

**Rye Public Library Community Visioning Session**  
**Imagine: Identifying Possibilities**  
**May 12, 2011**

**I. Background:**

Rye Public Library (RPL) hired Opus Advisors, LLC (Opus) to facilitate a community Visioning Session to engage residents of Rye in the Library's Strategic Planning Process. Opus planned and conducted this process in the context of the RPL's goals and objectives and focused on assessing public perceptions of the Library and how RPL might consider its future role in serving the Rye community. Along with an open invitation to the public, specific invitations were made in the hopes of including a wide variety of voices and opinions in the discussion. Local business, the Rye School District, seniors and teens, along with many others, all had representation in our discussion. The Community Visioning Session explored ideas to enhance the Library's programming and service offerings using the constructs of the existing Town of Rye Master Plan 2006 (amended '09).

To prepare for the meeting, Opus worked with RPL leadership and staff to plan the agenda and prepare for the Community Visioning Session. Participants met on Thursday, May 12, 2011 from 6:30-9:00 pm. Andrew Richmond, RPL Director, and Annie de Cossy from Opus, facilitated the introduction. This was followed by the break-out of six smaller groups to develop Vision statements building on each of six components of the Town of Rye Master Plan.

The Master Plan components of Land Use, Housing, Transportation, Natural Resources, Civic Life and Municipal Services were addressed. These Vision statements were utilized to introduce a wider community perspective to the discussion. Rather than adopting a library-centric focus from the outset, the existing visionary statements from Town of Rye Master Plan helped frame a broader initial view, from which more library-specific brainstorming was later conducted within the groups. Each group was moderated by Opus Advisors and RPL leadership. The following report and findings are based on that evening. Please note the following information is a recapitulation of the views and opinions expressed by participants at the May 12 Community Visioning Session and may not be the opinion of RPL's staff and leadership.

## **II. Opus' Overall Findings & Recommendations: "What We Think, We Become." - Buddha**

The following summary of overall findings and recommendations presented by Opus is based on the thoughts, aspirations and ideas generated by participants in the Community Visioning Session. Similar to the groundbreaking work undertaken by the RPL Strategic Planning Committee on March 10<sup>th</sup>, which Opus attended, and which informed the broader Community Visioning Session. The community's vision for the role RPL could play centers on educational, informational, municipally cooperative activities and in some cases, advocacy, as in the example of creating a more pedestrian-friendly town center.

### **Land Use**

Blue Sky Community-wide discussion, building on Town of Rye Master Plan 2006 (amended '09) on the Land Use Vision category:

- All will be able to access 'open spaces' (land or water) and have the benefit of and accessibility to playing outdoors.
- Opportunities to volunteer to maintain open spaces.

Library Implementation:

- Provide maps, invite cooperation with others, e.g. the Seacoast Science Center, the Rye Historical Society, the Rockingham Planning Commission and the Rye Conservation Commission, Rye School System, etc.
- Offer educational courses.
- Provide rules of availability/accessibility of open spaces.
- Provide a list of dog friendly sites.
- Provide tailored packets for children to 'explore the outdoors'.
- Are there 'Passport Program'-like activities that the Rye Library could form or participate in?

### **Housing**

Blue Sky Community-wide discussion, building on Town of Rye Master Plan 2006 (amended '09) on the Housing Vision category:

- Rye will be a model for mixed development where affordable housing for seniors and young families is offered in an ecologically friendly and sustainable manner.

**Library Implementation:**

- Expand lending library, to include laptops, e-readers, etc.

- Provide posting of rental property listings.
- Provide educational programs aimed at lower income families, e.g. Families First, New Heights, etc.
- Post affordable services offered by youth, i.e. clean-up, painting, yard work.

## **Transportation**

Blue Sky Community-wide discussion, building on Town of Rye Master Plan 2006 (amended '09) on the Transportation Vision category:

- Road safety education and bike safety education is required.
- More mass and alternative transportation is available.

Library Implementation:

- Bike safety education through the Police and Fire Departments, and collaboratively work with existing educational services provided by them and other organizations.
- Ride share for bikes and cars is provided.

## **Natural Resources**

Blue Sky Community-wide discussion, building on Town of Rye Master Plan 2006 (amended '09) on the Natural Resources Vision category:

- RPL is a model for conservation, sustainability, energy efficiency and green technologies.

Library Implementation:

- Distribute information about preservation and conservation of wetlands, forest and ocean ecosystems.
- Programming to learn what sustainability means.
- Programs on the Rye Energy Committee's work and goals.
- Showcase how RPL is becoming "greener".
- Lectures by representatives of local green technology companies.

## **Civic Life**

Blue Sky Community-wide discussion, building on Town of Rye Master Plan 2006 (amended '09) on the Civic Life Vision category:

- "What would we like to see in ten (10) years?"
- The library to become a "home" especially as technology separates us physically.
- Promoting more sustainable energy resources.

- Helping local farms and farm owners.

#### Library Implementation:

- Increase evening programs.
- Expand programs for children through high-school age by increasing community involvement.
- Use RPL space for cultural activities and fun events for kids.
- Focus educational programs on sustainability, farming and residential energy efficiency.
- Provide information on how to advocate for pedestrian-friendly initiatives including more sidewalks, better lighting, safe driving practices, etc.
- Create an outdoor (shaded) area for programs & gathering – café?

### **Municipal Services**

Blue Sky Community-wide discussion, building on Town of Rye Master Plan 2006 (amended '09) on the Municipal Services Vision category:

- Establish a Clean Water Initiative.
- Establish a Recycling Initiative - Increase recycling at Transfer Center to 70%.
- Cooperate with Police/Fire Departments to create a public safety information initiative.

#### Library Implementation:

- Provide info on run off, dangers associated with pesticides, alternatives to grass, invasive plants, organic gardening.
- RPL could provide info re how to recycle & benefits.
- RPL needs a recycling bin system.
- RPL could be a repository for recycling/trading in batteries.
- Work with public safety to reduce # of drug/alcohol incidents and accidents by offering education, speakers series, involve youth in developing programming.

### **III. Conclusion**

As RPL works through its three-year Strategic Planning Process and presents a cogent statement of the Library's role, the Strategic Planning Committee, together with RPL leadership, will want to consider the community's demographics, data collected during the planning process including the Visioning Session, and additional input from the community, as well as what resources are available.

A more unified identity for the library informed by both the organization's mission and the community's needs, with clear and specific, measurable steps to achieve the work identified, will provide a roadmap that RPL can use as a management tool, a focal point for ongoing conversation with the community and in helping manage expectations for growth.

The attached document contains notes taken on the evening of May 12, 2011. The following notes are not RPL's Strategic Plan but will influence components of the three-year Strategic Plan. The discussion on May 12, 2011 was a highly effective tool that informs the organization's Strategic Plan with valuable and constructive input from the community. The notes in the attached document are the not necessarily the opinion or view of RPL staff and leadership, but reflect the opinions and ideas of Community Visioning Session participants (as best captured by the note takers).

### **Meeting Notes from the Community Visioning Session**

Community Visioning participants met on Thursday, May 12, 2011 from 6:30-9:00 pm. Andrew Richmond, RPL Director, and Annie de Cossy, from Opus, facilitated the introduction, followed by the break-out of six smaller groups to develop Vision statements building on each of six components of the Town of Rye Master Plan: Land Use, Housing, Transportation, Natural Resources, Civic Life and Municipal Services were addressed.

Again, this community view approach initiated our discussion with the valuable work done by those who developed the Town of Rye Master Plan. Building in this manner on the Master Plan, our planning process will continue to refine the broad initiatives identified at the Visioning Session and inform the creation of the goals and objectives developed for the final RPL Three-Year Strategic Plan.

