, the median listing home price in Rye was \$1.2 million dollars. This is a \$200k increase over the August 2023 median listing price. This trend of rising housing costs will reduce the diversity of resident ages and incomes over time. If nothing changes, Rye will not be an accessible place to live for many people.

Lack of housing affordability and diversity has resulted in the pricing out of young families, a lack of economic diversity, loss of businesses,





and a declining population of school aged children. Accommodating a diversity of housing types in the future will help Rye maintain a multi-generational community. This will provide options for prospective residents, and ensure current Rye residents can stay in Rye as their housing needs change over time.

While the pace of development in Rye has slowed in recent years, the town is proactively planning to ensure that future growth happens in the most appropriate locations – away from the coast, on the Route 1 corridor, in the town center, and strategically in the semi-rural areas. Rye is also interested in connecting land uses, including housing, to commercial, recreational, and municipal destinations. Over time, Rye, and other partners like NH Department of Transportation will prioritize integrating the necessary infrastructure along

key routes to support pedestrian, bicycle, and transit travel. **Looking ahead, the town must balance development opportunities with the need to responsibly manage its natural resources, and consider the impacts of climate change.**

COMMUNITY PERSPECTIVES

Members of the public that participated in the creation of Rye 2035 shared a variety of thoughts and ideas on housing, transportation, and our economy.

There are concerns about accommodating future development and retaining Rye’s character.

Many participants expressed concern related to the effects of increasing development including the loss of habitat, increasing traffic, increasing demand on infrastructure, and loss of community character

and semi-rural charm.

Housing costs and availability are impacting residents.

Residents also expressed concern with rising housing costs and the lack of available and affordable housing in Rye. To address the housing needs in the community, participants suggested that more types of housing be permitted. To accomplish this, investments in infrastructure would be needed, specifically water and sewer in some areas. However, expanding public infrastructure would also increase the economic diversity of the community and benefit the town and local businesses. It would also allow for some denser new development areas that could be used to shift development pressure away from the semi-rural areas and natural resources.

There is a desire for a more people-oriented transportation system.

Traffic and infrastructure related challenges were also identified by participants. These included increased road traffic, speeding, inadequate infrastructure, safety concerns for pedestrians and cyclists, and parking issues. To address these concerns, many felt the town will need to improve road signage, invest in infrastructure for bicycles and pedestrians, and address current parking limitations.

The demographics and dynamics of the community are changing.

Rye’s population is aging and this is resulting in the loss of younger families. Some

indicated that this is creating a growing divide between older residents and younger generations, and a lack of inclusivity in decision-making processes. Some participants suggested that Rye should encourage younger families to move in by ensuring there is affordable housing available, and creating an inviting and inclusive community.

Residents are concerned about the future of Rye’s natural resources.

Impacts from development on Rye’s natural resources (wetlands, open spaces, beaches, etc.) were identified as a concern. Some participants also mentioned local flooding events that have increased due to

climate change, and the general degradation of water quality. To address these needs, residents suggested that local ordinances be strengthened, additional land be conserved, current conserved land be maintained, agricultural uses be encouraged, infrastructure improvements be planned for, and that environmental awareness and action be promoted.

FUTURE PRIORITIES

ECONOMY AND FUTURE DEVELOPMENT

To align with the Master Plan Vision and Future Land Use Strategy, Rye will need to review and amend its land use regulations to manage and



support the type of growth it wishes to see. This will allow the town to create zoning that informs and guides future development activity while maintaining the town's character and enhancing its local economy.

A central component of these regulatory changes relates to the Route 1 corridor. This is an area of the community that is away from the coast, can accommodate future development, is well positioned for a mix of residential and commercial uses, and will require coordinated infrastructure investments over time.

To be most effective, this effort should begin with the organization of a public planning and design workshop series. Often referred to as a design charrette, such a public visioning process will help residents weigh in on

the concept of mixed-use development with housing and commercial activities included. Residents can then help determine the allowable density and the required design elements of developments in this area of Rye.

This public process will also create an opportunity to identify the environmental protection and architectural design goals for developments here. Then, land use regulations and infrastructure investments can be planned for and communicated to the development community.

One of the regulatory approaches that should be further investigated is a form-based or character-based code. This type of zoning ordinance is visual and clearly communicates the requirements for the placement, massing, and

CASE STUDY: YORK, MAINE

This case study is an example of how a community design workshop can transform an area of a community, while retaining its town character. In the summer of 2023, the Town of York, Maine conducted a design charrette, created a plan, and then wrote new zoning language for an approximately 300-acre area. This project was initially identified in the Town's 2013 Comprehensive Plan as a recommendation to create a mixed-use district situated between Route 1 and Main Street. The goals for this area included innovation, preservation of natural resources, sustainability, and recreational opportunities.

The design workshop provided a way for residents to voice concerns, share their visions, and learn about character-based code (also known as Form Based Zoning). It is anticipated that a final draft will be delivered in the Spring of 2024, followed by several required public hearings, and ultimately, a Town vote.



Above: A rendering produced from the York, Maine design charrette.

FORM-BASED CODE

Form-Based Codes are one of the more effective land use tools for shaping pedestrian-scaled, mixed use, and active village and town centers. The regulations and standards in form-based codes are presented in both words, clearly drawn diagrams, and other visuals. As a result, they are typically more concise and user friendly, communicating concepts like density clearly to the user. This could be an effective tool for guiding land use in the Route 1 corridor area.

Form-Based Codes (also known as character-based zoning) stress the importance of mixed-use areas and focus on the placement, mass, and relationship of the buildings with each other and the shared public way. Because form-based codes are prescriptive (they state what the town wants), rather than proscriptive (what the town does not want), form-based codes can often achieve a more predictable physical result.

design of structures within proposed developments. Such an approach is ideal for locations where pedestrian activity is a priority, greater density is possible, and a mix of uses is desired. Other regulatory tools that should be considered for new development activity include TIF Districts and impact fees. Route 1 should be evaluated for a Tax Increment Finance District. Tax Increment Financing (TIF). A TIF is often used to fund infrastructure investments and would lessen the financial burden on the municipality. Impact fees should also be considered if they would help fund critical capital improvements.

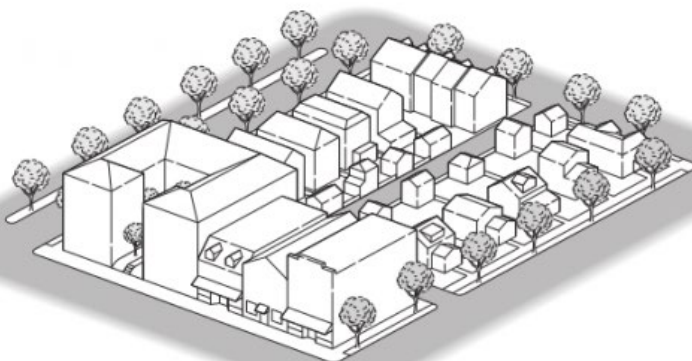
Another area of the community that was identified for additional mixed-use development at a gentler, village-scale of density is the Town Center. The density of development in this area will likely be driven by the need to rely on individual and shared wells and septic systems. This area is already the location of most municipal departments, and over time these uses and gathering spaces should continue to be accommodated

as their needs change and grow. There is also interest in allowing the addition of some small businesses, such as cafes, and updating the zoning to foster this type of development activity.

The Town Center and busier coastal commercial areas would also benefit from streetscape improvements including expanding pedestrian walkways and lighting, incorporating wayfinding signage, and maintaining landscaped areas. Ensuring that Rye's land use regulations support and reinforce the creation of a vibrant, pedestrian-oriented streetscape will help turn this vision into a reality. A form-based code may be appropriate for the Town Center area as well.

HOUSING SOLUTIONS

Diversifying housing options for Rye's residents is essential. This need was documented in the 2023 Housing Needs Assessment and can be accomplished while preserving Rye's distinct character. In 2024, a Land Use Regulation Audit was completed to identify regulatory changes that are needed to support housing



COMPONENTS OF A FORM-BASED CODE

- Regulating Plan
- Building Form Setbacks
- Public Space/Street Standards
- Architectural Standards
- Landscape Standards
- Parking Standards

TAX INCREMENT FINANCING (TIF) DISTRICTS

Higher density areas that can support a mix of uses and a walkable development pattern require infrastructure and services. However, the cost of constructing this infrastructure may be more than the community alone can support up front.

Tax Increment Financing (TIF) Districts are a flexible finance tool used by municipalities to overcome this barrier. TIFs accomplish this by leveraging the value and property taxes generated by new development projects within a defined geographic area. This type of program is locally adopted and managed. The municipality defines the district area, determines the amount of new taxes to be captured, sets the term (up to 30 years), and identifies the allowable projects that can be funded.

Once this tool has been adopted all new projects in the designated district will provide a percent of the new property taxes they generate to fund the projects needed. This is a tool that is used in many municipalities to fund infrastructure improvements that support the local economy and reinforce the chosen development pattern.

diversity and supply in Rye. Now, the public needs to be engaged in this process so that the identified regulatory changes can be revised and brought forward to future town meetings for consideration.

Potential changes that have been identified include promoting the construction of accessory dwelling units (ADUs), reviewing the conservation land development ordinance to reduce barriers, and possibly enacting an inclusionary housing provision. These and other changes are being considered in Rye because they present realistic housing opportunities. They reflect an approach often referred to as “gentle density,” and can fit into the community without threatening the semi-rural character that residents cherish.

It is also important for Rye’s existing and future homes to be protected from natural hazards as much as possible. For this reason, it is envisioned the community should maintain and possibly expand regulations that reduce the risk of flooding and coastal storms to protect existing homes and neighborhoods, and to discourage new housing in hazard-prone areas. This is even more complex in Rye where significant salt marsh migration is expected. This was considered in the Future Land Use Strategy, and is one of the reasons why backlot development will not be feasible in all areas of the community.

MULTI-MODAL TRANSPORTATION

Investing in transportation improvements that prioritize safety and enhance infrastructure for pedestrians and cyclists will create a people-centered transportation network. This is often referred to as a multi-modal transportation system and can best be ensured by adopting a Complete Streets Policy. Complete Streets is a street design and planning approach used to create streets that accommodate all users of the road (including vehicles, pedestrians, cyclists, and others) to the greatest extent possible.

This approach advocates for walkable and bikeable communities that connect neighborhoods, schools, and other local destinations through a well-connected roadway network. Such a policy will ensure new roadways accommodate all transportation modes, including pedestrians, bicycles, and public transportation.

“ Rye needs more sidewalks or trails that provide safe routes for all ages to connect with each other.”

– Rye community member during master plan outreach

GENTLE DENSITY

Gentle density is a planning concept that is appropriate in communities such as Rye with large semi-rural areas and smaller village scale developments. It advocates for allowing a variety of house-scale buildings that can be configured in many ways. This concept has gained traction in many communities working to address their own pressing housing issues because it promotes the development of residential structures that are compatible in scale and form with the existing detached single-family homes.

While larger multi-family structures and higher densities may be possible in key areas of Rye, many of Rye's more semi-rural neighborhoods could also play a role in accommodating some additional housing units and still maintain the town's semi-rural character. This would require amending the land use regulations to allow "gentle" increases in density. Often this is implemented by permitting the construction of accessory units, two-, three-, and four-family homes, conservation subdivisions, and backlot development in appropriate areas. One of the reasons this technique would be effective in Rye is the cost of land.

According to the Brookings Institute "where land is expensive, building more homes per parcel increases affordability." These developments can often be unnoticeable to the passerby, examples include a backyard duplex or heritage home with multiple units. By integrating new homes thoughtfully into Rye, gentle density provides housing options while preserving the unique charm and aesthetic of the neighborhood.

This type of infrastructure is easy to envision in the Town Center, in a new development on Route 1, and in some of Rye's existing neighborhoods. However, the recent completion of the New Hampshire Seacoast Greenway also presents an exciting opportunity for Rye. This new non-motorized transportation and recreation corridor should be thoughtfully connected to these existing developed areas, other key destinations in Rye, and out to the coast. This

will require identifying and then constructing sidewalks and multi-use paths where they are lacking to improve connectivity throughout the town. Another important aspect of such a holistic transportation system is public transit of some type. At a minimum, this should include the continuation or expansion of Rye's Senior Serve services to help older residents and those with disabilities to get to appointments and out for shopping.





CASE STUDY: ELDER SERVICES, ATKINSON NH

The Town of Atkinson's innovative and locally funded Elder Services program provides rides to Atkinson residents age 60 and older (or under, if permanently disabled). The Elder Services Department provides complimentary transportation by appointment, lends a variety of donated medical equipment as needed, and acts as a link to information regarding helpful community resources.

The Elder Services Department also offers Wellness Checks, reliable contractors information, referral to Veterans Administration services, and works to collaborate with the Atkinson Recreation, Fire, and Police Departments. There is no direct cost to the participating resident and rides are scheduled ahead of time. Given the semi-rural nature of the community and the lack of available public transit options, this is a significant innovation that helps residents remain in the community when they can no longer drive. This program could serve as inspiration for expanding and improving upon Rye's Senior SERVE bus service.

Climate Change Resilience



“We have to learn to ADAPT.”

— Rye resident comment on the 2024 Community Survey

INTRODUCTION

The impacts of climate change are becoming more pronounced and are projected to increase in both frequency and severity. Low lying coastal communities, like Rye, are particularly vulnerable to these changes, which include sea level rise, storm surges, groundwater rise leading to saltwater intrusion, and coastal erosion. Because of the many potential climate impacts to the community, this was identified as a critical theme for Rye 2035 to address in planning for Rye's future. The 2019 New Hampshire Coastal Flood Risk Summary estimates a rise in sea level between 0.5 to 1.3 feet by 2050, highlighting the urgency for communities to adapt and prepare for these changes.

The challenges Rye is facing also relate to increasing occurrences of saltwater intrusion in drinking water wells, damage to critical natural resources like beaches, and damage to essential systems such as roads, drinking water infrastructure, and wastewater disposal systems. Additionally, the Town must consider how to best support private property owners, especially along the coast, in making their properties more resilient to these ongoing risks.

To address these issues, the Town of Rye has been proactive in increasing its climate resilience. Over the past decade, Rye has partnered with local organizations and participated in various projects aimed at strengthening its defenses against flood conditions, storm surges, and sea level rise.



Resilience is at the forefront of Rye 2035 to withstand the effects of our changing climate. Resilience is the ability to prepare for, respond to, and recover from the effects of climate change while minimizing damage to the environment, economy, and society. It's a concept that describes how well people and ecosystems can bounce back from climate hazards and other challenges.

Notable efforts include the 2015 Tides to Storms project, the development of the 2016-2017 Coastal Hazards and Climate Adaptation Master Plan Chapter, and the 2022 update of its Hazard Mitigation Plan. As Rye continues to move forward, collaboration with regional and local partners will be key to ensuring residents' safety and the town's long-term resilience to climate hazards.

DIRECTING OUR EFFORTS

Looking ahead, Rye's goals for future planning include:

- ▶ Enact long-range planning actions that preserve coastal integrity, strengthen community resilience and adaptation opportunities, and minimize impacts to the built and natural environments.
- ▶ Address existing climate related impacts to infrastructure and property from coastal storms and sea-level rise flooding, water quality, and other impacts.

INVENTORY AND TRENDS

Climate resilience has become a significant focus for Rye as it is one of the state's most vulnerable coastal communities. Rye's coastline spans nearly eight miles, making up approximately 52% of New Hampshire's total shoreline. With approximately 296 National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP) policies insured for over \$87 million, the town has taken proactive steps since joining the program in 1986. These efforts include updating zoning to protect wetlands and shoreland buffers, conducting a climate change vulnerability assessment, and adopting a climate resilience chapter in the previous Master Plan. As Rye looks to the future and plans for additional residential and commercial development, the community must continue to account for coastal hazards, natural resource protection, and the need to minimize the effects of rising sea levels on both private structures and public infrastructure.

The town's natural features—beaches, marshes, and sand dunes—are vital to its character, yet they face increasing threats from climate change. Flooding is a common hazard in Rye, with specific areas, such as Wallis Road, Ocean Boulevard/Route 1A, and Jenness Road, experiencing recurring or high-potential flood risks. Projections indicate that by 2050, 1,039 acres (or 12% of Rye's land area) and approximately 300 structures could be affected by a one-foot rise in sea level. By 2100, sea level rise is expected

The impacts of climate change are increasing and are projected to continue to increase in frequency and severity. This includes:

- **Sea level rise**
- **Drought**
- **Risk of groundwater rise causing saltwater intrusion**
- **Marsh migration**
- **Storm surge and flood inundation, and**
- **Coastal erosion**

to reach between 1.0 and 2.9 feet, threatening an even greater portion of the town's infrastructure and homes.

According to the Rye Hazard Mitigation Plan, several locations were identified as areas of chronic reoccurring flooding or having high potential for future flooding. These areas include:

- Wallis Road between Appledore and Ocean Boulevard/Route 1A;
- Ocean Boulevard/Route 1A at Church Street;
- The Breakers;
- Jenness Road;
- East Atlantic Avenue;
- Kenphill Avenue;
- Harbor Road at Ocean Boulevard/Route 1A;
- Locke Road at Harbor Road;
- Long John Road;
- Sagamore Road.

Road closures at these locations can occur during periods of heavy rainfall and rapid snowmelt, and are temporary in nature with road

surfaces covered with water. Coastal storm surges have also caused damage to the shale piles along Ocean Boulevard/Route 1A, causing the rock to be pushed back into the roadway.

Rye has already taken significant steps to bolster its climate resilience. These efforts include studying the impacts of future high-water levels, updating floodplain and land development regulations, and restoring tidal flow to 275 acres of salt marsh. Key concerns moving forward include the risk of saltwater intrusion into drinking water supplies and disruptions to septic systems, and the increase in frequency and severity of storm events. **Looking ahead, the town must continue to prioritize the protection of coastal resources like saltmarshes, infrastructure, and emergency operations as sea levels rise and climate hazards become more severe.**

Existing Conditions: Natural Hazards

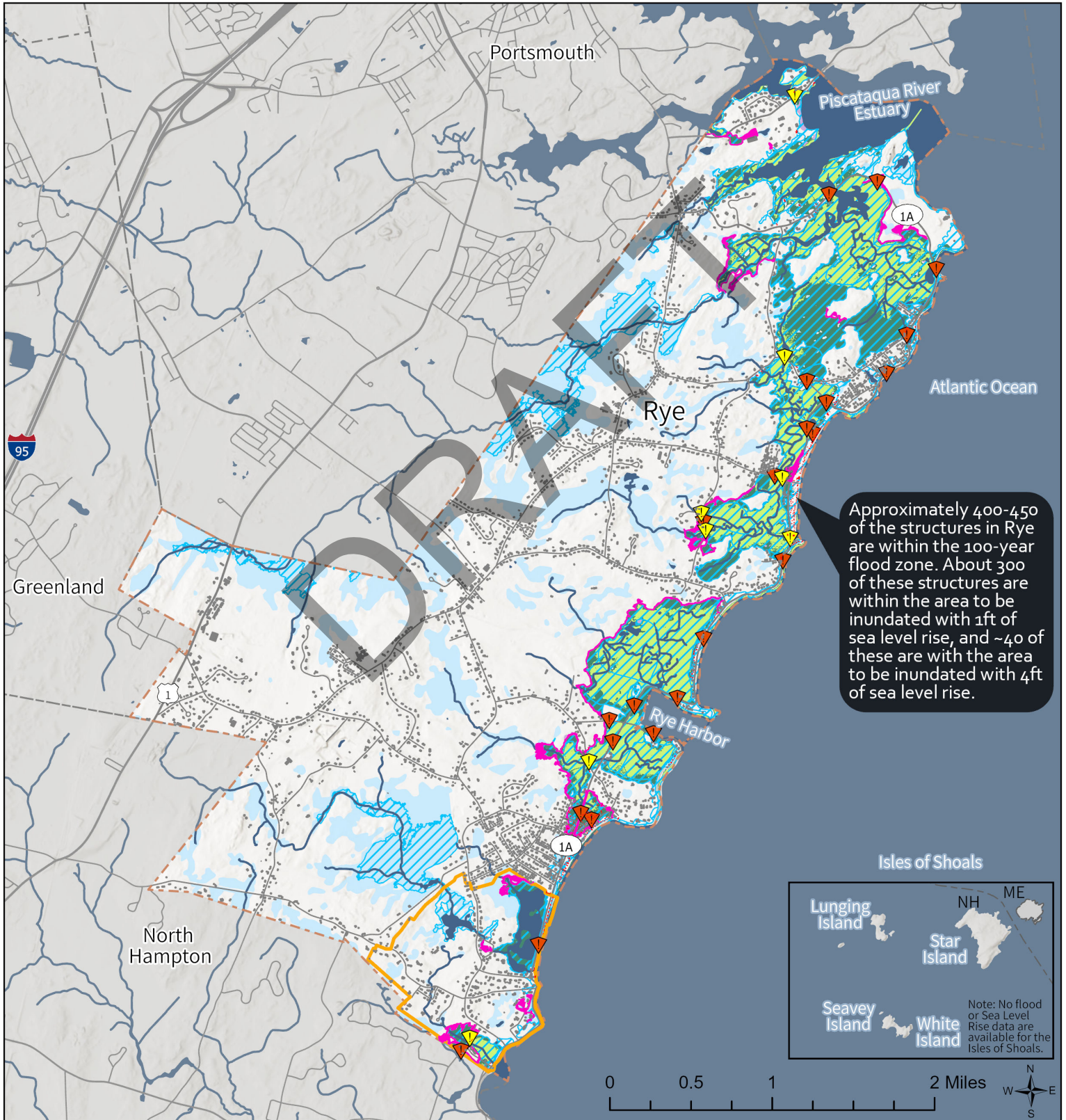
Town of Rye, New Hampshire

Map created for planning purposes
for master plan development



Data Sources: NH GRANIT, NHD, NH DOT,
Maine GeoLibrary, CAI, FEMA
Coordinate System: NAD 1983 State Plane
New Hampshire FIPS 2800 (US Feet)
Map by: C. Bunyon, FB Environmental

-  Town Boundary
-  Town of Rye
-  Rye Beach Village District
-  Road
-  River/Stream
-  Coastal Waters/Waterbody
-  Estuarine Wetland
-  Palustrine Wetland
-  Building Footprint
-  Building Affected by a Sea Level Rise of 1-foot OR a 100-year Flood
-  Roadway at Risk
-  Tidal Crossing at Risk
-  Area Inundated Under 1 foot of Sea Level Rise
-  Area Inundated Under 4 feet of Sea Level Rise
-  FEMA 1% (100-year) Flood Hazard Area
-  FEMA 0.2% (500-year) Flood Hazard Area





RECENT STORMS AND FLOODING IN RYE

Recent storm surge events in Rye occurred in December 2022 and August 2023, and two events occurred in January 2024. These storm surge events, along with increasingly frequent high precipitation events, have led to increased flooding incidents in town and impacted many roadways including beach access roads such as E Street, Cable Road, Atlantic Ave, and Jenness Ave.

The Town experienced significant damage from these flooding events which resulted in failed drainage infrastructure, damage to the sea wall, and rock, sand, and seaweed debris in roadways. Failed drainage infrastructure including culverts and collapsed pipes within coastal neighborhoods, such as the Jenness Beach neighborhoods, created flooding that left some neighborhoods stranded for days. In April 2024, it was announced that the state of New Hampshire is getting a \$20 million federal grant to help reconstruct seawalls damaged by storms and flooding. New Hampshire also received a disaster aid declaration to cover costs from the two storm surge events that occurred in January 2024.

COMMUNITY PERSPECTIVES

There were diverse opinions about how Rye should address climate change and hazardous events.

Members of the public that participated in the Rye 2035 planning process shared a range of perspectives and ideas related to the need to plan for greater climate resilience. Some participants expressed significant concern about the potential consequences of climate change, particularly in coastal areas. Issues like rising sea levels, extreme weather events, and environmental degradation were seen as major threats that require attention and action. However, opinions were mixed regarding the role the Town should play in addressing these challenges. While many advocated for municipal involvement, a smaller number of participants (approximately 15) opposed the town's involvement in mitigating climate change-related impacts altogether.

Many community members advocated for a thorough strategy for addressing climate change threats.

Most community members that gave input highlighted the importance of a comprehensive

“ Be proactive; make short- and long-term plans.”

– Rye community member during master plan outreach

approach to tackling the challenges posed by coastal resilience and extreme weather events. They emphasized the need for collaboration, preparedness, and environmental stewardship. Key concerns included coastal flooding, sea level rise, damage to infrastructure, and erosion of beaches. A majority of participants (71%) expressed particular worry about increased heavy precipitation events, while others voiced general concerns about the growing frequency and severity of storms, which threaten shoreline properties, roads, and infrastructure.

Climate mitigation and adaptation can happen through many different mechanisms.

Several suggestions were made to mitigate the impacts of climate change, such as constructing more resilient infrastructure, raising roads near marshes, reinforcing seawalls, and developing comprehensive adaptation strategies. Protecting natural habitats, wetlands, and marshes to manage flooding, maintain water quality, and preserve biodiversity was another priority. Concerns over water quality contamination from flooding, saltwater intrusion, and the degradation of habitats were also prevalent, along with the need for sustainable management practices.

However, participants were divided on whether the Town should assist private property owners in managing sea level rise hazards, with 43% in favor, 35% opposed, and 22% unsure. Many stressed that property owners should

“ Discourage building in vulnerable areas.”

– Rye community member during master plan outreach

be primarily responsible for protecting their properties, and that stricter building codes and zoning regulations could ensure that owners bear the costs of mitigating hazards on their own.

Some participants suggested that the town could instead assist private property owners by providing education and guidance on how to mitigate the risks associated with climate hazards. Related recommendations included providing resources, workshops, and seminars to educate property owners about available options, and promoting best practices to protect properties from sea level rise, storm surges, drought, flooding, and groundwater rise. Other suggestions included exploring options for partnerships with neighboring communities, leveraging collective resources, and advocating for external funding sources to support hazard mitigation efforts.

“ Work with the state to protect the shoreline.”

– Rye community member during master plan outreach



Wagon Hill Farm Living Shoreline Project, Durham NH

LIVING SHORELINES

As identified by the New Hampshire Department of Environmental Services (NHDES), living shorelines offer a natural solution for coastal protection, utilizing materials like plants and sand to reduce erosion while maintaining marine habitats. Living shorelines provide a sustainable alternative to traditional “hard” coastal protection methods. These systems help absorb wave energy and support marine life, creating resilient coastal areas.

In 2019, the State of New Hampshire conducted a Living Shoreline Site Suitability Assessment recommending locations along the coast, including Rye, for implementing strategies to protect against sea-level rise and storm impacts. Recommendations for Rye included prioritizing areas that are susceptible to erosion and habitat loss, such as marsh edges and sandy shoreline, as well as implementing living shorelines along coastal wetlands to enhance flood resilience and habitat connectivity.

As an example, the Town of Durham was awarded funds to create a living shoreline to stabilize 1,835 linear feet of tidal shoreline, restore 4,060 square feet of salt marsh habitat, and 2,810 square feet of tidal buffer at their local Wagon Hill Farm. The project is meant to stabilize severe erosion while protecting and increasing the adaptive capacity of critical conservation and community spaces.

FUTURE PRIORITIES

BUILDING CODE AND REGULATORY CHANGES

To minimize development in areas that are likely to be impacted by sea level rise and storm surges, regulatory amendments and other best practices need to be implemented in our community. This is an issue that Rye needs to address for the benefit of existing and future structures. A review of Rye's land use regulations based on the NH Coastal Flood Risk Guidance would inform the drafting of zoning changes that prevent new construction in vulnerable coastal areas. There is also an opportunity to do the same for building codes to account for flooding and increased storm intensity. Other potential changes include increased building setbacks in shoreland zones, protection of riparian buffers and wetlands, reducing impervious surfaces, and the preservation of natural floodplains should also be prioritized as initiatives that are important to the community's resilience.

INFRASTRUCTURE VULNERABILITY ASSESSMENT AND RESILIENCY UPGRADES

Another priority in the near term is the completion of a vulnerability assessment of all of Rye's coastal infrastructure, such as roadways, culverts, and hard structures. This assessment process will also create an opportunity to engage relevant partners and landowners in planning for greater climate resilience in Rye.

Based on the assessment results, infrastructure improvements and coastal protection measures should then be implemented to minimize the impacts of flooding and erosion. These improvements may include the ongoing maintenance of existing infrastructure, bank protection, berm construction, elevating sites, constructing floodwalls, or upgrading drainage systems.

Where possible, living shorelines should be identified as a preferred approach to reduce negative impacts on habitats, mitigate wave energy, extend the lifespan

of protection measures, and provide other environmental benefits.

A detailed study is also needed in the Jenness Beach and Sawyer Beach/Rye Beach neighborhoods to evaluate flooding projections and impacts. The outcome of this effort should be the creation of a resilience plan specific to this area. Such a plan may include infrastructure repairs, and the ongoing maintenance responsibilities of the town and state.

The adequacy of emergency services in flood-prone areas like Jenness Beach and Sawyer Beach/Rye Beach should also be addressed, and ways to improve them should be identified. This will inform efforts to plan for and fund improvements in these areas over the years ahead. Additionally, the adoption of a stormwater utility and fee could provide sustainable funding for stormwater-related coastal and groundwater resilience projects.





PLANNING FOR NEW HAMPSHIRE'S SALT MARSHES

The New Hampshire Salt Marsh Plan was developed by The Great Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve, in collaboration with NH Fish & Game to provide a comprehensive plan for improving resiliency of the state's salt marshes through land protection, marsh management (restoration/adaptation), research, and policy.

The Plan combines high-resolution land cover data from NOAA with local data sets to generate 224 marsh units across coastal New Hampshire. Data associated with more than 20 metrics is used to rank the current condition, vulnerability to sea level rise, and adaptation potential of each marsh unit. Each ranking is associated with one of eight categories of resilience, each with its own set of recommendations for management. Marsh Units are areas of broadly similar land use/land cover and hydrology, and are used to provide a framework to systematically assess and compare marshes in the state. The Great Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve is currently working on developing "Marsh Profiles" for each of the 224 marsh units identified in the state. The first "Marsh Profile" completed is for Odiorne Point in Rye. These profiles provide information on the type of habitat, current condition, vulnerability to sea level rise, adaptation potential, and a resiliency score.

EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS

Rye's 2022 Hazard Mitigation Plan helped inform Rye 2035 and will guide the development of evacuation plans for at-risk areas. Improving emergency management and coordination is crucial to ensure continuity of services for essential facilities, people, businesses, and employment centers. This should include maintaining access to critical infrastructure like schools and emergency services. This work is never finished, and the reality of a changing climate will require that emergency routes be evaluated, maintained, and improved.

Examples include the need to raise elevations of surfaces and expand road shoulders, particularly along Ocean Boulevard/Route 1A in case of inundation from weather events. The town should also consider allocating emergency funds for disaster cleanup and repair, enhancing communication systems during storm events with text alerts, and coordinating emergency management planning with neighboring towns and state agencies.

PUBLIC OUTREACH AND EDUCATION

Resilient communities have strong personal relationships, are committed to clear and frequent communication, and foster a culture of caring. Every resident can play a role in making Rye more climate resilient.

For this to be successful, the town will need to prioritize public outreach efforts that engage and inform community members about flood hazards, vulnerabilities, and opportunities to increase resiliency. Each of these outreach opportunities should also include a mechanism for gathering input and ideas from residents. Educational efforts are also important and should cover essential information, including what actions to take during a flood or other types of emergency events.

Additionally, property owners should be provided with information about efforts they can take on directly. This could include the constructing of living shorelines, and implementation of landscaping best practices. Property owners should also be educated on steps to reduce the impact of hazards on their properties, and be encouraged to incorporate the best available climate science and vulnerability assessments into their decision-making and preparedness plans.

SALT MARSH PROTECTION AND RESTORATION

A combination of regulatory and non-regulatory efforts will be needed to ensure Rye's salt marshes and open spaces remain functional natural areas that contribute to the coastal and climate resilience of the community. In some cases, more information is needed to inform these efforts and participating in regional and statewide efforts may be the best way to stay informed. This is especially relevant to the issues of groundwater rise and saltwater intrusion. This may also be relevant to the issue of fresh water resources, and a study of Rye's drinking water resources should also be completed to identify potential threats and possible solutions.

Strategically protecting lands with tidal and freshwater wetlands that provide benefits in flood protection and species migration should also be a priority. This should include prioritizing land conservation and marsh restoration efforts in areas of projected marsh migration. Owners of such land will mitigate development and climate related impacts by partnering in preservation efforts.

Rye should also use the New Hampshire Salt Marsh Plan as a guide for marsh restoration and conservation of adjacent lands. Improving marsh conditions to reduce vulnerability and facilitate migration will improve coastal resilience by protecting against wave action and sea level rise.





CASE STUDY: HAMPTON, NH CLIMATE RESILIENCE INITIATIVES

Climate resilience will continue to be addressed both locally and regionally in New Hampshire. Rye and the other coastal communities in New Hampshire are part of numerous regional efforts to address climate resilience such as the New Hampshire Coastal Adaptation Workgroup, which focus on regional coordination of resilience initiatives. New Hampshire communities can learn many best practices from each other as each municipality plans to address coastal issues and prepare for the future in their own way. The Town of Hampton has implemented several climate resilience strategies that are helping the town meet its resilience goals.

These strategies include strengthening floodplain ordinances, minimizing impervious surfaces to improve stormwater management, updating wetland regulations, and adopting higher standards for building elevation and land use in flood-prone areas. The town emphasizes collaboration with local organizations and public engagement to support ongoing projects and policies aimed at increasing coastal resilience and reducing future risks. Rye could use Hampton’s approach as a model for updating local policies and encouraging collaboration to enhance its coastal resilience initiatives.

Municipal Operations and Organization



“More transparency,
more inclusivity.”

– Rye community member during master plan outreach

INTRODUCTION

Rye’s volunteer leaders, professional staff, and residents work together each year to ensure a range of municipal services are planned for, financially supported, and delivered daily to residents and visitors. Taxpayers and visitors to Rye directly benefit from the municipal facilities and public infrastructure, and the community services they provide. Many of Rye’s public facilities, and the departments they house, are located within or near Rye’s Town Center, including the library, town hall, and schools. This civic-oriented town center plays a large role in the quaint, New England character of Rye and creates opportunities for it to remain the tight-knit, walkable core of town that serves as space for gathering as a community.

To function effectively as a community and municipality, building relationships and trust between citizens, staff, volunteers, and elected officials is critical. To do so will require a concerted effort by local board members, local opinion leaders, and the civic organizations working outside of municipal government. The lack of trust and coordinated collaboration between local government and other local groups is a significant concern, and one of the biggest challenges for the community to overcome. It is further complicated by the significant climate impacts the community is facing. Addressing the impacts of sea level rise, groundwater rise, extreme weather, infrastructure impacts, and other realities is difficult enough when the community is



“ Open and honest decision making and willingness to listen and implement what the public wants should be the policy.”

- Rye community member during master plan outreach

getting along but will be extremely challenging if the citizens remain divided.

Strong collaboration, clear communication, and proactive planning are ingredients for tackling big projects and addressing complex issues as a community. Otherwise, there is doubt, frustration, and halted progress. Improving the flow of municipal operations, town organization, and cross-community collaboration will ensure Rye is well-positioned to make important and wise decisions about anticipated capital improvements, long-term facility

planning, and near-term actions to focus on over the next ten years.

DIRECTING OUR EFFORTS

Looking ahead, Rye’s goals for future planning include:

- ▶ Inform citizenry of government functions.
- ▶ Proactively plan for municipal facility and community service investment.
- ▶ Foster an inclusive and community-oriented local government.

INVENTORY AND TRENDS

Rye has shown good stewardship of its municipal facilities, making significant investments in buildings over the years. However, time and regular use tax the condition of these facilities. The needs of the departments and staff that operate out of these facilities also change and

evolve with time. These realities along with increasing demand and the new service needs of a changing and aging population will require that the town remains dedicated to planning ahead. The existing community facilities in Rye include:

Public Safety Building

The public safety building houses police, fire, and emergency operations, providing critical community services such as fire protection, fire prevention, inspections, permitting, policing, parking enforcement, and emergency management.

Rye Public Library

The library is a vital and heavily utilized community space and resource in town providing books and other materials for lending, community programs, meeting space, and other services. It also played a significant role in creating a town green in Rye in collaboration with town committees and citizens.

Town Hall

The town hall houses many of Rye's town administration and land use services. It is a historic

structure and has a meeting room to serve local boards and committees.

Town Hall Annex

The town hall annex, which is a former bank building, houses the remaining town administrative offices. This space was renovated due to the town hall not being able to accommodate all the space needs required for the town offices. The space supports high frequency transactions such as town clerk and tax collection with ample parking and a drive up window, among other administrative functions.

Rye Elementary and Junior High Schools

Rye Elementary School and Rye Junior High School serve Rye residents K-8. They operate independently, as a School District, and in partnership with the Town of Rye.

Public Works Department Facility

The facility includes space for the Highway Department, including offices and garage bays, and the Transfer Station. The Highway Department maintains all town-owned roadways in Rye, and the transfer station provides waste disposal and recycling services

for residents. The Transfer Station facilities consist of one recycling bailer, a storage area for recycling, and an area for a swap shop that is run by volunteers where donations are brought in and given away as a way of reusing. The Town does not provide curbside pickup therefore residents seek private trash roadside service or deliver their trash to the Town's Transfer Station.

Rye Recreation Area

The recreation area includes a little league field, a multi-purpose field, a playground, a picnic area, a basketball/pickleball court, a garage/multi-functional building, and several small out-buildings. The Recreation Department provides important recreation programming for adults and youth in Rye and operate out of this facility.

Central Cemetery

Rye has one cemetery, Central Cemetery, adjacent to the town hall. It is approximately 17 acres and provides walking paths and green space.





Rye Sewer Department Infrastructure

The Sewer Department operates out of the Rye Beach Village District building and oversees the town’s sewer system, which includes gravity sewer lines, and force main lines, three pump stations. It services 555 parcels in town, with most of Rye being serviced by private septic systems. Sewage is piped to the Hampton Wastewater Treatment Plant.

Water Infrastructure

There are three water providers in Rye – Rye Water District, Aquarion Water Company, and the City of Portsmouth. Aquarion Water Company supplies water to the Jenness Beach and Rye Beach Precincts and the City of Portsmouth supplies water to the northern part of town along Pioneer Road, Sagamore Road, Elwyn Road, and Wentworth Road. The Rye Water District purchases some of its water from the City of Portsmouth, with other water being sourced from three wells located off Garland Road. The Rye Water District provides water to approximately 1800 service connections from resources in the Bailey Brook sub-watershed within the Berry’s Brook-Rye Harbor drainage area. Infrastructure includes wells, pump houses, storage tanks, hydrants, distribution main line,

and other water lines. In March 2024, the Rye Water District voted to raise \$15,950,000 for the design, development, and construction of a water treatment facility that will qualify for federal and/or state funds. The goal is to be ready for a June 2027 construction start date.

Stormwater Infrastructure

Rye’s stormwater collection system includes culverts, swales, catch basins, and associated piping. This infrastructure is designed to slow, capture, and filter stormwater runoff before it enters the town’s waterways.

There are several documented municipal building needs that will require planning and investment in the future. These include:

- Modernization, upgrades, renovations, or replacement of all existing municipal buildings.
- Renovation, restoration, and improvement of the Town Hall building including additional features that support community use and the restoration of its historic character.
- Improvements to the Public Works Department equipment and facilities.
- Improvements to Rye’s Transfer Station including improved traffic flow, expanded recycling options, and better handling and disposal of hazardous waste.
- Expansion of the library,

including enhancements to its facilities and increasing community programming.

- Upgrading the Recreation Department buildings and recreation facilities based on findings from the Recreation Master Plan.
- Proper maintenance of the athletic fields.
- Integration of the energy audits completed for all of Rye’s municipal buildings to guide future energy efficiency retrofits.
- Continued investment in school facilities to keep Rye an attractive place to live for families.

For Rye’s municipal facilities and operations to continue to provide a high quality of service, these departments, and their identified facility improvements, need to be adequately planned for and financed. The Town has a Capital Improvement Program Committee authorized to prepare capital improvement plans annually. A commitment to annual budgeting will allow the town to anticipate additional costs and plan for large expenditures accordingly so that they do not need to all be funded in the same year. A complete inventory of Rye’s existing facilities and infrastructure can be found in the Existing Conditions Report included in the Appendix to this Plan.

Existing Conditions: Public Facilities

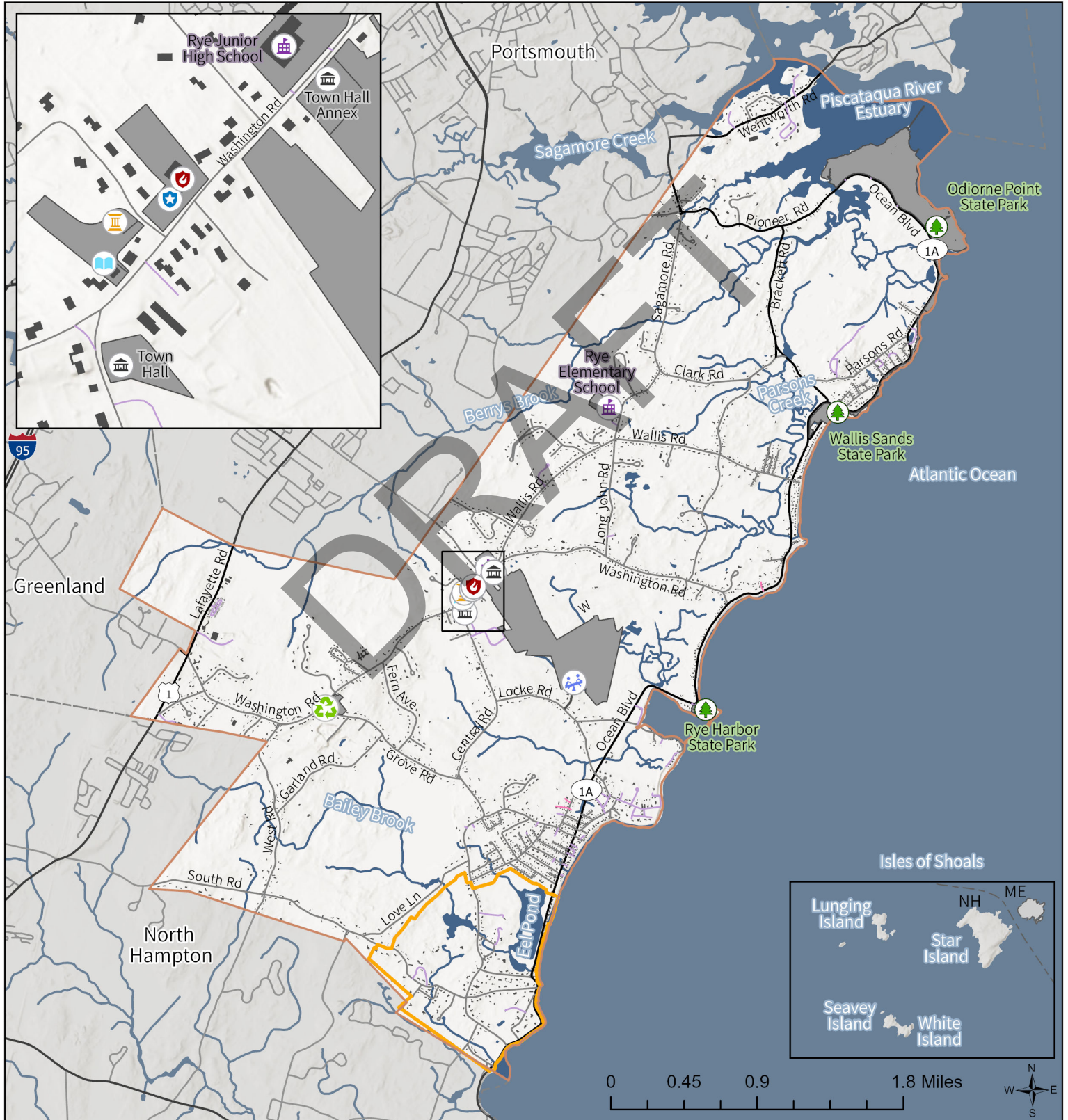
Town of Rye, New Hampshire

Map created for planning purposes
for master plan development



Data Sources: NH GRANIT, NHD, NH DOT,
Maine GeoLibrary, CAI
Coordinate System: NAD 1983 State Plane
New Hampshire FIPS 2800 (US Feet)
Map by: C. Bunyon, FB Environmental

- | | | |
|----------------------------|--------------------|-----------------------|
| Town Boundary | Building Footprint | Town Hall Building |
| Town of Rye | State Road | Library |
| Rye Beach Village District | Local Road | School |
| Coastal Waters/Waterbody | Private Road | Historical Society |
| River/Stream | Unmaintained Road | State Park |
| | Fire Station | Recreation Department |
| | Police Department | Transfer Station |



COMMUNITY PERSPECTIVES

In general, community members are satisfied with Rye's town facilities.

When asked about Rye's municipal facilities and operations during the 2024 public outreach conducted for Rye 2035, residents expressed overall satisfaction with how well they serve the community. They also expressed a desire for creating community gathering spaces within and adjacent to Rye's municipal facilities. Capital investments with larger price tags would also benefit from a longer lead time for community education and engagement to ensure public-informed decision making.

There is a desire to make Rye's town buildings more sustainable.

There is interest in making the structures that house the municipal departments more energy efficient, and reducing their annual operating costs. This helps address concerns that have been shared about the cost of services and the impact of service costs on taxpayers in town, as well as a desire for better maintenance

and management of facilities in the future. Together, these goals present an opportunity to make Rye's municipal properties more sustainably designed and constructed while still reinforcing Rye's historic community character.

There are mixed views on the perceived effectiveness of Rye's local government.

When asked about Rye's municipal organization and decision making (i.e. local government), community members were less satisfied. This dissatisfaction was stated in many ways, including comments directed at Rye's municipal boards and staff, and comments directed at the organizations that have been formed outside of municipal government. Also, 32% (of 238 responses) of participants that submitted feedback at the community forum or through the online tool thought the Town would benefit from a Town Manager, indicating there is some interest in exploring alternative forms of governance.

Some respondents provided context related to the difficulty of finding volunteers to serve in local government and the subsequent rise of external civic groups in

“ I agree with [adding] solar panels on schools, the landfill, and other municipal buildings to reduce costs to the town”

– Rye community member during master plan outreach

Rye. Other respondents noted that transparency of municipal processes, perceived inclusion of governmental processes, trust, process inefficiencies, and social dynamics all played a role in the difficulty of finding volunteers to serve in municipal government. Unfortunately, the resulting divide impacts how effectively Rye can operate.

FUTURE PRIORITIES

MUNICIPAL PROCESSES AND DECISION MAKING

The residents of Rye need to find a way to come together, build trust, and create a more collaborative decision-making environment.



This is a broader issue that is larger than this Master Plan can address, and goes well beyond land use related issues. However, several of the implementation actions that have been identified will help Rye move the needle in this direction. These include prioritizing clear municipal communications, enhancing transparency of municipal processes, and encouraging broader representation of residents serving within local government. This will help ensure diverse perspectives are represented, and that barriers to participation are reduced or eliminated.

Another related action that has gained public interest is the exploration of alternative governance structures such as expanding the Select Board, or reevaluating the current roles and functions within the town administration. This may include investigating the potential creation of a town manager position. Public outreach conducted for Rye 2035 indicate participants were split on whether Rye would benefit from a Town Manager position, however, this does indicate a need for further exploration. While governmental changes may play a role in clarifying and responsibilities, increasing capacity, and enhancing transparency of roles, it may not have a large impact on addressing the existing divide and distrust in Rye.

Rye should continue to work on improving its approach to communicating about municipal matters, issues, and projects to residents and other community

members. This should likely include examining the use and effectiveness of the town website, newsletter, media channels, and other forms of communication. A coordinated approach to communication will generate greater public awareness of governmental affairs and should create an environment that attracts and retains volunteers and staff, resulting in effective local governance.

Another need to be addressed related to municipal operations is the clarification and streamlining of the local regulatory process. It should be easy for applicants, many of which are property owners and developers who regularly work in the region, to find and navigate local regulatory documents, permit forms, and the approval process. Identifying gaps where these processes could be improved, and then making these improvements, has the potential to enhance user experience and build trust among the public that the town is well organized and ready to serve them. Clarifying processes also makes it easier for staff and board members to interact with the public and do their jobs effectively.

MUNICIPAL FACILITIES ASSESSMENT

Planning for municipal capital improvements and investments in Rye would be more effective and predictable if the town commissioned a town-wide municipal facilities assessment. Such an assessment would provide baseline information on all of the existing municipal facilities in Rye. It would also

present an opportunity to integrate the findings of energy audits for each structure, and would provide an action plan that could be used to inform the Capital Improvement Plan. An assessment of this type could be maintained and updated with the use of asset management software. This would allow each department to track building improvements, maintenance needs, and equipment replacement dates.

PLANNING AND TRACKING

There is a strong interest in managing Rye's public infrastructure, including roads, buildings, and other critical facilities in a way that keeps pace with current and future capacity demands. This also presents an opportunity to ensure that this infrastructure is resilient to the changing climate. For this to be truly successful, an effort like this must be tackled collaboratively with the appropriate partners. Improving the management of public infrastructure is a perfect opportunity to apply the practice of asset management, and integrate it with the capital improvement planning process in Rye. Proactive planning and decision making, and a commitment to annual and capital budgeting, provides an opportunity to anticipate and properly plan for funding and provides timely communication on the details of projects to residents to answer their questions and address their concerns.



ASSET MANAGEMENT AND CAPITAL INVESTMENT PLANNING

Long-range monitoring and maintenance of town assets (buildings and infrastructure) will ensure consistent and timely investment is made towards priority projects, and will guide investment decisions into the future. The publicly-owned buildings and infrastructure in Rye are the legacy of multi-generational investments, and are actively stewarded by town staff. Increasingly, municipalities are recognizing the value of tracking and monitoring these investments to better plan for future upgrades and replacements. To accomplish this, many municipalities are now turning their attention toward asset management programs as a process for making informed decisions to achieve the goal of delivering services, managing risks, and getting greater value for the money invested.

Asset management helps town departments confidently inventory, track, evaluate, and communicate trade-offs between service, cost, and risk. This provides the community with a way of prioritizing projects and resources, and can be used to inform the capital improvement planning process. In doing so, it helps the community decide what infrastructure needs to be replaced or renewed, and how many years they can get out of the investment. It also helps the community figure out how much they should be saving for future infrastructure investments, and can demonstrate accountability to residents and businesses in the community.

Asset information, condition rankings, and maintenance history can be assigned to each of the individual buildings and infrastructure components being monitored. Each distinct asset can also be linked to service requests, work orders, repair costs, and other information. These items can also be queried to identify prior repair histories, recurring or pending maintenance needs, or pending inspection needs.

Environment, Natural Resources, And Sustainability

“ The greatest threat to the natural resources and ecology of the Town of Rye is habitat loss, alteration resulting from development, and from climate change altering the landscape.”

– 2021 Natural Resource Inventory

INTRODUCTION

A RESILIENT NATURAL ENVIRONMENT

Rye’s natural resources encompass eight miles of Atlantic Ocean coastline, along with numerous wetlands, surface waters, groundwater, and upland forests. These resources provide essential benefits to the local ecology and our community, including hazard mitigation, recreation, and tourism opportunities. These benefits are often referred to as ecosystem services and are essential to the quality of life in Rye. From the smallest park or residential yard, to town-owned conservation lands, to privately owned forested areas, the soil and vegetation have the potential to offer a variety of ecosystem services and nature-based solutions. These can be described as:

Ecosystem services - the many benefits that nature provides for humans and other species, and

Nature-based solutions – the efforts residents take to protect forest lands, plant meadows, and restore wetlands as fundamental strategies for addressing the climate crisis.

Rye’s network of natural resources also acts as a vital defense against climate change, serving as a crucial component in climate mitigation efforts. Protecting and stewarding the full range of natural areas in Rye with recognition of these concepts will require strategic action by the community.



A SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITY

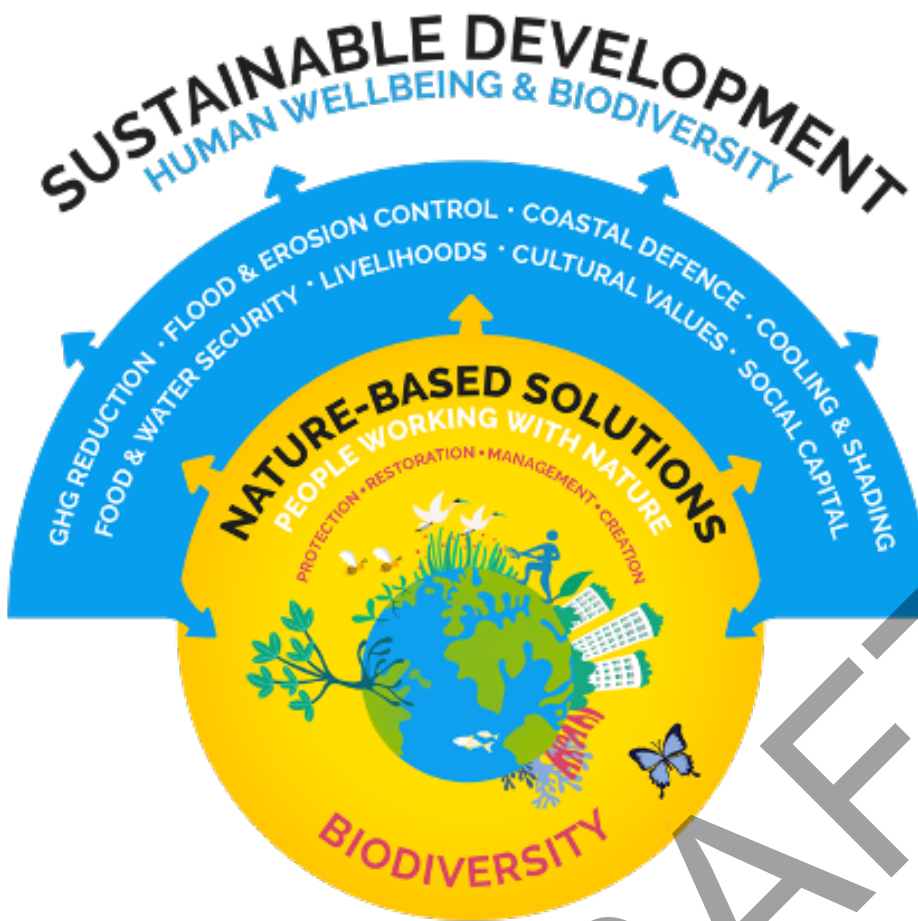
Rye’s sustainability initiatives extend beyond natural resource protection and management. Sustainability influences all sectors of life including how we use energy, how our buildings are designed, how we manage our waste, and how people are able to move between destinations. In 2023, Rye took a big step forward in their commitment to renewable energy by becoming a Community Power Community. Now, most public and private buildings are powered through the Community Power program and are using at least 24% renewable energy.

To continue enhancing our community’s sustainability, further efforts will be needed in the coming decade to expand renewable energy usage, and to promote non-motorized and electric vehicle transportation

alternatives. To accomplish this, there will need to be easy access to New Hampshire-based research and educational resources, and residents should be welcomed in to learn and guide these forward-looking initiatives.

“Sustainability is meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.”

– As defined by the United Nations



ECOSYSTEM SERVICES AND NATURE-BASED SOLUTIONS

Ecosystem services refer to the many benefits that nature provides for humans and other species – both direct or indirect– and small or large. Services include clean air and water, carbon storage, flood control, food production, pollination, recreation, climate change mitigation, and many others. Rye’s natural resources and open spaces provide these services to residents and other community members. Future generations and wildlife deserve the benefits of our natural areas and it is our responsible to ensure that stewardship of our natural assets is a priority.

Nature-based solutions include efforts to protect forest lands, plant meadows, and restore wetlands as fundamental strategies for addressing the climate crisis. Nature-based solutions are critical, reducing carbon emissions by removing said carbon from the atmosphere and locking it away in the vegetation and soil of these systems. They increase the resilience of our ecosystems and lower climate change risks for residents. Nature-based solutions provide an opportunity for everyone to get involved in the solutions needed, and ensure that future generations will benefit from improved human, economic, and ecosystem health.

DIRECTING OUR EFFORTS

Looking ahead, Rye’s goals for future planning include:

- ▶ Advancing policies, initiatives, and investments that protect environmental assets, and maintain natural resource services.
- ▶ Supporting actions that facilitate sustainability across municipal governance and facilities management, creating policies that support sustainability, facilitating community engagement, and coordinating sustainability action.

INVENTORY AND TRENDS

The natural lands, diverse resources, and conservation areas in our town have shaped the character of the community and play a critical role in climate adaptation and mitigation. Rye’s natural resources have been extensively inventoried in Rye’s 2021 Natural Resource Inventory. Two natural resource categories have been identified as being particularly important to Rye’s character. First, the beaches and tidal marshes are year-round attractions for both residents and visitors, offering tourism opportunities and serving as tidal buffers.

Existing Conditions: Natural Resources - Wildlife Habitat

Town of Rye, New Hampshire

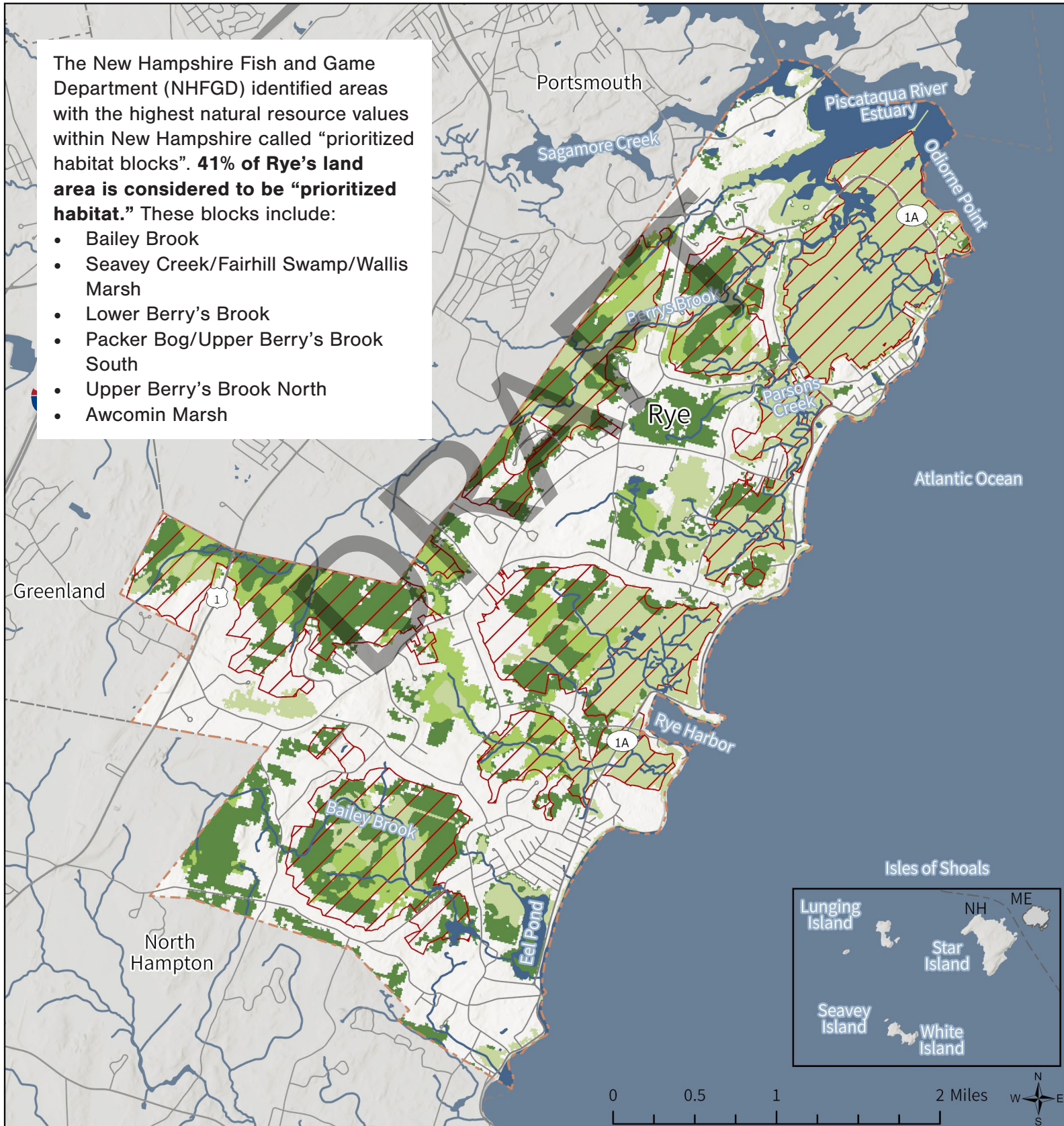
Map created for planning purposes
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Data Sources: NH GRANIT, Maine GeoLibrary,
NHD, NWI, NHDES, NHFGD, CTC
Coordinate System: NAD 1983 State Plane New
Hampshire FIPS 2800 (US Feet)
Map by: C. Bunyon, FB Environmental

- Town Boundary
- Town of Rye
- Road
- Coastal Waters/
Waterbody
- River/Stream

- Highest Ranked Habitat
in New Hampshire
- Highest Ranked Habitat
in Biological Region
- Supporting Landscapes
- Prioritized Habitat Blocks



Second, the uplands contribute to Rye's semi-rural character and include valued conservation lands.

