

Town of Ancram
Community Development Block Grant Project Team Meeting
January 14, 2009

Members Present: Art Bassin, Donna Hoyt, Will Lutz, Libby Mckee, Clara Van Tassel
Absent: Suzanne Bressler, Lucy Eldridge, Jim MacArthur, Mary Ann Roche, Kit White

The minutes of the 12/17 meeting was reviewed and approved. As part of the review of the 12/17 minutes, the Committee reaffirmed the need to develop a short term plan, to define “rural character” carefully as part of the Comp Plan, and to have a glossary of Comp Plan terms circulated as soon as possible. In addition, Mr. Bassin reported he had gotten an email from Charles Dodson of Copake’s Economic Advisory Board responding to Ms. Hoyt’s question about the role of the Grants Office. Mr. Dodson’s email indicated the Grants Office would initially be to identify grants only, and later be expanded to write grants for an additional cost.

1. Economic Development – The Committee discussed how to go about doing an economic development plan for the Town, reviewing first what we had learned from discussions with Charles Dodson of Copake and Mike Cawley and Marty Reynolds of Millerton. Mr. Lutz pointed out that Copake had significant economic assets – the State Park, Catamount, the Taconic Hills High School, camps, and retail stores in the center of Copake – and despite these assets, was still struggling to maintain a vial town center. In addition, while Millerton had an excellent building infrastructure, a strong commercial zone and the main street of Millerton was in pretty good shape economically, the side streets were still in pretty bad shape. The experience in Copake and Millerton suggested economic development was a very hard thing to “kick start” or successfully achieve.

Ms. McKee suggested we consider building activities around existing businesses -- like a Strawberry Festival promoting the Thompson Finch Farm, creating a Corn Maze or a series of mazes in farm cornfields, and building activities around the artistic and antique businesses in town and around the Pond, the Bottle Tree and the Ancram Opera House. Ms. McKee also suggested using the Town website to list and promote whatever activities were developed. There was general agreement that we needed to figure out what was unique about Ancram, and try to build economic activities and attract people to Town based on this unique set of characteristics. Mr. Lutz noted that Ancram hosted the Blue Grass Festival for years on East Ancram Rd, but that activity never really generated much traffic in the town or benefitted local merchants.

Ms. Hoyt commented that we needed to attract activity to the town – having 10 vehicles in front of the Hotel attracted business...having no cars in front of the Hotel caused people to just drive by and not stop in. Ms. Hoyt also suggested we could not just count on “unique” things or seasonal things, but needed to balance them with year-round, practical, traditional, basic activities, like convenience stores, grocery stores, gas stations etc, and suggested the businesses in Town, including hers, needed to do more promotion to attract customers.

Ms. Van Tassel noted that it was unlikely we would be able to attract basic stores like pharmacies, groceries, convenience stores or gas stations, as there just was not enough “traffic” in Ancram to support these basic services, and too much nearby competition. Mr. Lutz commented that there was no parking in Ancram, so coming to town to shop would be a problem.

Mr. Lutz asked whether economic development was actually a necessary thing to be focused on, or whether we should just be happy to acknowledge that Ancram was going to be a great place to live and raise a family, and we’ll get our jobs and do our shopping somewhere else nearby.

Ms. Van Tassel commented that Ancram was definitely a place people wanted to move to and live, and according to the town’s Building Inspector, relative to near by towns, we seemed to have more construction going on now, even during this economic slowdown. Mr. Bassin noted that home based businesses seemed to be the most important economic activity in town next to farms.

Ms. Mckee handed out an economic development plan framework which she had gotten off the internet, which outlined a detailed approach to the developing an economic development plan. She suggested the Committee review this framework and determine if it was a useful way to proceed. After reviewing the outline, Ms. Hoyt suggested that the Committee use the framework at the next CDBG meeting to see how far we could go to develop an economic development plan.

Ms. McKee noted that there were some “deterrents” to economic development in Ancram, citing the deteriorating center of town, the visual impact of the Mill and the lack of any definable, unique attractions to draw people to Ancram. Ms. McKee suggested working with the owners of the deteriorating properties in Ancram to clean them up with repairs, paint, etc, working with the Mill to better screen it from the rest of the Town to lower its visual impact, and suggested developing an “Ancram Brochure” which would promote Ancram to prospective businesses and to visitors, perhaps using Ancram’s historic character as the major draw.

The Committee identified the following elements of a successful economic development effort:

- town residents and town government have to be business friendly
- develop a brochure promoting Ancram as a place to live and do business
- use the town website and a monthly newsletter to advertise and promote businesses
- develop a complete list of Ancram businesses, farms and service providers
- create an Ancram Marketplace for agricultural and yard sale goods
- create a list of emergency services phone numbers (plumbers, electricians etc)
- create a list of possible real estate locations which could be used for businesses
- identify economic development objectives
- establish an economic development mission and strategy
- clean up the Town as best we can to make the Town look more attractive

The Committee reviewed a proposal from Ellen Pemrick to provide economic development consulting services as part of the CDBG effort. The Committee's preliminary reaction was the proposal was too expensive, and we could constructively do some of the work Ms. Pemrick proposed ourselves, before deciding what we needed outside help to do. The Committee decided to ask Ms. Pemrick to come to the next meeting to discuss the proposal.

2. Short Term Plan – In addition to the items identified for the “short term plan” last month -- like fixing the 82/7 intersection, developing an emergency preparedness plan, cleaning up the town and painting some of the deteriorating buildings in the center of Ancram – the committee discussed the possibility of planting 1000 trees and getting lights for the 2009 holiday season. The Committee discussed the possibility of seeking community support for the cost of these things, rather than asking the town for financial support. The Committee decided to focus on the Short Term Plan at the next meeting.

3. Historic Preservation Issues – Ms. Van Tassel reported that Bill Krattinger of the NY State Historic Preservation Office will be in Ancram again this week, looking at the Lutheran Church and the McKee house.

4. Next Meeting – The next CDBG meeting will be on Wednesday, February 18 at 7 PM.

The meeting adjourned at 9 PM.