

Town of Ancram
Comprehensive Plan Committee Meeting
May 12, 2008

Present: Art Bassin, Barry Chase, Jim Bryant, Gene Aleinikoff, Bonnie Hundt, Kyle Lougheed, Chris Sommerhoff, Leah Wilcox

Absent: Don MacLean

The Comp Plan Committee meeting was called to order by Chair Art Bassin at 7 PM. The minutes for the 5/5 Committee Meeting were reviewed and approved.

1. 4/26 Town Meeting Follow-up: Mr. Bassin asked members of the Committee if anyone had additional thoughts about or reactions to the 4/26 town meeting. Mr. Lougheed commented he thought that while we had had excellent turnout, due to circumstances a significant number of residents were unable to attend the 4/26 meeting and express their views. The Committee agreed that this was a problem, but did not have an immediate solution to address it. (Note: One possibility is to host another meeting to review the Vision and the Goals for anyone who was unable to attend the 4/26 meeting. The Committee will discuss and decide on this at the next (5/19) meeting).

2. Fire Company Question: David Boice and Will Lutz from the Fire Company came to the meeting to clarify how the Committee was thinking about changes to the town's zoning. Mr. Boice asked if the Committee knew how large the lots were that new home building permits had been applied for over the last 10 to 15 years. Mr. Bassin said we did not know those numbers, but could probably get them from the Building Department. Mr. Boice said he had heard the Committee might be planning to increase the size of building lots from 3 acres to 10 acres, and suggested this would make it harder for people to afford homes in Ancram. Mr. Bassin commented that the Committee was not planning to recommend increasing lot sizes, and had not yet discussed specific zoning issues. He indicated that the Survey made it pretty clear that most residents did not think either increasing or decreasing lot sizes was necessary or desirable. People in Ancram general seemed pretty comfortable with lot sizes in the current zoning law. Mr. Boice commented that making lot sizes smaller might not help make them more affordable, as the value of the "building lot", be it less than an acre, 1 acre or 3 acres, would probably be pretty much the same. Ms. Wilcox commented that the Water Study suggested a minimum of just over 3 acres, which is where Ancram's current zoning is for outside the Hamlets. The Committee promised to get back to Mr. Boice with the data on building permits by lot size.

3. Profile and Inventory Document – The Committee reviewed, page by page, the first 35 pages of the 70 page Profile and Inventory Document to insure its accuracy and completeness. The Committee will complete this review at the next Committee meetings. Mr. Bassin will document the proposed editorial and content changes and questions and will circulate them to the Committee and to Nan Stolzenburg. Specific issues of substance (not editorial or content comments) covered in the Profile Document that were discussed in some detail by the Committee included:

Affordable Housing -- Mr. Bryant commented that the data suggested affordable housing was a serious problem and need to be addressed in the plan, but that the “affordability” problem was largely caused by the “market”. Based on the data in the Profile document, an “affordable house” was probably in the \$125,000 range for many Ancram residents, or one that rented for less than \$1100 per month. The Committee agreed that affordable housing was a difficult problem, and discussed various approaches (expand the Hamlets, create new Hamlets, smaller lot sizes, encourage rentals, encourage multi-family homes, encourage mixed commercial/residential uses, encourage dwelling units in existing non-residential structures) without reaching any conclusions. Ms. Hundt suggested talking to developers who specialized in building “affordable homes”, and the Committee agreed this would be a good thing to do. The Committee also will ask Nan Stolzenburg and Ben Syden (Laberge Group) to comment on affordable housing, and how the CDBG system grant can help with affordable housing, when they join the Committee at the 5/19 meeting.

Biodiversity – Mr. Bassin commented that the lists of ecologically important birds, plants, reptiles, amphibians and animals in the Profile Document needed some additional explanation as they were not well integrated into a discussion of how these species were relevant to Ancram in any specific way, but appeared to be generic lists affecting the entire Hudson Valley. The Committee agreed it was important to identify the birds, plants, reptiles, amphibians and animals which required special habitat protection, and hoped Ms. Stolzenburg can assist in making this section more cohesive.

Census Data - Mr. Aleinikoff requested clarification about several sections of the groundwater study summary, about the meaning of “vacant homes” in the census data, which in Ancram were about 27% of all homes, and about several other sets of Ancram census data which appeared to be unusual or difficult to explain. The Committee believes the term “vacant home” when used in the census means a place where no one was home on the day the census was taken, and not necessarily an “abandoned” or “deteriorating home”. Several Committee members suggested we clarify this in the write up, and compile a list of definitions which covers the census data and other key terms used in the Plan.

Historic Places/Historic Preservation – The Committee reviewed the historic places on pages 32 and 33. Mr. Sommerhoff asked how these places were identified and what made them actually “historically important”. The Committee agreed it was important for the APG and the Town Historian to review the historical places list and assist in preparing this section of the report.

Fire Company/Fire District -- Mr. Aleinikoff questioned the distinction between the Fire Company and the Fire District. Mr. Bryant explained the Fire Company was a group of volunteers which was supported by community contributions, while the Fire District was a taxing authority whose funds went to the purchase of the vehicles, equipment and facilities the volunteer Fire Company used to perform their fire fighting and community rescue services. Mr. Aleinikoff mentioned he had heard the “Fire Company” planned to buy the tavern next to the Fire House. Mr. Bryant stated it would probably be the Fire

District which would technically buy the adjacent property if that deal to take place. Mr. Aleinikoff asked if the Fire District would have to seek approval through a referendum to buy the adjacent property, but no one was sure how this would work. Committee members thought a referendum might be necessary if the Fire District planned to borrow money to do the purchase, or if it needed to borrow money to renovate and expand the fire house after a purchase of the Tavern.

The Committee also discussed the need for the Fire Company to expand at a pace consistent with the expansion of the Communities it serves, to make sure the Fire Company's capabilities stayed in balance with the needs and limited budgets of the Communities.

Mr. