

TOWN OF ANCRAM
COLUMBIA COUNTY, NEW YORK
New York State Office For Small Cities
2007 TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE GRANT PROGRAM
COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT STRATEGIC PLAN

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I. PROPOSAL

A. IMPORTANCE - NEEDS AND BENEFITS:

1. Introduction

The Town of Ancram is requesting \$21,000 from the Small Cities 2007 Planning Technical Assistance Grant Program to assist in supporting a Community Development Strategic Plan. At present, the Town does not have a plan in place that identifies and addresses the diverse housing needs present in the community, and is ill prepared to address the concerns of an aging population, declining economic conditions and deteriorating business district.

The Town's business district, or town center, is located at the junction of County Routes 7 and 82. The main street/ town center area has pockets of vacant storefronts, lack of available infrastructure, and poor linkages with the rest of the community. Several of the buildings sit empty, others are in a state of disrepair, and at present, the district is not prepared for any sort of revitalization.

The Community Development Strategic Plan will focus on identifying strategies to address the town's current and changing housing and economic conditions and the revitalization of Ancram's business district/ town center. The plan will identify community needs in these areas and will establish implementation steps to address each within the framework of specific community development goals and objectives. Town leaders have created a community advisory committee that has been charged with developing a coordinated vision for the future.

2. Location/History

The Town of Ancram, Columbia County, is located in the southeast corner of Columbia County in the Hudson metro region, north of Poughkeepsie and midway between the Taconic Parkway and NY Route 22. Bordered by Dutchess County to the south, and Massachusetts to the east, Ancram is approximately 125 miles north of New York City and about 25 miles southeast of Albany, the State's capital. Bordering municipalities in Columbia County include the Town of Copake, Taghkanic, and Gallatin.

Originally part of the Livingston Manor, today's Ancram was first established in 1686 by Scottish born Robert Livingston. Livingston was a pioneer fur trader and served as the Secretary of Indian Affairs in Albany. While serving, he was granted manorial rights for 160,000 acres from which he established Livingston Manor.

Ancram was established in 1803 from the Town of Livingston, changing its name from the Town of Gallatin to Ancram in 1814. During the 1700s, the Town had an ironworks located on the Roeliff Jansen Creek, producing bullets for the Colonial armies. In 1845 the ironworks closed, reopening a short time later and operating as a paper mill. Schweitzer-Mauduit purchased the mill in 1955 and began the manufacturing of paper products. Thirty percent of the Town's 43.5 square miles is dedicated to farming and agriculture-type businesses; the Ancram Mill remains the major employer in the area.

3. Needs

A review of the US Census shows that during the 1990 – 2000 decade, Columbia County’s total population increased by a mere +.2%. This figure is created by averaging the population growth and/ or decline impacting all villages and towns that comprise Columbia County from the two most greatly increased, the Town of Clermont at +19.6 and the Village of Valatie at +15.1% to those communities that lost the greatest population numbers, the Villages of Chatham and Philmont with –8.4% and –8.8%. The disparity in numbers should be investigated further to determine the difference in the population movement.

Surrounded by rolling hills, majestic vistas, close-by Hudson River, historic mansions neighboring wineries, accessible highways, a fine school system, and close proximity to the Amtrak station in Poughkeepsie, Ancram should be inviting working families and retirees to the area for year round residency. However, according the 2000 Census, the Town has a total population of 1,513 compared to the 1990 Census which showed a population of 1,510, accounting for a dormant population growth of 0.2%.

The Census also reports the median age of Town residents is 42.2 years with 17.1% over the age of 65. As the Census figures are nearly 8 years old, it can be estimated that without population growth, these percentages have continued to climb to include the 12% of individuals reported in the Census’ 55+ age bracket. This large, older population living on fixed incomes is directly linked to the need for housing rehabilitation, affordable housing, and special needs housing.

A cursory review of the Town’s housing stock shows that in addition to a number of older, well-maintained residences, there are a number of homes in poor and deteriorating condition. The US Census reports there are 823 housing units in the Town with 595 occupied and 228 vacant and that nearly 37%of the homes are over 60 years old.