The vision statements set forth in the Town of Rye Master Plan relative to each of the components of Land Use, Housing, Transportation, Natural Resources, Civic Life and Municipal Services are included in their entirety as Addendum I to this report. The Town of Rye Master Plan 2006 (amended '09) can be viewed at the following Internet link: [http://www.town.rye.nh.us/Pages/RyeNH\\_Planning/plan.pdf](http://www.town.rye.nh.us/Pages/RyeNH_Planning/plan.pdf)

Detailed notes from our six (6) discussion groups follow below:

#### **1.) Vision Component – Land Use**

**Blue Sky Community-Wide discussion building on Vision component:**

- Continue to maintain rural feel through prioritizing conservation.
- Signage to mark historical Rye places.
- Expanded pathways to get to schools, recreation areas, church and library.
- Trail map for Rye Town Forest – trails not well marked and map needs to be updated.
- Trail maintenance and markers needed.
- Trails through or along salt water marshes with bridges as necessary.
- Easements needed for larger spaces to make less attractive to developers.
- Need smart growth.
- Block party planning to develop a community around the neighborhood.

### **Library Implementation:**

- Sponsor a Heritage Trail.
  - Trail with bridges for both walking and cycling – with educational kiosks throughout.
  - Could support the new trails with advertising for local businesses and farms.
  - Trail info should be available online & able to be downloaded.
- Sponsor a GPS Fair / Orienteering / Geocaching using trail markers as waypoints.
- Help apply for federal funding for bike paths, lanes and ways.
- Involve kids in trail maintenance to educate them on the trail system and the importance of maintaining them.
- Provide education on how to maximize the tax structure in conserving open space.
- Provide education about access to beaches and the resources involved.
- Cooperative café with outdoor seating

## **2.) Vision Component – Housing**

- **Blue Sky Community-Wide discussion building on Vision component:**  
We would like to see more senior citizens housing.
- We would like to see more residences available for younger families moving in to the area.
- Would there be a way for the town of Rye to work with developers to create mix-used developments where older generations interact with younger families
- Since the group thought the tasks associated with changing the zoning and ordinance restrictions in Rye to create more affordable housing options were

outside of this discussion, they focused on the role the Library could play in creating a sense of community that is inclusive and diverse.

- To us “community” means many things but one of which is multi-generational interaction between older generations and younger families and youth.
- The library could be a place to create community in the town of Rye.
- More sharing of resources would in its own way make Rye more “affordable”.

### **Library Implementation:**

- To create community and multi-generational interaction, RPL could implement:
  - Adult and Youth Book club discussions that interact every once in a while or perhaps choose the same book every once in a while.
  - The library is not just about sharing of books but about sharing resources. As a way to engage youth, middle school and high school-aged children could share their knowledge of technology and their technical expertise (how to use computers, iPhones, download pictures, download music, how to use excel, etc.) with the older generation. “We need to engage our youth with service and also inspire them to serve others by tapping in to what they do best. Technology is a great way to engage and inspire youth to get involved.”
- The library could share/lend computers, cameras, out-dated cell phones, iPods and iPads, Kindles and Nooks, etc.
- Being a central point for youth in the community to volunteer or provide low cost services to less economically advantaged citizens of Rye also makes our town more affordable, e.g. lawn services, painting, clean-up.
- The library could provide space for middle school and high school-aged children to convene from 7p-10p in the evening.
- The library could be a place for school clubs to meet.
- The library could be a resource for affordable housing by listing available rental housing in Rye.
- While residents of Rye could change ordinance and zoning restrictions to create more affordable housing options, working with existing conditions, the Library could:
  - Provide resources on zoning and ordinance restrictions.
  - Provide resources on obtaining food stamps.

- Facilitate or enable organizations like Families First to run community nights to educate on available resources for families or individuals that are in-need.
- Provide information for seniors and veterans on tax abatements, etc.

