

**RYE SCHOOL DISTRICT
SCHOOL USE FEASIBILITY COMMITTEE**

Thursday, August 3, 2017 – 8:30 a.m.
Rye Town Hall

Members Present: Co-Chair Peggy Balboni, Co-Chair Paula Tsetsilas, Craig Musselman, Salvatore Petralia, Paul Goldman, Gregg Mikolaities, Marc Sedam, Katherine Errecart and Doran Morford.

Ex Officio Members: SAU 50 Business Administrator James Katkin, RES Principal Suzanne Lull, RJH Principal Marie Soucy

Not Present: Jeanne Moynahan and Andrea Papoutsy

Members of the Public: Leif Honda, Ray Jarvis

I. CALL TO ORDER

Co-Chair Tsetsilas called the meeting to order at 8:32 a.m.

II. APPROVAL OF MINUTES – June 15, 2017

**Motion by Craig Musselman to approve the minutes of June 15, 2017 as presented.
Seconded by Paul Goldman. All in favor.**

III. REVIEW OF SUFC OBJECTIVES

Co-Chair Tsetsilas stated that the objective for this meeting is to have a common understand of the district's enrollment trends, historically and moving forward, and also understanding space needs. The goals that were defined by the Committee at the last meeting are:

- To study enrollment trends;
- To consider how to best use School District properties;
- To preserve excellence in education; and
- To present fiscally responsible proposals to the Town.

She continued that a lot of data has been collected over the last five weeks. She hopes that the members had a chance to review the information.

IV. DISCUSSION OF INFORMATION GATHERED

- **State, Regional and Rye student enrollment trends & Town population report – Katherine Errecart & Paula Tssetsilas**

Co-Chair Tssetsilas stated that she and Member Errecart have a shared folder for submitted information. Member Katkin has provided more information throughout the district for Newington, New Castle, Greenland and Rye. The information for Rye goes back to 1970 and moves forward to 2026.

Enrollment Highlights: (Co-Chair Tssetsilas)

- The current enrollment at the elementary school is 280. The school has capacity for 400 students.
- The junior high enrollment is 151 and the school has capacity for 280 students.

Local Level:

- The combined student population is expected to decline 156 students within the district from 2011 to 2019, which represents about a 30% decrease.
- From a demographic standpoint, from 2000 to 2015 the number of Rye children decreased 38%, while the residents who are 65 and older increased 70%.

Regional Level:

- Rockingham County is expected to see a 23% decline in the population for children ages 5 to 9 between 2010 and 2025. Coos and Rockingham Counties are seeing the largest decline.
- All but 20 of 151 districts in the State are in decline student population wise.

State Level:

- New Hampshire student enrollment peaked in 2002 and 2003. Many schools saw expansion in the 1990's, as a result of the baby boomers' children being of school age. At that point, Rye had its own expansion at the elementary school.
- School age population is predicted to decrease 13% from 2010 to 2025.
- New Hampshire is tied with Vermont as the second oldest state in the nation.

Member Errecart stated that she was trying to get her head around what is known and what is not as it relates to school enrollment and town population. The first thing she looked at was the raw data that was received last time. She also went back and gathered some of the live birth data. She prepared a scattered plot to better understand if the Committee can feel confident in using live birth data to predict kindergarten enrollment.

Enrollment Highlights: (Member Errecart)

- From what is known from historic data, the live birth rates are not predictive of kindergarten enrollment. They only describe about 3% of the variation in kindergarten enrollment. There is a lot of variability in the live birth data versus the kindergarten enrollment data. Current projections are entirely based on live birth data. How much can be assumed or drawn from those projections knowing that particular data point isn't actually predictive of kindergarten enrollment?

Trends from 1972 to 2016:

- There is a “baby boom echo” that happens. There will always be these larger demographic trends that will affect Rye and the State, which is the natural cycles of the demographic shifts.
- In looking at other towns in the region, they have actually experienced something different from Rye in the last 5 to 7 years. In looking at school age children from 5 to 14, Rye and many surrounding towns, between 1980 and 2010, were tracking against the national cycle. Rye takes a turn starting in 2010. Unlike the surrounding towns, Rye experiences a decline in population of school age children. Whereas, the towns of Durham, Exeter and Greenland, actually experienced an increase. Despite the declines for the state and the region, there are still towns that are attracting young families. Currently, Rye does not seem to be one of them.

Co-Chair Tsetsilas opened up for discussion.

Referring to one of the graphs, Member Goldman stated that one observation is that the total envelope has a lot of variability in it. However, the first three levels, (first, second and third grade), are almost constant. In looking at the next graph that divides up the total, it is almost a flat trend on grades K through 5 and somewhat declines out to 2021. If it gets down to building capacity and what building is used, this data is saying that for the lower grades, (K through 4), there is a pretty constant trend of what is happening. Couple that with the fact that the elementary school has a certain student occupation right now with a capacity that is almost twice that.

Co-Chair Tsetsilas commented it is the same for the junior high.

Member Goldman stated these are observations from the data that might say later on what kind of choices might be made building wise.

Member Errecart explained to the Committee how to interpret the scattered plot that she submitted for review.

Co-Chair Tsetsilas asked Ex-officio Member Katkin if he can tell the Committee about the data. Does it account for move-ins to the district?

Ex-officio Member Katkin explained that the data he submitted gives a 5 year weighted average. In looking at the data, the key is the Town’s population is declining. The live births are on a decrease. The K through 5 totals have gone from 327, five years ago, down to 280. That is a loss of about 47 students. There has been a loss at the junior high of about 68 students. He noted that the progression ratio percentage is based upon the weighted average of 5 years and then takes it forward.

Member Errecart asked if the one data point that influences the projections for kindergarten enrollment are live births.

Ex-officio Member Katkin confirmed.

Member Errecart stated that in looking at 30 years of data and comparing live births to what subsequently happened in kindergarten enrollment, they do not seem to have a relationship. Even in years where there were very low live birth numbers there were not necessarily low kindergarten enrollment numbers. It was highly variable.

In looking back at the numbers, Ex-officio Member Katkin noted that what was projected in one or two years was less than a 10% variable. The numbers were not off by 20 or 25%. The variable difference was not that great.

Member Musselman stated that the information was really well done and was enlightening. He drew from it that Rye is indeed different from other communities in the seacoast. It clearly shows that the Town's property values have gone up and younger families are not moving into Rye. In terms of projecting forward, at any given year, the number that shows up in a class five years later, is going to vary from the number of live births. It is going to be affected by in migration and out migration, which is going to vary over time. He thinks that what is driving Rye's decline more than other schools, unless there is a significant shift, is that the trend is likely to be exacerbated not swing the other way. In going forward, there is no other way to project it, other than to use history and use the data available. As it gets larger and larger, the in migration and out migration becomes less of a factor. Here there are societal issues that are playing into enrollment. He does not think there is anything that would project that in 10 to 20 years that Rye's real estate is going to get less costly, there would be more Workforce Housing or any of the trends that would reverse it, compared to other local communities. Even if there is a significant rebound, he is not sure this trend wouldn't track less than other communities anyway.

In looking at the trend from 1982 to 1987, Member Sedam stated it is roughly the same decline as seen between 2011 and 2016. He pointed out that five years later there was peak enrollment. One of the challenges with using historical data is it takes a while for different trends to catch up. He continued that they have talked a little about the population being in decline. Rye population isn't in decline. The school age population is what is in decline. The Committee needs to be sure to not conflict those two things. People are still moving to Rye. Rye's population is growing. This is not a Town that is in decline. The tax base is going up as people move in and the property values increase. In looking at the data, it shows that there is a 31% increase in home values in Rye, whereas Greenland had a 13% increase. The home prices are growing three times higher while the population growth rate for ages 5 to 14 has been dropping since 1990. He continued that what the data says to him is that there are people moving to Rye who may have school age children who may not choose to put their children in Rye schools.

Speaking to Ex-officio Member Katkin, Co-Chair Balboni stated that there was a dip in school age population when Pease closed down. She asked what year that was.

Member Katkin stated that it was in the late 80's or early 90's.

Member Sedam commented that it was 1992.

Ex-officio Member Katkin pointed out that the base started moving people out just about that time.

Co-Chair Balboni commented this does not seem to have had a big effect on Rye. She continued that economic factor is playing a role in the student population. When the economy is not doing well, there may be more children in Rye schools and when it is doing well, more people can afford to send them to private schools. She stated that if there is an increase in population of people who are 50 and over, there will be more of an increase in the tuition for high school students, more so than the school age population because the people who can afford to move into Town are probably the ones who have children who are older. This could actually effect the budget in future years for tuitions out of Town.