As Ancram’s rental vacancy rate stands at a low 3.3% it can be presumed that the largest percent of vacant homes are those used for seasonal, recreational, or occasional use. These figures will be reviewed more closely as it is not economically beneficial to have 27% of households as seasonal residents as attested to by the closing of businesses and the lack of local service providers.

4. Potential Benefit

The community is committed to preparing a Community Development Strategic Plan that recognizes the needs of the Town, addresses each, identifying the issue and recommending methods to ameliorate the problem with achievable solutions. As such, Town officials have documented their commitment to the Plan by forming a planning committee that will serve as the Lead Agency and in that persona be known as the Community Advisory Committee (CAC).

Town of Ancram, Columbia County, New York
Community Development Strategic Plan Application

The implementation, promotion, and marketing of the plan will provide the resulting socio-economic benefits:

- Improve the community's sense of place,
- Improve condition of substandard housing, (Small Cities Definition)
- Identify the type of businesses that will succeed in the Town,
- Invite new businesses to choose a downtown location,
- Create employment opportunities with potential micro enterprise program,
- Deal with property owners with deteriorated or abandoned buildings,
- Promote inter-community services for low income residents,
- Increase the local tax base and reduce residential taxes.

A review of the socio-economic benefits to be derived from the implementation of the *Community Development Strategic Plan* relate directly to the funding opportunities provided by the Office For Small Cities' Community Development Block Grant Program (CDBG). The Town of Ancram is a community with multi-economic and housing needs that can be addressed and met through the National and State Objectives of the CDBG program.

Per 2007 HUD NYS Income limits, the median family income for Columbia County is identified as \$60,100. A low-income (80%) family of 3 persons (Ancram family size average is 2.90) must have an income at \$43,300 or below to be eligible for CDBG programs. As the Town completes its Community Development Strategic Plan and moves forward to begin implementation, the Community Advisory Committee is confident there is a significant number of families and businesses in the Town who have incomes that fall well below this figure.

B. CITIZEN AND BUSINESS COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION

Phase I of the Town's Outline of Tasks & Activities dedicates Task 1.3 to determining the best approach for public participation. Several preliminary activities are outlined to ensure community participation in the development of the Community Development Strategic Plan:

- Advertise and give public notice of all planning meetings;
- Identify key individuals/ groups (committee members) representing the community who will prove to be active participants;
- Establish the method to maintain the participants' involvement throughout the planning and development process; and establish committees and meeting dates;
- Include the participants in the preliminary design of survey tools, the distribution of surveys, and the collection of data;
- Report survey analysis to the group/ committee participants and to the general public, accepting comments; and
- Public workshops, the format of which will be determined at a later date, may include visioning, assets and liabilities, and small group topic targeting.

A public participation process provides an opportunity for citizen input during the development of a strategic planning tool. Differing perspectives, opinions, and talents are shared by members of the community and enhance the quality of the planning process. Public participation provides an opportunity for a community to identify and address pressing issues and define measures to meet the recognized needs. In the process, a vision is created representing where the community wants to go and how the vision will be achieved.

C. PLAN DEVELOPMENT

The Town of Ancram has an active Town Council that has appointed representatives comprised of Town residents and businesses to assist the Town in developing a Community Development Strategic Plan. While the planning committee is looking to a future date when a full comprehensive plan can be created, it believes it paramount to immediately address the three key issues impacting the Town at this time:

- 1) Housing
- 2) Economic Development
- 3) Town Center Revitalization

For the purposes of the Community Development Strategic Plan, the planning committee will serve as the Community Advisory Committee (CAC) and will direct all activities associated with the Strategic Plan's development. The CAC will be assisted by a consultant that has been retained through an RFQ process.

The consultant will facilitate all public participation activities as well as be responsible for completing the tasks shown on the project milestone schedule. The consultant is experienced in developing a variety of planning tools and completing each in a timely manner.

Upon the Community Development Strategic Plan's completion, the plan will be brought before the Town Council for adoption and implementation. Implementation will begin immediately as shown on the project schedule.