### **3.) Vision Component – Transportation**

- **Blue Sky Community-Wide discussion building on Vision component:** Beautify roads that lead into town – “welcome signs”, make it pedestrian friendly, plantings.
- Ride Share – could encourage young families to come to RPL in the winter months, use internet-building communications to promote.
- Bike Share – RPL as center hub for sharing bikes.

#### **Library Implementation: “ALL ROADS LEAD TO RPL.”**

- Develop committee of local businesses and Rye residents who own local businesses to provide expertise/resources. (Pat Ritter, Gus’ Bike Shop/Latimers, Outdoor Pride Nursery.)
- RPL Friends could “adopt” a section of the road.
- Design contest for a new town center. Include a children’s contest.
- Use RPL web site to communicate.

### **4.) Vision Component – Natural Resources**

#### **Blue Sky Community-Wide discussion building on Vision component: Vision:**

- This building as a model – outdoor venue with shade, parking lot replaced with porous surface, safe access between library and other town venues, e.g. Parsons Field and the Junior High School.

#### **Library Implementation:**

- Library as a clearing house for resources on access to natural resources.
- Pull together people and organizations that deal with natural resources, e.g. the Seacoast Science Center, the Rye Historical Society, and the schools.

### **5.) Vision Component – Civic Life**

- **Blue Sky Community-Wide discussion building on Vision component:**  
We would like to see more civic engagement in the Rye community.
- We would like to have more cultural activities hosted within Rye, including those engaging different age groups and interests.
- We would like to have a better way of communicating within the community about activities, needs and opportunities to participate.
- We would like to find ways to incorporate and help the community appreciate the natural beauty contained within Rye.

### **Library Implementation:**

To create activities for people of all ages, the Library should consider some of the following:

- More evening lectures and talks – many are now standing room only.
- Add more afternoon and activities to interest different age groups.
  - Great activities for children at RPL now but nothing for school-aged kids.
  - Could be visual arts, dance, technology or something else.
  - Get local experts to donate time or charge for classes.
  - Need activities that are “cool” for kids to engage them as a group after school.
- Not just informative but also fun activities at different times of the day and evening such as:
  - Karaoke
  - Open mike
  - Readers’ Theater
  - Computer design
  - Music
  - Video classes
  - Game nights
  - Central performing space
- RPL fulfills a critical role of as a place that provides both information and is a gathering spot.
  - RPL could help by providing information online, communicating all kinds of news and activities, similar to what the town newsletter does in print.
  - The Library could create a space on Library grounds that could be dedicated to community gathering.

- Transportation is huge issue for kids who can't drive and rely on others for rides.
  - Perhaps RPL could provide message board (physical or virtual) to help coordinate transportation.
- Would be useful to have a Community Support Fund to help with major transitions for families in need – library role to communicate its existence, its benefit and how to support or apply for funds.
  - Death of a spouse
  - Major medical issues
  - Lower income support for activities

## 6.) Vision Component – Municipal Services

- **Blue Sky Community-Wide discussion building on Vision component:**  
Establish a Clean Water Initiative.
- Establish a Recycling Initiative - Increase recycling at Transfer Center to 70%.
- Establish a Police/Fire Dept Initiative.

### **Library Implementation:**

- Provide info on run off, dangers associated with pesticides, alternatives to grass, invasive plants, organic gardening.
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**Opus Advisors, LLC offers comprehensive counseling to nonprofit organizations, combining expertise in nonprofit consulting with financial acumen. At Opus Advisors, we help organizations of all sizes face the challenge of attaining and sustaining financial and operational stability, launch new initiatives, and boldly expand their reach in order to advance their missions. With over sixty years of combined experience in nonprofit consulting, strategic planning and marketing, Opus Advisors knows how to develop organizations that thrive.**

## **Addendum I**

The following excerpts are taken verbatim from the Town of Rye Master Plan 2006 (amended '09).