Co-Chair Tsetsilas commented that she wonders if the Committee could come to an agreement that the data, with a plus or minus 10% variable, is accepted. She has looked at what Portsmouth has done and they use the same type of analysis based on live births. Speaking to Ex-Officio Member Katkin, she asked if it is a standard in the industry to use live births.

Ex-Officio Member Katkin confirmed.

Co-Chair Tsetsilas stated that there is this aging population that has grown 70% in the 65 plus age bracket. She noted that this is her parents' age range. Both of them have had to sell their homes in Rye due to medical and financial reasons. She wonders if it is expected that there will be a surplus in Rye in housing, as people move into a different life stage; maybe for assisted living or to downsize. Then it has to be considered who can afford those homes. Will the homes be passed down to another generation? Is it going to be a family that is well established in their 50's with a child in high school? Will it be a family with a fourth or fifth grader?

Member Morford stated that the whole phenomena of fewer children in Rye may also be affected by the region, in the sense that the seacoast is an expensive place to buy a home. Rye is kind of a factor in the larger context of the region of this not being a financially easy place to live for families with children. As far as development in Town is concerned, there is not a great spirit for development. The number of new homes in the community is relatively small. There is not going to be a lot of houses built in Town. Although the population may be growing, that may cap based on how much development the Town will even allow. That may have a factor as well.

In terms of the demographics, Member Mikolaities stated that from the Recreation Commission perspective, the 55 plus programs are exploding. The Town has a very active 55 plus community. The Recreation Department is experiencing the effects of the aging population right now.

Member Errecart stated that in terms of the data for enrollment there is so much that is unknown about what will happen. She commented that she is not prepared to say this information is set in stone or look at school consolidation. There is so much variability in the data and anything can happen. It does need to be taken into account what is being seen in the way of trends. There is a lot at play when it comes to the trends. What has not been discussed is what is happening at the middle school level. There are additional factors here that play into a more significant decline in the middle school enrollment. Her hope is that as a Town maybe they can mitigate the lack of families moving in. The key point for her is that there is a lot of variability. As the Committee thinks about how to use the school buildings, she would like to see the Committee account for that variability.

In terms of the 55 and over crowd, Member Sedam stated that they have to look at what they support. The Town's behavior is saying they like 55 and over. A 55 and over community is sending the explicit message that there will not be school age children taking up resources on the tax base in Rye. Whereas, Workforce Housing in different communities in the State have had different headways. Is the Town inadvertently incenting a 55 and older community by not doing things to invest in the folks that are going to come and possibly solve this problem? The Town has to invest in the things that they wish to happen.

Member Musselman stated one thing he noticed in the projections is that the high school enrollment projects are not shown to be in the declining mode as the others, which he presumes is because live birth data is not used to project high school population. That has more to do with in migration and out migration in all likelihood. In the community, raw land is worth \$400,000 to \$500,000 per lot, where

most people who can afford that are people who are further along in life, such as their 50's versus 30's. That value of raw remaining developable land is likely not going to go down relative to other communities. Speaking to Ex-officio Member Katkin, he asked how high school enrollment is being projected differently from elementary school enrollment.

Ex-officio Member Katkin explained that at the high school level the data has already been set by the in migration and the people leaving. Therefore, the percentages on the progression line are changing. He noted that he is taking the number from the 8th grade and multiplying it by the progression line because that line is really saying who moved in and who moved out.

Member Musselman clarified that the further away from kindergarten the more accurate the data is with respect to historical trends.

Ex-officio Member Katkin agreed.

Member Morford stated that one factor that has not been taken into account is the population of higher education folk in the community. The country struggles at a national level with the view of public education in general and whether it continued to be valuable and viable for families. A private school has to sell their product to the population. In public schools, for a long time, that was not the case. The school did not have to sell to the population. Now more than ever, communities have to sell the quality of its schools. In his experience, the Rye schools have a good quality of education. However, it is assumed by nature that public schools are not as good as private, parochial and charter schools. An element comes into play with people who feel they are more knowledgeable about education that may automatically be more likely to say "that's only public school". This is another variability to add about how families change where their children are educated.