The Town of Rye contains 2,632 acres of forests, making up 31% of its total land area. Rye's forested lands provide valuable habitats, support natural communities, offer scenic landscapes, and serve as recreational areas. Habitat for wildlife include Appalachian Oak-Pine forests, temperate swamps, salt marshes, and wet meadow/shrub wetlands which cover 4,896 in Rye or 57% of the Town's area. One example of a rare natural community found in Rye is the Atlantic White Cedar swamp, which were previously inventoried in Rye's Bailey Brook sub-watershed.

Over 2,164 acres of natural land are conserved in Rye, totaling 25% of the town. Much of the land is town-owned, including salt marshes, such as the Awcomin Salt Marsh, Fairhill Marsh, and Parson's Creek Marsh; and forested areas, like the Rye Town Forest, that allow the community to engage with the natural environment. There

are also protected lands in town that are state-owned, such as Odiorne Point State Park and Jenness State Beach.

Wetlands and waterways are prominent features in Rye, providing pollutant filtration, nutrient uptake, floodwater storage, and scenic value as tidal marshlands along the coast. Wetlands cover about 30% of Rye, extending beyond the coastal areas, with over 42 miles of waterways, including Berrys Brook, Seavey Creek, Witch Creek, Parsons Creek, and Bailey Brook, throughout town. It is important to also note that only 24% of Rye's wellhead protection areas are currently conserved.

Protected natural land in Rye also helps manage stormwater and storm surges during flooding, as it acts like a sponge, absorbing excess water more effectively than developed areas. It is important to know that 29% of Rye is classified as the Highest Ranked Habitat in New Hampshire, and 25% of the town lies within the 100- or 500-year floodplain. However, habitat fragmentation for terrestrial and aquatic ecosystems is increasing



COASTAL CONSERVATION FOCUS AREAS

The [New Hampshire Coastal Watershed Conservation Plan](#) was developed in 2021 by The Nature Conservancy. Spanning 52 communities across New Hampshire and Maine, the coastal watershed is the geographic area that drains into the Atlantic Ocean from the Piscataqua River, the Hampton-Seabrook Estuary, and the coastline in between. Rye is one of these communities.

The Plan identifies priority coastal conservation focus areas for each municipality within the coastal watershed of New Hampshire. The Plan also aligns efforts to protect high priority lands in the coastal watershed. These include:

- Drinking water source protection and groundwater recharge
- Wildlife habitat and corridor protection
- Flood reduction and salt marsh habitat protection
- Local farm productivity

Many of the prioritized lands identified in Rye are adjacent to existing conservation land and are located throughout the community. This Plan should be used to inform and guide land protection efforts in Rye over the next 10+ years.

COMMUNITY POWER

In 2021, the Rye Energy Committee proposed an electric aggregation plan to the Select Board, which recommended the implementation of Rye Community Power (RCP). Rye residents voted to adopt the plan in March 2022, and it took effect in April 2023. The plan involved joining the Community Power Coalition of NH (CPCNH), a member-owned, non-profit community power agency that procures and administers electricity supply.

The Community Power alternative was created because the New Hampshire Legislature found that allowing municipalities and counties the local control to aggregate retail electric customers for the purpose of accessing competitive markets for supplies of electricity and related energy services was beneficial for many reasons.

The resulting benefits include lowering costs, creating cost effective and innovative energy solutions, and careful consideration of local conditions and opportunities. In the end, Community Power creates more choices for customers, the collective buying power to drive down cost, and the local control to allow New Hampshire communities to chart their own energy futures.



RYE COMMUNITY POWER Town of Rye NH

due to development, leading to habitat loss or disconnection. This works against Rye's Vision and Future Land Use Strategy which calls for greater connectivity across the community for the movement of people and wildlife. Retaining habitat connectivity will also ensure that water and other elements of the natural resource network can flow and migrate as needed without negatively impacting the built environment.

Over the past decade, Rye has also demonstrated a strong commitment to sustainability through its renewable energy, energy efficiency, and climate resilience related initiatives. Accomplishments include:

- ▶ Completing energy audits for all town buildings.
- ▶ Converting all town buildings to LED lighting.
- ▶ Evaluating municipal buildings for solar energy system installations.
- ▶ Installed solar panels on Rye Junior High and Rye Elementary School.
- ▶ Becoming a Community Power town in 2023 and participating in the New Hampshire Community Power Coalition.

In 2021, an analysis conducted by the Energy Committee assessed the annual carbon dioxide emissions of Rye's buildings based on heating type, cost, and overall energy usage. At that time, 1,806 buildings in Rye were heated with oil, 651 with propane, and 177 with electricity. The assessment serves as an important baseline to measure against as public and private buildings switch to lower carbon emitting infrastructure for heating, cooling, and power.

Rye's active Energy Committee has also identified potential renewable energy projects, the need for expanded electric vehicle charging infrastructure, and has identified the need to research microgrid infrastructure to enhance the town's sustainability and resilience.

COMMUNITY PERSPECTIVES

There is more work to be done.

About half of all residents (51%) that participated in the Rye 2035 master planning process do not think Rye does enough to safeguard its natural resources. Another 18% of respondents were unsure. Participants collectively

expressed a desire to balance future development activity with environmental protection, and to promote sustainable practices while engaging residents in preserving Rye’s natural resources for future generations.

Our unique resources need our attention.

The top natural resources that respondents identified as needing further protection and stewardship in Rye are as follows:

- Drinking water resources – our groundwater,
- Surface water resources - such as Parson’s Creek and watershed,
- Rye’s beaches – including Jenness and others,
- Wetlands and marshes – both fresh and salt water,
- Forests and fields – regardless of their existing ownership.

A multi-faceted approach to natural resource protection is needed.

The top three natural resource protection strategies identified by participants included land conservation, regulations and enforcement, and public education and engagement. Together, these strategies provide a means of communicating the importance of Rye’s natural resources, and a combination of regulatory and non-regulatory approaches to aid in their protection and stewardship.

The greatest potential for renewable energy in Rye is solar.

When it comes to sustainability, there are a range of perspectives among residents on the potential to increase renewable energy production in Rye. Solar energy was the most favored alternative, while wind energy faces some considerable opposition. Many residents expressing opposition to wind energy were concerned with its visual impact, potential harm to wildlife, and perceived inefficiency.

What role should town government play?

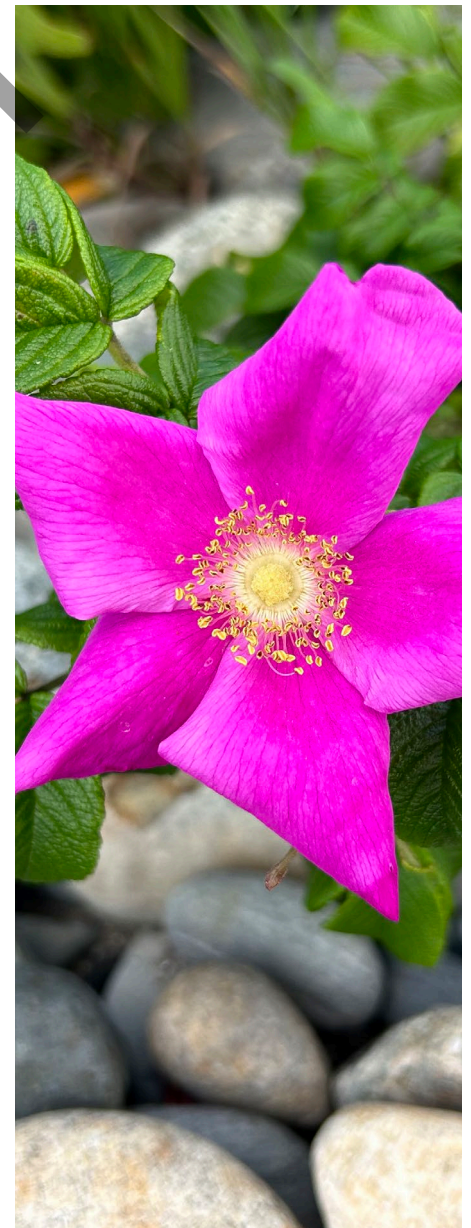
There are also mixed views on the role that town government should play in supporting energy efficiency and renewable energy production. Most respondents (80%) are in support of Rye producing more renewable energy on municipal property and buildings. However, only 52% of respondents expressed support for renewable energy production on private property. Responses indicate a large percent of the participants do not recognize the threat of climate change, and many myths related to sea level rise and sustainability will need to be addressed in the years ahead.

Sustainability efforts should be tackled from many angles.

Mechanisms for promoting greater sustainability that were highlighted favorably include financial incentives, simplification of regulatory processes, educational support, and collaboration with state and federal programs. Overall, there was also a strong emphasis on respecting individual property rights and minimizing taxpayer burden while implementing any renewable energy initiatives.

“ Education on available options and resources is great, but Rye should not be financially assisting individual residents.”

– Rye 2035 Community Forum/Online Tool Participant





FUTURE PRIORITIES

STRATEGIC CONSERVATION

Future conservation efforts in Rye should be informed by the best available local and regional data. An ongoing commitment to revisiting and updating necessary sections of the 2021 Natural Resource Inventory (NRI) regularly will ensure Rye is being guided by the most up-to-day information about its natural resources. As stated as a recommendation in the NRI, the creation of a strategic conservation plan for Rye would also prioritize the protection of undeveloped lands in town to enhance Rye's coastal resilience, safeguard water resources, and establish greater connectivity for people and wildlife. A conservation plan will also help Rye utilize its resources and capacity efficiently as it balances this work with other town initiatives.

“Future conservation acquisitions should be strategic and analyzed for maximizing connectivity with current conserved parcels.”

– Rye 2035 Community Forum/Online Tool Participant

With the support of residents, future conservation efforts have the potential to protect aquifers, priority habitats, wellhead protection zones, coastal properties, and marshes. The success of Rye's efforts will be heavily dependent on the town's collaboration with local land conservation organizations to secure available open spaces, and a diverse funding strategy. Land protection efforts should also be paired with strong stewardship

efforts on conservation lands including the planting of native species and the adoption of sustainable land management practices that support wildlife and ensure a full range of ecosystem services.

WATER QUALITY AND QUANTITY PROTECTION

Wetland protection and restoration, stormwater mitigation, groundwater protection, and other water resource needs are critical to the future of Rye. This is an issue of both quality and quantity. To accomplish this, Rye is committed to continuing efforts to engage landowners and foster stormwater best management practices as required under the town's MS4 permit. Regular monitoring and investigatory sampling of Rye's water bodies will also be necessary to inform these efforts.

Water resource protection is also a focus of Rye's future

land conservation efforts and should include the protection of headwater streams. Particularly Berry's Brook where the impacts of pollution on the brook's water quality restrict fishing currently; and Bailey Brook sub-watershed, which is home to important groundwater resources including a gravel well, two bedrock sites, and other potential wells currently under investigation.

As development activity continues in Rye, the town should consider requiring or incentivizing green infrastructure, low impact design, nature-based solutions, and stormwater infiltration best practices through Rye's land use regulations. A coordinated effort should also be made to inventory all properties along shorelines to determine which landowners have old septic systems that need to be upgraded. If no regulatory mechanism is in place, educational materials can be provided to these property owners to inform them of possible funding sources for septic system replacement.

LAND STEWARDSHIP

Over the coming decade, the town and its conservation partners should maintain existing stewardship plans (and create stewardship plans for open spaces without one) for each of the major public open spaces in Rye. Stewardship plans provide an opportunity to enhance



WATER QUALITY ISSUES IN RYE

Rye's water resources are diverse and abundant and clean water that is plentiful is a key part of Rye's vision for the future. Threats to Rye's water resources include poorly planned development, polluted stormwater runoff, climate change, contamination, and others. A summary of the most pressing threats is included below:

Waterbody Contamination: Some of Rye's water bodies have been classified as having water quality impairments, or presence of pollutants, specifically for aquatic life and for fish/shellfish consumption. Impairments, and their durations, are increasing. Berry's Brook, Eel Pond, and Lower Sagamore Creek are impaired for aquatic life. Berry's Brook, Parson's Creek, Lower Sagamore creek, Rye Harbor, and Witch Creek are impaired for fish and shellfish consumption. The Town of Rye has also been monitoring fecal sources in Parson's Creek since 2008 to investigate, trace, and work towards remediation of bacterial pollution.

Drinking Water Contamination: Saltwater intrusion is a top concern for the Town's drinking water, as well as pollution from development and septic systems. Drinking water contamination has also occurred at three of four water distribution sites in the Rye Water District in 2023. Contamination from insufficient or malfunctioning septic systems is likely to become an increasing problem as climate change progresses and sea levels rise. Current work aims to understand how septic systems may be impacted by saltwater intrusion. Additionally, 76% of the wellhead protection areas are not held under permanent land conservation. Natural land cover protects the underlying groundwater resources.

Freshwater Marsh Degradation: Marsh degradation from saltwater inundation threatens the health and stability of marshes, and marsh erosion and flooding from more severe storms are increasing.

“ I think Rye is doing a great job with conservation and habitat, but I also think there is more we can do.”

– Rye community member during master plan outreach

resources, improve public access for all, and incorporate alternative management approaches that enhance nature-based solutions. The Conservation Commission has suggested that there be an emphasis on addressing invasive species, and a commitment to keep waterfront areas and adjacent lands clean, free from trash, debris, and dog waste to maintain environmental quality and public enjoyment.

PUBLIC EDUCATION

If residents would like to emphasize natural resource protection and a sustainable future, there must be a commitment to public outreach and education. This will garner public support, communicate the importance of Rye’s natural resources and the big issues Rye is facing, and build momentum for this objective that requires the whole community to be achieved. These efforts must be ongoing and creative if they are going to effectively raise awareness about Rye’s natural resources,

best management practices, and environmental assets. Specific efforts may include educating town staff and the community on ways to reduce fertilizer, pesticide, and herbicide use. Such a campaign should include a broad set of topics that appeal to a variety of residents and inspire action. Outreach may also include ongoing efforts to inform the community of Rye’s Community Power Program, energy efficiency upgrades to consider, and other sustainability issues.

COMMUNITY POWER

To enhance energy resilience and sustainability, Rye 2035 recommends increasing participation in the Community Power Program through ongoing public education and outreach efforts. This should also be used as an opportunity to get existing participants to increase the percent

of renewable energy they are purchasing.

The town should also explore the development of microgrids that could provide a distributed energy opportunity. Such an approach would allow municipal facilities and other essential services to be connected to the utility grid, and then to be disconnected and placed in “island” mode during an emergency.