D. LEVEL OF COMMITMENT

The Town Council met in November and adopted a Resolution which states that it is desirable and in the public interest to undertake the development of a Community Development Strategic Plan to address the revitalization of the downtown and central business area.

The Supervisor has been authorized to submit an application for Technical Assistance funding from the Small Cities 2007 program to assist with the Plan's development costs and commits to the provision of the required 40% match.

In addition, a Letter of Intent has been provided as a means to express the commitment of the Town Council in addressing the needs of the community. The letter states that it is the intent of the Town Council to officially adopt the Community Development Strategic Plan and to immediately begin the scheduling of the delineated activities included within the document. The correspondence also provides the Town's reaffirmation to provide the required 40% match.

E. PROPOSED SCHEDULE OF MILESTONES:

Upon notification of a funding award, the Town, with the assistance of an experienced consultant, will immediately begin the necessary steps to initiate the development of the Community Development Strategic Plan Application for the Town of Ancram.

Public announcements and the scheduling of meetings will be calendared using a Small Cities' award announcement date of early January, with the kick-off meeting scheduled immediately following. The enclosed schedule of milestones depicts that the project will be completed within an eleven-month time frame. The Town is intent on completing the plan in a timely manner, adopting the plan, and immediately initiating the activities delineated within.

The calendar below has been prepared in anticipation of the Technical Assistance grant being announced in January 2008. As stated, should announcements be forthcoming at an earlier date, the Town will immediately begin the preliminary activities.

PROPOSED MILESTONE SCHEDULE	2008											
	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	
PHASE I: PRELIMINARY ACTIVITIES												
PHASE II: STRATEGY & PLAN DEVELOPMENT												
PHASE III: ASSESS & ANALYZE COMMUNITY												
PHASE IV: FINAL GOALS, OBJECTIVE & PLAN												

Current administration, together with the newly appointed CAC, will integrate the Main Street Approach™ strategies and Quality Community Principals in their preliminary efforts to improve the economic climate of the downtown business area. As the development of the plan moves forward, the CAC will continue to use the combined philosophies of the Main Street Approach™ and Quality Community Principles, in particular, strengthening intergovernmental partnerships and encouraging public participation. Public participation efforts will involve a comprehensive public participation strategy custom-designed for the Town and will ensure a vision based upon the contribution of ideas, skills, and talents from a broad mix of community members.

Phase I of the proposed Community Development Strategic Plan focuses on the review and updating of the project's scope of services, designing a comprehensive public participation program and the scheduling of the tasks to be undertaken in the plan's development.

*Town of Ancram, Columbia County, New York
Community Development Strategic Plan Application*

As the development of the plan proceeds, **Phase II** lists several tasks to be undertaken with detailed activities to accomplish each. Stakeholder Meetings will be held with representatives from the varying areas of the community. A housing condition and income survey will be prepared and distributed to gauge the level of need and also in preparation for meeting the National Objectives for future Small Cities' programs. An economic overview of downtown conditions such as exploring changes occurring in the market place, verifying what consumers want from their downtown, and identifying what type businesses the market will support.

Phase III is dedicated to the visual assessment of the Town's building stock, municipal facilities, and downtown structures. Residential infrastructure (private and community wells and wastewater) will be assessed. A condensed market analysis will be completed on the downtown area and a visual condition map prepared.

Phase IV of the proposed work plan provides information describing the development of goals, objectives, and recommendations. To complete the process an action and implementation plan is provided in the plan in the form of a matrix explaining specified actions, the timeframe for the actions, the responsible entities for the actions, and identifies any available funding may be available for the achievement of the actions.

The development of a Community Development Strategic Plan and the immediate implementation of the adopted plan, fully supports the primary Quality Communities Principles which states, *"The architectural variety, history and unique characteristics of our cities and downtown areas provide a special sense of place –and of home–for all of us. New York communities also see their downtowns as an opportunity for future growth. Keeping existing developed areas economically vibrant and environmentally healthy and breathing life into abandoned downtown areas is critically important to the quality of life of New Yorkers."*

F. EXISTING PLANS

For the last 25 plus years, the Town of Ancram has been guided by a 1970s era Plan that is outdated for today's community and development. During the past year, a great deal of thought has gone into the Town's appearance and failing economic conditions. Population numbers have remained nearly the same over the last decade, employment opportunities have not grown, and the area's overall economic climate lacks vitality.