### **LAND USE -VISION**

Our vision for land use in Rye includes a community that is comfortable for those who live here, and desirable to those who are looking for a town with a good sense of heritage, open spaces and excellent schools. Rye's land use policies will be fair and good for the community as a whole. Our decisions will support balances of choices, convenience, safety, security, conservation and a sense of community. We will value our past and present, embracing change when we foresee that it improves the Town according to this Plan. Green Spaces will be for conservation of natural resources such as water and to preserve fragile habitats, for viewing of coastline, marshes, fields and forests along our roads and for recreation use by the public.

### **HOUSING -VISION**

We recognize that – The majority of our citizens want Rye to remain semi-rural; This desire was evident in the 2003 passage of a \$5 million bond to purchase conservation land; There are increasing demands for housing in Rye, with the increase in population growth in the Seacoast region; This will make it challenging to maintain Rye as a semi-rural community unless changes are made in our zoning.

Thus we envision for our future a community which continues to value its winding roads, stands of trees and coastal shores. Our housing options will adjust in response to shifts in our residents' needs. Our variety of choices will be safeguarded through local ordinances to ensure we do not have to leave Rye to have an affordable home.

### **TRANSPORTATION -VISION**

We recognize that – Increased knowledge of the environmental consequences of how we use energy is pushing us to re-think and support other options for transportation; Our municipal services are mainly concentrated in the center of town while our population is largely de-centralized; and significant tourist and second-home traffic will remain a seasonal challenge for residents. Recognizing the changes in our environment, we hold the following as part of our vision for Rye's future. We will provide multiple safe and efficient transportation alternatives to its residents and visitors. Our children will increasingly walk or ride their bikes safely to school.

Adult residents will increasingly take advantage of environmentally sound travel options such as cycling, ridesharing, and using public transportation. Senior and disabled residents will be enabled through expanded transportation options. All transportation projects in Rye will be undertaken with an eye to increasing safety, protecting our natural resources, and preserving or enhancing our sense of rural

character. We will maximize the safe, efficient and effective movement of people and goods into, around and through the town, connecting with the wider transportation network.

### **NATURAL RESOURCES -VISION**

The opinions expressed in the visioning sessions demonstrate that the many residents of Rye recognize the challenges they face in addressing natural resource concerns and can formulate a number of solutions to address these issues. It is clear from the visioning sessions that residents made frequent connections between our built infrastructure, (understood as buildings, roads and modes of transportation) and the natural or —green infrastructure. Residents also made connections between the green infrastructure and the social infrastructure, or the social needs of the people, such as the need for pedestrian walkways in some areas of town, and the relationship between the natural landscape’s scenic areas and property values in the community. Through their comments, residents identified several natural resource concerns and suggested a variety of creative solutions. Solutions include not only regulatory approaches, but also market-building and voluntary programs.

### **CIVIC LIFE -VISION**

We recognize that working together gives us our hometown feel. This takes many forms, such as encountering each other as we get our mail or business at Town Hall. It is expressed through our involvements in social groups; supporting our children, addressing town issues, volunteering on town boards/committees and participating in service organizations. We want to promote more of these opportunities. We recognize that it takes the energy and idealism of our young; as well as, the experience and wisdom of our elders to get things done well; and it takes the fresh eyes of our newcomers and the histories of our long-timers to create our future. Thus our vision of civic life in Rye includes the following: There will be increasing cultural and recreational opportunities for our residents to share; There will be larger voter turnouts; There will be waiting lists to serve on Town committees and commissions; Residents of all ages will recognize that they have roles that are important in making their town their Home; and Our out-of-doors will be enhanced and preserved through informed stewardship. We want to protect, preserve, and reinforce the semi-rural character and integrity of our Town Center. Residents as well as visitors should feel a palpable identity that they are in a place that is uniquely Rye. It will be a physically welcoming part of town characterized by human-scale design and architecture reflecting our historic roots.

### **MUNICIPAL SERVICES -VISION**

We recognize that as a community, we have many components working together that make up our Municipal Services to the residents of Rye and the surrounding areas.

They are comprised of the Fire Department; Police Department; Department of Public Works; Water District; Recreation and Schools.