Expanding access to three-phase power is also identified as a priority to improve infrastructure reliability and future opportunities for renewable energy production in Rye. Together, these initiatives aim to bolster the town’s energy security and adaptability while reducing its carbon emissions.



Above: Solar panels on the roof of the Seacoast Science Center in Rye, NH

RENEWABLE ENERGY DEVELOPMENT AND ENERGY EFFICIENCY

A commitment to strategies that promote renewable energy and energy efficiency in Rye is essential if residents want to reach the stated vision of a resilient and sustainable community. This will include developing additional community solar projects on town-owned land or buildings, reducing regulatory barriers, and the development of larger solar installations that expand access to renewable energy locally.

The adoption of building codes that align with the International Energy Conservation Code has also been recommended to achieve Rye's energy reduction targets. A comprehensive local campaign that supports and incentivizes residents, landowners, and businesses to implement energy efficiency measures, upgrade heating systems, install renewable energy systems, and invest in battery storage, will also help to round out the town's effort to meet its sustainability goals.

SUSTAINABLE TRANSPORTATION

With a recognition that the transportation sector in New Hampshire is producing 45% of the emissions in the state, Rye is committing to accessible and sustainable transportation options. This will build on the pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure initiatives mentioned elsewhere in Rye 2035 and reduce Rye's carbon footprint. It should include efforts to transition Rye's



municipal fleet to electric vehicles, with a focus on the feasibility and benefits of such a shift.

The increase in privately owned electric vehicles also calls for strategically investing in electric vehicle charging stations. This is an opportunity to accommodate the needs of travelers and to support Rye's local economy. The primary benefit of chargers near retail and hospitality locations is attracting customers. It has been documented that this can lead to increased time spent at these locations, and charging infrastructure can generate additional income for the landowner.

SUSTAINABILITY AS A FRAMEWORK

Sustainability touches all aspects of community life. To truly work toward a sustainable future for Rye, sustainability must be embedded in how the town functions, examines projects, uses its resources, and manages waste. Energy and transportation are the largest energy consumers in the state of New Hampshire, and focusing our initial efforts in these sectors over the next 10+ years will have a great impact on our community.

Community



“Affordable housing.
Affordable child care.
Recreation facilities for
all.”

*— Rye resident comment on
the 2021 Community Survey*

INTRODUCTION

Rye is a vibrant community that thrives on the connection between its natural beauty, rich heritage, and residents' commitment to maintaining a high quality of life. However, the population is aging and the cost of housing is making it more difficult for younger residents and families to compete for housing in Rye.

A vital and livable community is shaped by several key factors that enhance the daily lives of all residents and foster a strong sense of belonging. Access to quality housing, efficient transportation systems, and essential services such as healthcare, education, and public safety all contribute to a community's overall vitality. Recreation opportunities, such as parks, outdoor spaces, and cultural activities all play a crucial role in promoting physical and mental well-being. They do so while supporting active lifestyles, preserving local heritage, gathering residents together, and reinforcing Rye's community identity. Ultimately, all of this strengthens social connections between residents and pride in the community.

Building a strong, inclusive community in Rye will require thoughtful and ongoing planning that considers the needs of all populations. As the town continues to grow and evolve, equity and inclusion should be at the forefront of decision-making processes. Ensuring that all populations—regardless of age, income, or background—have equal access to resources,



housing, and services fosters a sense of belonging for everyone. When communities plan with a focus on inclusion, they create environments where residents not only meet their basic needs but also thrive, ensuring long-term sustainability and resilience for future generations.

Resilience is not just about bouncing back from adversity; it is also about adapting and growing stronger. Communities that prioritize fostering social connections through inclusive events, shared spaces, and collaborative decision-making tend to be more adaptable in the face of change. By fostering a culture of connection and cooperation, Rye will be better equipped to navigate uncertainty, making the town not only more resilient in the short term but also more sustainable and thriving in the long term.

DIRECTING OUR EFFORTS

Looking ahead, Rye's goals for future planning include:

- ▶ Provide services and access to tools and amenities that create and foster connectivity, engagement, communication, and trust across all age groups.
- ▶ Launch town wide and neighborhood initiatives to bring people together for conversation, discussion of issues and ideas, and sharing of challenges and needs.
- ▶ Ensure equitable access to basic human needs including housing, transportation, recreation, and more.

INVENTORY AND TRENDS

Rye is home to 5,605 residents as of 2023, reflecting a small increase in population since 2010, when the town had 5,543 individuals. While the growth over this time period is modest, it underscores Rye's desirability as a place to live. Household sizes are also decreasing in Rye, so even a stable population will require additional housing units over time.

Understanding the composition of Rye's population today and the likelihood of changes ahead is essential to planning for future services and infrastructure. There is an estimated need for an additional 476 housing units by 2040, as reported in the 2023 Regional Housing Needs Assessment. This further illustrates the importance of accommodating population growth in a sustainable way, and presents an opportunity to plan for the types of units that

are needed most to support current and future residents.

One of the most defining characteristics of Rye's population is its aging demographic. According to the 2020 U.S. Census data, 39% of Rye's residents are over 65 years old, and the town's average age has risen to 55.6 years, compared to 49.1 in 2010. This trend is indicative of an increasing older adult population, which can place unique demands on healthcare, housing, and community services. In contrast, only 17% of the population is under 18 years old, highlighting the need for infrastructure and services that cater to both the aging population and younger families, who are critical to the community's long-term vitality.

Housing is a key aspect of Rye's population dynamics. The town's housing is predominantly owner-occupied, with only 14% of units

“ It is too expensive for young people or families. There is not enough variety of types of housing in town.”

– Rye community member during master plan outreach

classified as rental properties. The number of rental units has declined by about a third since 2010, while demand for short-term rentals has grown, with 80 short-term rental units identified in 2021. Rye also has a significant number of seasonal housing units, accounting for 21% of the town's housing stock. This seasonal nature of the housing market combined with the regional draw of visitors also influences municipal service demands, and creates unique



challenges for managing Rye’s infrastructure and community services year-round.

Rye’s economic profile indicates it is a generally affluent community, with a median household income of \$137,969 as of 2022 and a per capita income of \$98,421. However, 4.1% of the population still lives below the poverty level, emphasizing the importance of ensuring that future planning efforts consider the needs of all residents, regardless of income level.

As Rye plans for its future, addressing the decreasing number of rental units, the increasing demand for smaller units and rental units, and providing more affordable housing options will be crucial for maintaining an equitable and diverse community.

COMMUNITY PERSPECTIVES

Although some see Rye as an age-friendly community, there is room for improvement.

A notable 54% of community members who participated in the Rye 2035 planning process believe Rye is already an age-friendly town. The remaining participants either disagreed or were unsure.

To make Rye more inclusive for all ages, participants consistently called for the creation of a community center and more gathering spaces to foster multi-generational interaction and socialization. Affordable housing for seniors, young

adults, and middle-income residents was also identified as a priority, along with a safer and more accessible transportation network. This would include better walking and biking routes, improved beach access, and expanded transportation options for seniors and disabled individuals, all aimed at enhancing the town’s sense of community and accessibility.

Not all community members needs are being met in Rye.

In the development of Rye 2035, public participation revealed that 50% of respondents felt the needs of all community members are not being fully met. Many emphasized the need for more affordable housing, particularly for lower-income families, seniors on fixed incomes, and younger members of the workforce.

Suggested strategies included requiring a percentage of affordable units in new developments, encouraging the use of accessory dwelling units (ADUs), and providing tax credits for low-income elderly homeowners. Additionally, respondents highlighted the importance of improving transportation services, such as handicap-accessible vans, shuttle services to neighboring areas, and public transit options.

RYE 400

To celebrate the 400-year anniversary of Rye’s first European settlement in 1623, as an initiative by the Rye Historical Society, a 501(c) (3), tax-exempt organization, the Rye400 Committee was formed. The Rye400 Committee was formed to provide robust historic educational events to Rye residents to raise awareness of the unique history and heritage of Rye. Some of these events included community celebrations such as Rye Day held in July 2023, while other events included tours of homes and significant landmarks or structures, historic lectures, artist observation, auctions, and many others to promote the sense of community and historic awareness of Rye’s heritage. Permanent Rye400 signs are displayed throughout town.



There are growing concerns about preserving the semi-rural atmosphere amidst the need for new housing development.

To address this many residents favor smaller dispersed units that would fit the town's character and scale. If larger residential structures are needed, participants generally agreed that parcels along Route 1 would be more suitable for higher-density housing, particularly for workforce or affordable housing. However, some residents expressed skepticism about allowing any further development, citing concerns over the adequacy of local infrastructure to support additional growth. This perspective will need to be addressed along with the reality of New Hampshire's Workforce Housing Law during implementation.

Involvement in local governmental affairs is impacted by many factors.

Another pressing issue in Rye is the increasing difficulty of recruiting volunteers for municipal boards and committees. Despite this challenge, civic groups have emerged outside of municipal government to monitor and inform community actions. This trend raises questions about the relationship between these groups and Rye's local government, and whether there are opportunities to involve them more directly in municipal decision-making. Concerns about a lack of transparency, trust, and effective communication within local government have fueled this shift, with unclear decision-making processes and perceived favoritism further eroding residents' confidence in their leaders. The rise of outside civic groups and the prevalence of

social media discussions have led to an increased division in Rye, with instances of incivility and ideological conflict driving a wedge between residents and deterring engagement in the community's governance.

FUTURE PRIORITIES

A MULTI-GENERATIONAL COMMUNITY

To ensure that Rye is a multi-generational community in the future, the town should explore opportunities to expand its recreational infrastructure to meet broad public needs. This expansion may include adding new parks, trails, playgrounds, racquet/basketball courts, playing fields, and a bicycle pump track. Additionally, investigating the feasibility of a dedicated indoor recreation center could address year-

HISTORIC RYE CENTER



Parsons Family Home
The Parsons family built this home circa 1787 and by the 1900s three generations of doctors had served the Town from this house. In 1979, the adjoining field and forest totaling 50 acres became protected conservation land thanks to the generous effort of Parsons Park Corporation.

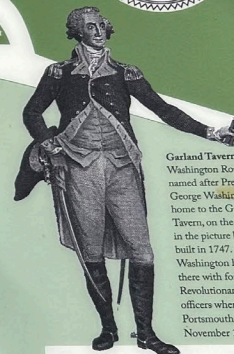
Rye Congregational Church
Rye Congregational Church is the fourth church to sit on this sacred ground. Rye's first church was built in 1726. The second church served Rye from 1756 to 1837 followed by the third church, also known as the Congregational Church, pictured right circa 1900, which burned on March 19, 1959. The current church opened in 1961.



View Toward Rye Center circa 1891
Looking up Central Road towards Rye Center, the central steeple would appear on the right in 1893. In the mid-1800's this would be a view of these churches. In 1873 the town bought the Methodist Episcopal church on Central Road and converted it to a Town Hall.



CENTRAL ROAD
War Monument



Garland Tavern
Washington Road, named after President George Washington, was home to the Garland Tavern, on the right in the picture below, built in 1747. President Washington had drinks there with former Revolutionary War officers when he visited Portsmouth on or about November 1, 1789.



WASHINGTON ROAD

WALLIS ROAD

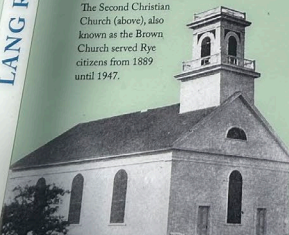


Wedgewood School
On the current field that is adjacent to Rye Junior High built in 1934 sat the Center or Wedgewood School. It burned to the ground on February 14, 1932. A neighbor reported ashes from burning school books flying down on her house to the delight of the students.

LANG ROAD



The First and Second Christian Church
The Public Safety Building is located where two former churches sat. The First Christian Church existed from 1839 to 1888. The Second Christian Church (above), also known as the Brown Church served Rye citizens from 1889 until 1947.



OLD PARISH ROAD



Rye Public Library
The Rye Public Library was built in 1911 with a bequest from Mary Tuck Rand. The first addition was added circa 1968 and the second in 1998.



Town of Rye Museum
Originally built by Mildred Wilson as an antique shop on an adjacent lot, this building has housed the Town of Rye Museum, managed by the Rye Historical Society, since 2002.

Photos courtesy of Rye Historical Society

round recreational needs for all ages. There is also potential to add new trails on existing or conserved lands, enhancing trail connectivity throughout the community. Evaluating elder services in Rye and the surrounding region is also an essential step to ensure they adequately serve the town's aging population.

Efforts to highlight Rye's history and culture through public art and interpretive signage at key locations can draw the community together, reinforce its identity, and foster a deeper sense of community. Providing educational resources to the public on the relationship between Rye's history, heritage, recreation, conservation, and community pride can also further strengthen community identity and engagement. The housing, transportation, and infrastructure related actions needed to ensure Rye is a multi-generational community have been addressed in other themes, and are identified in the Implementation Section of Rye 2035.

PRESERVING OUR HERITAGE

Heritage refers to the collective history visible in the community, ranging from Rye's development pattern, to farms, to scenic resources and vistas, to historic buildings. Rye's

heritage is important in maintaining the town's natural beauty and preserving what makes Rye special. Continued preservation and maintenance of Rye's historic resources should be a priority as future land use is guided in town.

PUBLIC SPACES AND COMMUNITY EVENTS

Building personal connections between residents creates greater social capital. This is an ongoing need that is vital to fostering a strong sense of community in Rye. Supporting existing annual community events and identifying opportunities for new ones can pull people together and strengthen these connections. The town can utilize existing spaces, such as parks, school gyms, and the library to continue offering community-building and recreation programs.

Additionally, creating new public outdoor gathering spaces, as opportunities arise, will allow for flexible programming, events, and informal gatherings that further strengthen the town's social fabric. This is a critical need in Rye to improve communications and trust among residents, and contributes to the quality of life for all residents regardless of age.

NEIGHBORHOOD HERITAGE DISTRICTS

Rye's residents have expressed a strong preference for maintaining semi-rural character. The presence of historic homes, barns, outbuildings, fields, forests, farm land, stonewalls, and gardens add to the charm and unique character of Rye. Maintaining these structures and land resources is seen as essential to preserving the Town's identity, and concern exists about their protection. Rye's preservation efforts are guided by its Historic District Commission, Heritage Commission, and are evident in the Rye Historic District in the town center. The community may also wish to explore a neighborhood heritage district or heritage area district.

A heritage district can be a handful of buildings, a larger neighborhood, or buildings linked by a common natural feature such as rural setting. The heritage district is subject to zoning, under a more flexible, less restrictive framework than a historic district. Goals may include protecting rural character, encouraging compatible alterations and additions, encouraging both traditional design and contemporary design that enhances the heritage district, and others. The Town of Stratham has a heritage district like this.

To create this district, the neighborhood with support from the historic and/or heritage commission presents the planning board/staff with a district proposal which outlines the need, purpose, and how it is connected to the objectives in the Master Plan. A preliminary plan to establish standards under which the district is administered, and draft ordinance are prepared by neighborhood representatives and reviewed by the planning board for the warrant article at town meeting. Once the ordinance is passed, the Planning Board creates a Neighborhood Advisory Committee and neighborhood representatives sit on the advisory review board.