Co-Chair Tsetsilas stated that she has spoken with the Center of Public Policy who work with districts who are going through this and seeing significant financial impact because public schools are afforded money by the State based on student population. Some communities are losing significant amounts of dollars. Unless there is a significant economic change in this area, these trends are forecasted for the next 50 years. She continued that she has worked with the NH School Board Association. The Town of Candia has gone through a similar exercise as Rye is experiencing now, as well as Oyster River. Oyster River hired a consultant to study population. Candia did the work themselves. They identified the need to have public relations program around Candia. They looked at ways to rebuild the community to try to reverse the trends. She commented that this material can be added to the folders if the Committee is interested in seeing this information.

Member Sedam stated that there is some other positive data that shows companies are choosing the seacoast over Manchester and Nashua. It is not just about proximity to the border but it's about the quality of life and harmony. As those companies grow they attract other companies. He commented that he can provide this data to the Committee.

- **Current & projected student population per district within the SAU & building capacities – Jim Katkin**

Co-Chair Tsetsilas stated that she looked at the data closely for the districts within the SAU. She pointed out that there could be a possibility to regionalize. The Town may be able to collaborate with Greenland. There is a public perception that Greenland is over capacity. However, in looking at Greenland's long term projections, they have enough space in their buildings to house their students. In considering whether they could house Rye's junior high students, there does not seem to be enough space for Rye. She noted that the Town of Newington is projected to be above capacity by 2020. She does not anticipate that Newington would come to Rye; however, these are ideas that need to be discussed and ruled out. She continued that what concerns her most as a parent, when looking at this data, is the middle school population being about 30 students per grade. There is a place where the school can become too small. It could affect the programming and the staffing. What would this do to the school as a community? She thinks about how this will impact the social bonding of different student groups. To her, grade levels of 30 is too small. Should the students be tuitioned to Portsmouth? Should the Town really look at building the population over the next three years and look at this as stage 1. By year three, if the enrollment hasn't grown, maybe the Town should consider tuitioning into Portsmouth.

The Committee reviewed the data regarding the current and projected student population per district within the SAU provided by ex-Officio Member Katkin.

Member Balboni noted that New Castle no longer has to send their middle school students to Rye Junior High.

Ex-officio Member Katkin stated that the number of students coming in for the junior high are less than what they were, mainly because its population base is so small now. New Castle used to send about 20 students into Rye. Last year, they sent 3 students in total. The few other students went to Portsmouth Middle School.

Member Balboni commented that this needs to be kept in mind. The Town no longer has the secured population of tuitioned students from New Castle. Parents feel that it might make more sense to transition their child at the middle school level to Portsmouth, rather than waiting until high school.

Co-Chair Tsetsilas commented that the Committee might want to consider tuitioning students from other towns. The School Board is working very hard to shift the perception of the schools. The School Board and the PTA will be holding an open house at the junior high for the public and all potential 5th grade students. The open house will be much like a tour of a private school to show what the junior high has to offer. There is competition in this area and this is a way to increase visibility.

Member Errecart stated that the ratings online for the schools is largely influenced by test scores and Rye does very well in those ratings. She thinks if they take the assets of Rye and market them better that can be very influential. There is a lot to be said about controlling the narrative and to shape the narrative about the Town.

In regards to smaller class sizes, Member Morford stated that at 7th and 8th grade the students are much more involved in making the choice. They feel that there is so much more they can do at a larger school, such as Portsmouth. An argument can be made for smallness, as far as involvement, attention and access, but for children it can be a harder sell. That is the challenge the Town has. If the population is not going to move naturally by a trend the sell becomes difficult. Hopefully there will be room and financial ability for people to move to this community. That number is probably going to be smaller with who can afford to move to Rye that have children.

- **Private school departures – Paula Tssetsilas**

Co-Chair Tssetsilas stated that over the past three years there has been an average of 8 students per grade who have departed for private schools from the elementary school throughout their junior high career. If all 8 in each grade, (24 in total), came back to the district, housing the students at the school would be a nonissue.

- **Town space needs overview – Craig Musselman**

Member Musselman stated that the Town square footage of space will vary based on the space that is available to use. The Recreation Department has moved out of the Town Hall to the rec area. The Sewer Office has moved to Rye Beach. In round numbers based on the planning in the past, the Town needs a net of 8,000sf for Town offices, as long as large meetings can continue to be held in school facilities and voting can continue at the elementary school.