The Supervisor and Town Council have appointed an active planning committee who are assertively advocating for positive change and smart growth. The planning committee is comprised of a 9-person group representing the Town's constituency. The Town, with the planning committee acting as the Lead Agency, is applying to Small Cities for funding to support, in part, a Community Development Strategic Plan. The plan will focus on identifying strategies to address the town's current and changing housing and economic development conditions and the revitalization of Ancram's town center. The plan, with a thorough public process contributing to its preparation, will identify community needs in these areas and will establish implementation steps to address each in order to achieve the identified community development goals and objectives.

In planning for the Town's future, the committee is also addressing municipal -provided services. At the current time, the Town does not provide municipal water and wastewater services; however realizing the importance of water in residential and commercial development along with the need for resource conservation, the Town has partnered with the New York Rural Water Association (NYRWA). The NYRWA will assist the Town in by mapping and providing a better understanding of the nature of their local groundwater resources. Upon completion of their study, NYRWA will be preparing a groundwater protection report and plan which will help the Town in planning future development, as well as protecting agricultural lands and environmental resources.

G. DEMONSTRATION OF NEED FOR FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE

The 2000 Census data shows that the Town of Ancram has a low - to moderate-income (LMI) level of 36.6%. While the median household income is impacted by a number of households who have incomes above the median, there are several community markers that indicate families and households are in need of assistance, such as the Town's median age is 42.2 years (children in college), higher than the state average of 35.9; only 64.7% of those 16 years and over are in the labor force (lack of employment opportunities and mean travel time to work of 27.5 minutes); and 17% of the population is over the age of 65 (fixed retirement income). The lack of local industry and businesses has resulted in a reduced municipal tax base.

The Town's population growth has remained nearly unchanged in the decade between 1990 and 2000. Although the Census reports there to be 823 housing units located in the Town, only 595 (72.3%) are occupied, and of that number 478 are owner occupied with 117 renter occupied. Regardless of the LMI, With nearly 20% of the Town's homes vacant and used for seasonal or recreational uses, the Town does not financially benefit as it would from year round residents living, working, and shopping in the Town.

The Town of Ancram recognizes the need to improve its economic state through affordable and improved housing conditions, new business development and the creation of jobs, and a revitalization of its central business-downtown business district, perhaps through an enhanced tourism industry. These changes would bring about a vibrant community with financial contributions passing through to local government.

The Town does not have the municipal funds to support the development of the Community Development Strategic Plan. This Plan will provide the Town with a vision for the future and identify additional opportunities for funding assistance to address the issues noted above.

TA grant funds will not be substituted for funds available in the Town of Ancram's general fund nor will they be substituted for available private funding sources.

H. Estimated Project Cost

The Opinion of Cost was determined by computing the estimated number of hours required to accomplish each task scheduled in the specific phase and multiplying it by \$100 per hour which is the usual and customary hourly rate for the demographic Hudson Metro Region.

Town of Ancram
Community Development Strategic Plan
Opinion of Cost

Tasks		Task \$
Phase I	Project Initiation/ Preliminary Activities	\$ 4,200
Phase II	Citizen Participation, Data Collection, Plan Development Activities	\$ 16,000
Phase III	Assess, Analyze, Identify	\$ 7,800
Phase IV	Strategies, Final Report	\$ 6,000
	Total hours per staff	\$34,000
	Reimbursable Expenses (travel, copies, photos)	\$ 1,000
	Total	\$35,000

I. Evidence of Funding

The Town of Ancram has provided an adopted resolution attesting to the Town's commitment to provide the \$14,000 in local match. Match dollars will be in the form of municipal cash with the possible exception the Town may assist in the surveying tasks, and if so, the time dedicated to this task will be documented as in-kind and credited against the total project cost.