RYE'S RECREATION ROAD MASTER SITE PLAN

The 55 Recreation Road facility hosts the Town's recreation offerings and is the location of heavily used athletic fields and recreation assets. With significant use, demand for more recreation space, and the need for overall facility improvement, the Rye Recreation Commission initiated the update of its facility master plan.

The 2023 Rye Recreation Road Master Plan analyzes Rye's existing Recreation Area, presents a conceptual plan, and provides next step options to work towards implementation. After meetings with Town staff and Committees, and conducting a public online survey, the conceptual design plan is based on the list of desires determined by the Rye Recreation Commission. These include a new Rye Recreation Department office and meeting space, new recreation facilities, the addition of vehicle parking, expansion of trails, new public restroom facilities and others.

Municipalities use varied methods to raise funds for public projects such as the improvement of recreation facilities. In Rye the plan is to incorporate the needed investments into the capital improvement plan over a six-year period.

RECREATION

The Town of Rye will focus on the implementation of the Recreation Master Plan, identifying and prioritizing recreational facilities that need improvements to address safety, access, and maintenance concerns. To support this effort, the town will need to estimate the related costs and develop a six-year schedule that can be integrated into the Capital Improvement Program (CIP). Expanding the capacity and funding for park and recreation field maintenance will also be crucial to meeting public demand. Additionally, enhancing existing facilities by adding amenities like a picnic pavilion, trash cans, bike racks, dog waste bags, free-standing accessible restrooms, and water fountains will improve the user experience and ensure these facilities appeal to a broad range of residents. The town should also collaborate with the state to make improvements to Wallis Sands Beach, focusing on universally accessible restroom facilities, trash receptacles, and improved year-round access.

Further efforts should be directed toward enhancements at Goss Farm and Parson's Field to ensure they become better-utilized community gathering spaces. The town should also explore opportunities to expand recreation infrastructure by adding new parks, trails, playgrounds, athletic courts and fields, and possibly a bicycle pump track over time. The desire for a dedicated indoor recreation center could also provide new year-round options

and is worthy of additional investigation. Additionally, the town should seek opportunities to add new trails on existing or conserved lands and improve trail connectivity throughout the community.

ACCESSIBILITY

Being an equitable and inclusive community requires attention to accessibility related issues. In Rye this should include improving the universal accessibility of all public facilities, as well as the transportation network, parks, and public spaces to ensure inclusivity for all residents. To encourage the use of the town's parks, open spaces, and recreation resources, Rye can promote these assets to residents by creating a public mapping layer of open spaces, trails, parks, and playgrounds on the town's website.

Additionally, the town should maintain maps of all parks and recreation resources, distribute them at key locations, such as the town office and library, promote maps online, improve signage and trail markings, and partner with local organizations to identify further strategies for outreach. Future collaborations between the Recreation Department and Rye Senior SERVE could lead to day trips and outings for older adults, while maintaining strong partnerships with entities like the Rye School District, Public Library, and other community organizations.

Implementation





IMPLEMENTING RYE 2035

To achieve the Vision and Future Land Use Strategy outlined in Rye 2035, our community will need to come together to support and take action collaboratively. Whether you are a voter, a business owner, a parent, serve on a board or committee, or participate in a partnering local or regional organization, there is a role for you in this effort. A set of implementation actions were created, with input from the Master Plan Steering Committee, to provide a clear roadmap for implementing Rye 2035. These actions, as of the 2024 adoption date of this Plan, are outlined on the following pages and are subject to change, review, and revisions as time progresses. Actions are organized by each of the Rye 2035 themes. There is also a set of general actions that are more administrative and relate to general implementation. Each action includes categories like:

- ▶ Responsible Parties
- ▶ Timeframe of Action
- ▶ Status of Action

To coordinate and oversee the varied actions, it is recommended that the Town establish a Master Plan Implementation Committee. This group should meet, at a minimum, 4 times throughout the calendar year. During the first year, it is suggested that this committee meet monthly to build momentum. This committee, which may be composed of Board/Committee Chairs, residents, department heads, or their designees, will prioritize and coordinate the completion of implementation actions outlined in Rye 2035 to ensure implementation action items are being worked on by the appropriate parties. A Committee like this would serve a supportive role and work with the various parties charged with implementing actions outlined in the Plan. A Master Plan Implementation Committee also monitors and reports on the progress toward the vision and future land use strategy in the Master Plan.

Responsibilities of this Committee could include.

- ▶ Tracking the implementation of the Town's Master Plan through 2035.

- ▶ Developing the administrative procedures and responsibilities of the committee.
- ▶ Working with staff and the Planning Board to prioritize action items to work on annually.
- ▶ Assisting with implementation by liaising with responsible parties to ensure commitments to implementing the plan are being met alongside their annual strategic and work plan activities.
- ▶ Identifying both successful strategies and barriers to progress and communicating them to the public.
- ▶ Providing regular progress updates to the Planning Board and Select Board, and annual updates to the public.
- ▶ Maintaining an updated live Action Plan spreadsheet to track implementation progress in a way that provides a high level of public transparency.
- ▶ Learning about related initiatives being coordinated by neighboring communities, state agencies, and federal partners and investigate collaboration opportunities.

WHAT ARE THE “BIG ACTIONS” LOOKING AHEAD?

The six highest priority actions Rye will work on over the next 10+ years include:

- ▶ **Amend Rye’s land use regulations over time** so that they achieve the Master Plan Vision and Future Land Use Strategy, and build off the 2024 Land Use Regulation Audit.
- ▶ **Increase Rye’s resilience to climate change and coastal hazards** through flood protection, infrastructure planning, enhanced emergency services, regulatory amendments, open space protection, and other efforts.
- ▶ **Coordinate a strategic land conservation initiative** that protects Rye’s natural resources (especially important wildlife habitat, water resources, and coastal areas), promotes connectivity, and provides outdoor recreation opportunities where appropriate.
- ▶ **Invest in people-centered transportation improvements** in Rye including enhanced pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure, safety upgrades, and improved connections, including to the NH Seacoast Greenway and other important destinations.
- ▶ **Diversify the housing types available to Rye residents** to better provide for a range of housing needs, and ensure a vibrant and multi-generational community through regulatory and non-regulatory initiatives.
- ▶ **Assess Rye’s municipal governmental structure and make improvements** to enhance coordination between departments, monitor staffing needs, increase citizen participation, improve town services, and increase volunteerism in town.



ACTION MATRIX

#	Action	Responsible Parties	Timeframe	Status
1. GENERAL ACTIONS				
1.1	Coordinate an annual end-of-year joint meeting of all boards, committees, and local officials in Rye that are active partners in the implementation of the Master Plan to evaluate progress from the past year and plan for the upcoming year. This would include the Planning Board, Select Board, Conservation Commission, Zoning Board, Town Departments, and other select groups.			
1.2	Regularly report on the progress of the 2035 Master Plan to the public through media channels, the town's email lists, a newsletter, and through the town's website.			
1.3	Provide a progress report on the Master Plan annually at Town Meeting and in the Town Report.			
1.4	Ensure the Town's Planning Department serves the role of "tracker" to document progress and the completion of specific action items in a master implementation table that includes detailed information including responsible party, potential partners, and level of priority. This will ensure consistency and accountability over the coming years.			
1.5	Annually review the goals identified in the Master Plan related to housing and other issues and amend them when necessary due to changes in conditions, information, or legal requirements. This should be done in manner that is coordinated with the Rye Beach Village District's efforts, when possible, given the unique planning and zoning relationship between the Town and Village District and compliance with RSA 674: 59.			
1.6	Consult with neighboring communities early in the implementation process about Rye's Master Plan and learn about their long-range planning efforts to determine opportunities and impacts.			
2. LAND AND DEVELOPMENT				
Economy and Future Development				
2.1	Create a Planning and Design Workshop Series for the Route 1 Corridor to create a vision for this area of town that is compatible with the Future Land Use Strategy. This will inform the drafting of land use regulations and infrastructure investments that will support the desired vision for this area of town. The resulting zoning should promote mixed use development, including housing and commercial activity, as outlined in Rye's Future Land Use Strategy.			
2.2	Work with the public to identify potential parcels in the Town Center suitable for small businesses, like a coffee shop, and ensure these areas are zoned to support and foster this type of development. Update land use regulations in this area to accommodate desired uses.			
2.3	Consider establishing a Tax Increment Financing District (TIF) to fund future investments along the Route 1 corridor.			
2.4	Consider establishing an impact fee ordinance per NHRSA §674:16.V to help meet the needs occasioned by certain development activities.			

#	Action	Responsible Parties	Timeframe	Status
2.5	Support existing businesses and the economy as well as promote and encourage new businesses and economic opportunities along the coast and beach areas, as part of the scenic coastal future land use strategy.			
2.6	Continue to improve the streetscape environment in the Town Center and the commercial areas of Rye's coastline by:			
2.7	Creating new and maintaining existing landscaped areas			
2.8	Maintaining and expanding pedestrian-scale walkways and lighting as needed,			
2.9	Incorporating wayfinding signage as needed, and			
2.10	Ensuring land use regulations support the creation of a pedestrian-oriented and vibrant streetscape.			
Water and Sewer				
2.11	Conduct studies of the existing water and sewer infrastructure capacity and service areas and the potential for new areas to be serviced. The findings from these efforts should be used to inform the location and density of future development within Rye.			
Housing Solutions				
2.12	Review the findings of the 2024 Rye Land Use Regulation Audit and pursue possible land use regulation modifications that increase housing opportunities. Engage the public in this process and consider the pros and cons, level of effort required, identify support (or lack thereof) for such changes, and anticipate the level of impact of these regulation changes would have on housing.			
2.13	Identify development regulation amendments that will help Rye meet its housing needs as identified in the 2023 Rye Housing Needs Assessment while maintaining the characteristics of the community expressed in the Master Plan. These could include:			
2.14	Promote accessory dwelling unit construction to homeowners as a viable option for earning supplementary income and contributing to Rye's housing solutions. This could include creating design guidance and educational materials on ADU construction, allowing detached ADUs by right, and reviewing the town's ADU regulations on a regular basis to identify ways to make improvements to the ordinance.			
2.15	Review the conservation land development ordinance and identify ways to reduce barriers and encourage this type of subdivision in town.			
2.16	Consider allowing duplexes by-right strategically in certain areas of town, following the Future Land Use Strategy.			
2.17	Investigate zoning changes to allow for higher density housing along the Route 1 corridor.			
2.18	Consider the establishment of an inclusionary zoning provision to promote the development of affordable housing units which could include, but is not limited to, density bonuses, growth control exemptions, and a streamlined application process.			
2.19	Assess the potential for a short-term rental ordinance and tracking mechanism to better regulate short term rentals in the community.			

#	Action	Responsible Parties	Timeframe	Status
2.20	Conduct additional public outreach on housing related land use regulation changes, particularly those regulation modifications that could be made to help Rye address the housing needs of residents and help the town to follow state housing laws.			
Multi-Modal Transportation Solutions				
2.21	Develop and adopt a town-wide Complete Streets Policy to ensure all new roadways are designed to accommodate all modes of transportation. This will ensure bicycle, pedestrian, and public transportation improvements, along with vehicular traffic improvements, are considered during roadway maintenance and planning projects to the greatest extent possible.			
2.22	Review the 2009 Safe Routes to School Plan and determine how it can inform future pedestrian infrastructure improvements in the town center, especially when looking at connectivity between the town center, junior high, and the elementary school.			
2.23	Expand pedestrian infrastructure, including sidewalks and multi-use paths, where appropriate and enhance pedestrian connectivity throughout town. Priority areas should be roads that connect active areas of town, like the coast or the town center; specific destinations, like the schools or recreation facilities; and neighborhoods where people live. At a minimum, this should include portions of Washington Road, Route 1A, Sagamore Road, and Wallis Road. Explore grant opportunities through NH Department of Transportation to help fund these projects.			
2.24	Expand bicycle infrastructure, including bicycle lanes and off-road paths, where appropriate and enhance connectivity throughout town. Priority areas should be roads that connect active areas of town, like the coast or the town center, and specific destinations, like the schools or recreation facilities; and neighborhoods where people live. Utilize NHDOT's recommended bike routes map to identify opportunities for bike infrastructure expansion.			
2.25	Investigate ways to connect potential bicycle traffic from the NH Seacoast Greenway by creating bike-friendly roadways that connect to key locations in Rye including the coastline.			
2.26	Coordinate with pertinent DOT projects, including Rye's RPC TAC representative. For ex, nascent planning is in the news for bicycle and pedestrian lanes on Rt. 1 Portsmouth from Ocean Road north to Wilson Road (Ocean is an east west road which is proximate to Rye's Lang Road). An overall plan may benefit the experience of multi-unit residential, commercial and mxd-use along Rt. 1.			
2.27	Improve beach accessibility. This includes identifying areas where pedestrian safety can be improved, including adding sidewalks, bike lanes, traffic calming, crossing devices, and improving parking regulations to alleviate congestion.			
2.28	Evaluate roads for sufficient emergency access and make improvements to those that are insufficient.			
2.29	Investigate the feasibility of expanding Rye's Senior Serve public transportation service.			

#	Action	Responsible Parties	Timeframe	Status
3. CLIMATE ADAPTATION AND RESILIENCE				
<i>The action items listed below are meant to be complementary and add to those thoroughly provided in previous reports such as the Rye Natural Resource Inventory, Rye Hazard Mitigation Plan, Rye Vulnerability Assessment, and others.</i>				
Building Code, Zoning, and Regulatory Changes				
2.30	Continue to allocate additional annual funding for regular road pavement projects. Repaving roads also provides an opportunity to create additional pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure. Investigate paving remaining unpaved roads, as appropriate.			
3.1	Continue to minimize development in areas likely to be inundated by sea level rise and storm surges through regulatory amendments and best practices. Consider the following:			
3.2	Review land use regulations and identify potential amendments based on the 2019 and future iterations of the NH Coastal Flood Risk Guidance.			
3.3	Implement zoning changes to prevent new construction in vulnerable areas of the coast.			
3.4	Adapt building codes to ensure new developments are designed to account for flooding, sea level rise, and increased storm intensity.			
3.5	Increase building setbacks in shoreland zones.			
3.6	Encourage the protection of riparian buffers and maintain floodplains in their natural state through updated zoning.			
3.7	Review Rye's wetland conservation ordinance to ensure it meets or exceeds best practices set out by the NH Department of Environmental Services for buffers, setbacks, etc.			
3.8	Prioritize water-dependent uses in flood risk areas. Examples include marinas, fishing and aquaculture operations, and recreational water uses.			
3.9	Evaluate existing vegetative buffer requirements and setbacks from tidal wetlands, freshwater wetlands, and surface waters and identify improvements to strengthen these to better address the impacts of climate change.			
3.10	Consider establishing a Coastal Hazard Overlay District with boundaries encompassing projected future flood hazard zones presented in the New Hampshire Coastal Viewer platform. The Coastal Hazard Overlay District should have higher regulatory standards to protect against flood impacts from sea-level rise and coastal storm surge. The Town of Durham recently adopted a Coastal Hazard Overlay District which applies higher standards for building freeboard height and other provisions to lessen vulnerability of new buildings and facilities to flooding due to sea level rise.			