- **Rye Rec space needs overview – Gregg Mikolaities**

Member Mikolaities stated that last year he chaired a Selectmen's Committee to look at space needs for Rye Recreation. The Recreation Staff is now housed in temporary trailers at the rec area. There are 1800 participants in the programs with 12 locations throughout the Town and New Castle being used. He noted that storage is a big issue. The Recreation Commission is working on a plan for storage at the rec area. There is an average of about 45 children in the after-school program. The program is held in two rooms at the elementary school; however, the Recreation Department is a tenant at will. The over 55 programs are held at the Congregational Church. Again, the Recreation Department is a tenant at will. There can be as many as 150 participants in the over 55 exercise classes and luncheons. He noted that parents have told the Recreation Department that they are not offering enough programs for the middle school children. He commented that the Rec Department does not have the space to house programs for the middle school children. This has been identified in the study as a real problem as this age group does not have a place to go and to gather after school.

- **Current space requirements and anticipated future needs of Community Pre-school – Sal Petralia**

In regards to Member Musselman’s question about the square footage of SAU offices, Member Petralia stated that there is 11 office staff members. The square footage is approximately 2000sf, not including storage space.

There was discussion on whether the Committee needs to consider space for the SAU offices. It was then determined the space is adequate for SAU needs and there is no excess or shortage of space.

Member Petralia stated that he has asked the district’s special education director to provide the legal requirements for the preschool program and the enrollment projection for the upcoming school year for the Committee’s review. She also provided the space requirements provided by the NH Child Care Program Licensing Rules. He continued to say the district is required to provide services to all special education students ages 3 through 21 in the least restrictive environment. He noted that there has been a slight dip in enrollment over the past 6 years. For the upcoming school year, the projection is 12 with the potential for an additional 5 students. This information is derived from early intervention and other feeder programs. The number of typical students over the last 6 or 7 years has declined, while the number of students who require special education services has remained steady or increased in certain years. He stated that students with special needs who are on Individual Education Plans (IEP’s) have significant needs in some cases; either physical or medical impairments. These students usually require additional personnel to provide the services, along with the administrator and service provider. He pointed out that over the past several years, the program has been housed at the Greenland Central School. Greenland has approved full day kindergarten. Because of that, the projected enrollment for 2017/18 has spiked. The Greenland school has 45 students confirmed for enrollment to kindergarten. The School Board has approved a third kindergarten teacher in Greenland. This has prompted the relocation of the SAU Community Pre-School, at least on a temporary basis, for one year. He has been to the Rye School Board to ask them to consider accepting housing the preschool program at the Rye Elementary School for the upcoming school year and they have agreed. The physical move of supplies and equipment has recently taken place. The preschool program will be held in room 102 of the elementary school, which is sufficient in size and has the required bathroom. He noted that there is also the anticipated need for an additional classroom in the 2018/19 school year that may prompt the relocation of the preschool.

V. PUBLIC COMMENT

Leif Honda, a member of the public, spoke to the Committee in regards to the public’s perception of Rye.

Ray Jarvis, Liberty Commons, spoke to the Committee in regards to the presented data.

VI. NEXT STEPS/AGENDA PLANNING

Action Items:

- **Invite two realtors to the next meeting – Look at listings over the last three years to see if inventory is growing and who is buying.**
- **Set a time frame for presentations.**
- **Research on how the Committee will examine the cost and benefits of running two buildings – If the Committee agrees this should be examined.**
- **Consider a K-6 alternative**
- **Consider a preK-4 and Grades 5-8.**
 - **Co-Chair Tsetsilas will collect educational data in regards to the effects other communities have had with combining schools.**
 - **Work with Administration on educational impact of each option**
 - **Possible school tours**
 - **Have a rationale as to why a certain direction was not considered.**
- **Impacts to the budget should be considered for all scenarios.**

VII. MEETING CALENDAR UPDATE

- **Next meeting: August 31st (Committee meetings will start at 8:00 a.m.)**
- **September 14th**
- **October 12th**
- **October 26th – Public Meeting – (To be held in the evening)**
- **November 9th (potential conflict)**

ADJOURNMENT

Motion by Marc Sedam to adjourn at 10:38 a.m. Seconded by Salvatore Petralia. All in favor.

Respectfully Submitted,
Dyana F. Ledger