

Town of Ancram
Community Development Block Grant Project Team Meeting
September 10, 2008

Members Present: Art Bassin, Suzanne Bressler, Lucy Eldridge, Donna Hoyt, Will Lutz, Libby Mckee, Clara Van Tassel, Kit White; **Absent:** Mary Watkins

The CDBG Project Team met on 9/10 to discuss the status of the CDBG project, the possible need for an economic development effort and the possible need for a broader town-wide historic preservation effort.

Economic Development – Mr. Lutz started the meeting by asking if anyone knew how the NY State Empire Zone program worked and whether Ancram would qualify. Ms. Bressler was familiar with the program and described how it worked, but the Project Team concluded that collectively we did not know enough to understand if Ancram would qualify. Mr. Bassin indicated he would try to find out more about the NY State Empire Zones before our next meeting.

The CDBG Team then discussed the possible value of forming an Ancram Economic Development Committee, and concluded that it would be useful to understand better how the Economic Development Committee in Copake had been working out, and decided to invite Charles Dodson, the Chair of the Copake Economic Development Committee, to the next CDBG meeting, which will be on Wednesday 10/15.

Ms. Hoyt noted that it was important to have the ability to support local businesses 7 days a week, year – round. Weekend business was good, but it was not enough to support the practical day-to-day needs of the community like gas, milk, restaurants. Ms. Hoyt commented that we needed to figure out how to support the practical needs of the community first, before we focused on weekend and seasonal demand. Mr. Lutz commented that we did not have enough of a population in Ancram to support practical needs, and noted that we used to have more local stores and activity in Ancram until nearby areas like Pine Plains, Millerton, Hudson and Copake started to develop additional services and stores which drew customers away from Ancram, causing Ancram businesses to close. Ms. McKee commented that it was going to be very difficult to turn back the clock and compete with nearby areas for gas stations, food stores and restaurants, and suggested we focus on what was unique about Ancram, which was our scenic resources and our history, and try to build economic activity from these resources by making the town a “destination”. Mr. White commented that New Weston, Connecticut had successfully taken this approach to economic development, by attracting antique stores, restaurants and by capitalizing on the recreational assets of their area.

Historic Preservation -- Town Historian Clara Van Tassel made a report on the work she, Robin Massa and Katie Hunt had been doing on cataloguing and photographing all the historic places in Ancram. Ms. Van Tassel will document her list of “historic places”

when the effort to catalogue them is done. The Committee agreed that a map of “Historic Places in Ancram” would be a good way to promote Ancram’s past and create some interest in preserving and protecting the history of the Town. Ms. Van Tassel reported she had been told that there was a house dating to 1706 in town, but this had not been verified. Ms. Van Tassel also reported that her research had uncovered a “horse shedding building” by the Lutheran Church, believed to be among the one or two best preserved of such buildings in the County, which could be eligible for a restoration grant in 2009.

Ms. Bressler suggested that the budget to support Ms. Van Tassel’s efforts and historic preservation in general be increased. Ms. Hoyt suggested that the Simons General Store could perhaps be purchased by the Town and be turned into the Town museum, a place to store and display historical records and significant historic information and artifacts from Ancram’s past. Ms. Bressler indicated that using the Simons General store as a town museum and historical center to store and display historic records, along with a map of “historic Ancram”, could help stimulate economic development in Ancram.

CDBG Project Delayed -- Mr. Bassin commented that the engineering consulting work which was supposed to have started in early September to analyze the structural soundness of the three deteriorating buildings in the Center of Ancram, the dangerous intersections in Ancram and Ancramdale, and the alternative solutions to the septic problem in the center of Ancram had been delayed by a month because of the Town Board situation, but should start in early October

Deteriorating Buildings In Ancram – Mr. Bassin reported that Mr. White (APG President) has gotten permission from the owners of the Stiehle House and the Tin Smith House to gain access to do the structural assessments. Ms. Hoyt, owner of Porter’s Store next to the Ancram Hotel, has also agreed to permit the engineers to examine the Porter’s Store building, and indicated she and her husband were agreeable to any solution for the Porter’s Store that would benefit the Town. When asked what APG’s feelings were about these houses if they had to be taken down or moved to “fix” the 82/7 intersection and generally improve the center of Ancram, Mr. White said APG would support whatever was in the best interests of the town. He indicated if the buildings were structurally sound but had to be moved to improve the traffic flow and safety at the intersection, APG would want to look into moving them if possible. Mr. White noted that while the Stiehle House was not old, it and the Tin Smith House had a significant role in helping to define the character of the center of town. If either had to be moved or taken down, Mr. White suggested that their replacements should be designed to represent the look of the historic period, even though they are new construction.

Ancram Intersection -- The Committee discussed the need to solve the 82/7 intersection problem as the precondition to any serious “revitalization” efforts in Ancram. Ms. Hoyt commented that now seemed to be the time to deal with this set of problems and fixing the intersection, whatever it takes, may be the key to the future of the center of Ancram. The Committee also discussed that it may be necessary for the Town to consider buying Simons General Store, the Stiehle House and the Tin Smith house in order to have the ability to do the work needed to solve the intersection problem. In

theory, since the Fire District already owns the Fire House and the Tavern, if the Town were to buy Simons General Store and the deteriorating buildings in the center of Town, the Town would have complete control over fixing the 82/7 intersection and redesigning the center of Ancram. Once the center of Ancram is “fixed”, the town could either re-sell the land/buildings remaining, or retain them for municipal purposes. The Committee agreed that this idea of an “Ancram Center” was interesting, and worthy of continued discussion and debate.

Ancram Tavern – Mr. Lutz commented that the Tavern which had been purchased by the Fire District might be rented out, but was not going to continue to be used as a bar, and if it was not rented out, the Fire Company would use it for storage.

Emergency Preparedness Plan – Ms. McKee brought up the need for an Emergency Preparedness Plan for Ancram to deal with major and minor disasters which could affect the town or the region. The Project team agreed this was important, but was outside the scope of the CDBG effort and should be addressed by the Town Board and the Ancram Fire Company in coordination with the County.

The next CDBG meeting will be on 10/15 at 7 pm.

The meeting adjourned at 9 PM.