#	Action	Responsible Parties	Timeframe	Status
Infrastructure Vulnerability Assessment and Resiliency Upgrades				
3.11	Consider establishing a marsh migration overlay zone to prohibit new development in areas of predicted marsh migration under specific scenarios and timeframes. Maintain ecosystem services (e.g. flood storage, storm surge attenuation) and allow for inland migration of tidal marsh systems and conversion of fresh freshwater systems to tidal systems to accommodate projected changes in sea-levels. Utilize the 2024 NH Salt Marsh Plan as a resource.			
3.12	Update property assessment practices to account for the impacts of sea level rise on future property values.			
3.13	Identify and conduct a vulnerability assessment of coastal infrastructure (such as roadways, culverts, hard structures, etc.). Engage other partners and landowners in these efforts as needed.			
3.14	Based on the assessment results, implement infrastructure improvements and coastal protection measures to minimize the impacts from flooding and erosion. This includes maintenance of existing infrastructure, and new measures that may include bank protection, berm construction, elevating the site on fill, constructing floodwalls, and upgrading drainage systems. Living shorelines should be utilized as much as possible to minimize the negative impacts of protection measures on local habitats, reduce “reflectance” of wave energy on adjacent sites, increase the lifespan and decrease management requirements for the protection measure, and provide environmental benefits.			
3.15	Conduct a comprehensive coastal overlay district study of flooding projections and impacts on the coastal neighborhoods in Rye and identify a plan of action for increasing resilience in this area of town. Aside from rebuilding seawalls, this may include drain repair, replacing collapsed pipes, and ongoing maintenance efforts by the town and state. As part of this study, assess the level and adequacy of emergency services, which are of great risk to flooding, and identify ways to improve and budget these services.			
3.16	Determine sources of funding for infrastructure projects and implementation efforts. The American Flood Coalition developed a document on Federal Funding Opportunities for Flood Resilience – A Guide for Small Cities.			
3.17	Consider establishing a stormwater utility and fee to fund stormwater related coastal and groundwater resilience projects.			
Emergency Preparedness				
3.18	Continue to support and implement the action plan identified in Rye’s 2022 Hazard Mitigation Plan. This should include: Updating this document regularly. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensuring written evacuation plans and procedures are prepared for Rye’s at-risk areas. Ensuring evacuation routes are well-publicized and understood by the public and that they are marked with signage. Communicating evacuation routes to the public on the Town’s website. Coordinating evacuation plans with other towns in the coastal region, as well as with the State. 			

#	Action	Responsible Parties	Timeframe	Status
3.19	Improve emergency management, coordination, and delivery mechanisms to ensure continuity of services to essential facilities, people, businesses, and employment centers.			
3.20	Consider allocating emergency funds for natural disaster cleanup and repair.			
3.21	Enhance communication systems for residents during storm events, including text alerts, etc.			
3.22	Maintain emergency access to critical facilities and essential services including schools, emergency response buildings, and municipal infrastructure. Maintain emergency routes with expanded road shoulders should Route 1A become inundated from a weather event or natural hazard.			
3.23	Coordinate with neighboring towns and state agencies to coordinate emergency management services and planning.			
Public Outreach and Education				
3.24	Prioritize public outreach efforts to engage and inform community members of flood hazards, vulnerabilities, and opportunities to increase resiliency. This also provides an opportunity to solicit input from residents. Education should include what to do when a flood occurs or is forecasted, and other important information.			
3.25	Provide information to property owners about constructing living shorelines and the importance of retaining the functions of natural shorelines. This should include ways to implement landscaping best practices.			
3.26	Educate property owners on steps they can take to reduce the impact of hazards on their properties. Encourage private property owners to incorporate the best available climate science and vulnerability assessments in their decision making and preparedness plans.			
Salt Marsh and Coastal Open Space Protection and Restoration				
3.27	Participate in regional or state-wide groundwater rise and saltwater intrusion studies.			
3.28	Conduct a study of Rye's drinking water resources to better understand potential threats, impacts, and solutions.			
3.29	Assess lands where the protection of tidal and freshwater wetlands would provide tangible benefits to protect against flooding, or where conservation of open space will reduce flooding and promote the inland migration of species and habitats such as tidal marshes. Then, prioritize properties that can be permanently preserved as a mitigation strategy to reduce impacts from development in high-risk coastal areas and from rising sea levels. This should include prioritizing land conservation initiatives and marsh restoration in areas of projected marsh migration. This effort should be built into the Strategic Conservation Plan action referenced under the Environment, Natural Resources, and Sustainability section.			
3.30	Assure uninhibited saltmarsh tidal flow by regularly inspecting and cleaning out culverts and bridges of debris. Consider replacing culverts that are undersized, perched, or misaligned.			

#	Action	Responsible Parties	Timeframe	Status
3.31	Utilize the New Hampshire Salt Marsh Plan to guide town action and priorities for marsh restoration, conservation of adjacent lands to tidal and freshwater wetlands, improving marsh condition, reducing vulnerability, or facilitating migration.			
Coordinated Beach Stewardship and Access				
3.32	Work with partners to make beach improvements that enhance resiliency and address erosion, cleanliness, and runoff from parking areas and other impervious surfaces.			
3.33	Continue to improve the accessibility of Rye's beaches and coastal areas for residents and visitors.			
4. MUNICIPAL OPERATIONS AND ORGANIZATION				
Municipal Processes				
4.1	Review the town's permitting and administrative procedures as they pertain to the land use code. Identify ways to streamline the processes, make applications easy to find and navigate, digitize forms, and ensure the materials and process are easy to follow by applicants.			
4.2	Evaluate ways to improve the enforcement of Rye's land use regulations. This includes improving the tracking systems used (including conditions of approval, variances, special exceptions, etc.), analyzing staff roles, and identifying where capacity needs to be increased or shifted.			
4.3	Explore alternative governance structures such as expanding the Select Board or reevaluating the current roles and functions within the town administration. This may include investigating the potential to create a town manager position which may require requests for more information, cost-benefit analysis, and clarity on specific duties and responsibilities of such a position.			
4.4	Prioritize transparency, and broader representation within local government to ensure diverse perspectives are represented and that barriers to participation are reduced.			
4.5	Develop strategies and an overarching approach to enhance municipal communication to residents and other community members regarding town projects, initiatives, permitting regulations, and events. This should include examining the use and effectiveness of the town website, newsletter, media channels, and other forms of communication.			
Municipal Facilities Assessment				
4.6	Commission a town-wide municipal facilities assessment. This should include an action plan, a timeline to guide budgeting and clear details that will inform the updating or replacement of Rye's municipal facilities. This should include:			
4.7	Modernization, upgrades, renovations, or replacement of existing municipal buildings.			
4.8	Renovation, restoration, and improvement of the Town Hall building including additional features that support community use and the restoration of its historic character.			
4.9	Improvements to Rye's Transfer Station including improved traffic flow, expanded recycling options, and better handling and disposal of hazardous waste.			

#	Action	Responsible Parties	Timeframe	Status
4.10	Expansion of the library, including enhancements to its facilities and increasing community programming.			
4.11	Upgrading the Recreation Department buildings and recreation facilities based on findings from the Recreation Master Plan.			
4.12	Proper maintenance of the athletic fields.			
4.13	Integration of the energy audits completed for all of Rye's municipal buildings to guide future energy efficiency retrofits.			
Planning and Tracking				
4.14	Develop an asset management program for tracking the maintenance of all town-owned facilities and infrastructure, and to inform Rye's Capital Improvement Planning.			
4.15	Improve the capital improvement planning process by forecasting capital improvement needs further into the future beyond the current standard of six years. This will ensure there is enough time to properly plan for funding and communicate projects clearly to residents.			
4.16	Manage public infrastructure to keep pace with current and future capacity demands and resilience in conjunction with the state agencies.			
5. ENVIRONMENT, NATURAL RESOURCES, AND SUSTAINABILITY				
Community Power				
5.1	Increase participation in Rye's Community Power Program through public education and outreach.			
5.2	Consider developing microgrids to minimize disruptions to service and decentralize electricity.			
5.3	Continue to expand access to three phase power in Rye.			
5.4	Investigate community fuel programs for oil and gas usage.			
Renewable Energy Development and Energy Efficiency				
5.5	Consider developing community solar projects on town-owned land.			
5.6	Reduce regulatory restrictions for larger solar projects.			
5.7	Upgrade building codes to meet the energy reduction requirements of the International Energy Conservation Code.			
5.8	Support and incentivize the efforts of residents, landowners, and businesses to complete energy efficiency measures, upgrade heating systems, install renewable energy systems, and invest in battery storage systems.			
Sustainable Transportation				
5.9	Research and investigate the feasibility of transitioning Rye's municipal fleet to electric vehicles.			
5.10	Strategically invest in electric vehicle charging stations on select town-owned sites.			
5.11	Promote electric vehicle charging stations on private land and remove any related regulatory barriers that may exist.			

#	Action	Responsible Parties	Timeframe	Status
Strategic Land Conservation				
5.12	Continue to support and implement the recommendations from the 2021 Natural Resource Inventory. This should include documenting key natural resource features and updating the natural resource inventory on a regular basis, such as every 5 years. Ensure the NRI informs future regulatory updates.			
5.13	Create a Strategic Conservation Plan for Rye that identifies and prioritizes the remaining undeveloped lands for acquisition/conservation, preserves the character of the rural areas of town, increases Rye’s coastal resilience, protects water quality and quantity, and creates wildlife corridors and ecological connections. Identify key parcels of concern and critical importance, as part of this planning process. Prioritize the conservation and regulatory protection of lands over or near public water supply aquifers, priority habitat blocks, wellhead protection areas, coastline, and marshes for viewing and recreation and public use where appropriate. Review species and habitat information per NH Department of Forest and Conservation and NH Department of Natural and Cultural Resources to inform environmental, mitigation, and conservation planning.			
5.14	Continue to pursue conservation opportunities through partnerships with local land protection organizations and local landowners to acquire and conserve important open space in Rye. This is especially important for land near the drinking water aquifers, priority habitat areas, the coastline, and in the semi-rural areas of town. Balance other community needs, such as housing, with the prioritizing of these future conservation efforts.			
5.15	Devise a funding strategy for future conservation that includes more than taxpayer money. This could include grants, use fees, and other sources that increase available funding for land conservation. As part of this, investigate the feasibility of developing a conservation fund to help supply funding for future land acquisition and conservation projects.			
Surface and Subsurface Water Quality and Quantity Protection				
5.16	Prioritize wetland restoration in areas identified in the Natural Resource Inventory for stormwater mitigation.			
5.17	Continue to engage landowners and foster stormwater best management practices through MS4 permit requirements.			
5.18	Continue investing in long term water quality monitoring and investigatory sampling of Rye’s water bodies.			
5.19	Protect headwater streams, particularly Berry’s Brook where the impacts of pollution on the brook’s water quality restrict fishing currently; and Bailey Brook, which is home to important groundwater resources including one gravel well, two bedrock wells, and other potential wells currently under investigation.			
5.20	Conduct a vernal pool survey for the town to inform future wetland protection efforts.			
5.21	Require or incentivize green infrastructure, low impact design, nature-based solutions, and stormwater infiltration best practices in future development projects through Rye’s land use regulations.			

#	Action	Responsible Parties	Timeframe	Status
5.22	Develop an inventory of properties along shorelines that have old septic systems that need to be upgraded. Provide educational materials to those homeowners to inform them of potential funding options for system replacement. This could include encouraging septic system testing.			
Stewardship of Open Space Resources				
5.23	Maintain existing and implement stewardship plans for major public open space parcels to address any needed resource enhancement and improvements to public access. Create stewardship plans for those open space areas without one. Devise a funding strategy for stewardship costs.			
5.24	Combat the spread of invasive species, as identified by the Conservation Commission website.			
5.25	Plant native trees and plants to support pollinators and other wildlife and improve current land management practices on municipally owned lands to reflect best sustainable management practices and nature-based solutions. Encourage public and private landowner to do the same.			
Public Education and Outreach				
5.26	Conduct public education to increase awareness and understanding of Rye's natural resources, best management practices, and other environmental assets. This could include:			
5.27	Educating town staff and the broader community on reducing or eliminating fertilizer, pesticide, and herbicide use on town property and residential lawns; and alternative pest management mechanisms that do not harm water quality.			
5.28	Educating the broader community on Rye's Community Power Program, energy efficiency upgrade programs for homeowners, and sustainability issues.			
5.29	Educating the broader community on the importance of recycling and composting and how they can engage in these practices in town.			
6. COMMUNITY				
Community Events and Programming				
6.1	Support existing annual community events in town and identify opportunities for new community events.			
6.2	Utilize existing community spaces as Rye continues to provide community building and recreation programming, including the school gyms and library.			
6.3	Create new public outdoor gathering spaces, as opportunities arise, that provide opportunities for flexible programming, events, and informal gathering in Rye.			
Recreation Improvements				
6.4	Implement the Town's newly developed Recreation Road Master Site Plan Update.			
6.5	Identify and prioritize existing recreational facilities in need of improvement to better address safety, access, and general maintenance issues. Estimate the related costs and develop a six-year schedule that can be incorporated into the Capital Improvement Program (CIP).			

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6.6	Explore ways to expand capacity and funding for parks and recreation field maintenance and improvements to best meet the needs of the public.			
6.7	Add amenities to existing recreation facilities (parks, trailheads, and athletic fields) as appropriate including benches, trash cans, bike racks, dog waste bags, restrooms, and water fountains.			
6.8	Work with the state to make improvements to Wallis Sands Beach including the addition of accessible restroom facilities, trash receptacles, and better year-round access.			
6.9	Make improvements to Goss Farm including more defined parking and trails.			
6.10	Make improvements to Parson's Field to ensure it is better utilized as a community gathering space.			
Expand Recreation Infrastructure Town-Wide				
6.11	Explore opportunities to expand recreation infrastructure in town to meet public needs, including accessibility. This may include parks, trails, playgrounds, additional outdoor athletic courts and fields, a bicycle pump track, etc.			
6.12	Investigate the feasibility and need for a dedicated indoor recreation center for the Town of Rye.			
6.13	Investigate opportunities to add new trails on existing or new conserved lands and increase trail connectivity throughout the community. Enhance accessibility to trail systems where possible.			
Recreation Promotion and Outreach				
6.14	Publicize Rye's parks, open spaces, and recreation resources to residents and other community members and encourage their use by:			
6.15	Creating a public GIS layer of open spaces, trails, parks and playgrounds in Rye.			
6.16	Maintaining maps for all parks, forests, and recreation resources and distribute at the town office, library, and elsewhere.			
6.17	Improving signage and trail markings, as necessary,			
6.18	Partnering with local organizations to identify other strategies for publicizing these resources to the public.			
Partnerships and Collaboration				
6.19	Encourage collaboration between the Recreation Department and Rye Senior SERVE to coordinate a broad range of day trips and outings for older adults.			
6.20	Maintain strong partnerships with organizations and entities like the Rye School District, Public Library, Rye Garden Club, Rye Historical Society, and others.			
6.21	Evaluate and improve, where needed, the ADA accessibility of Rye's public facilities, transportation network, parks, and public spaces.			

#	Action	Responsible Parties	Timeframe	Status
Heritage and Culture				
6.22	Seek ways to highlight Rye’s history and culture through public art and interpretive signage at key locations across Rye’s built environments and natural landscapes.			
Accessibility				
6.23	Provide educational resources to the public on the relationship between Rye’s history and heritage, recreation, conservation, community pride, and more.			
6.24	Consider implementing and promoting the state barn preservation incentive program to protect historic barns in town.			
An Aging Population				
6.25	Evaluate elder services in Rye and the surrounding region and determine if services are adequate for the town’s aging population.			

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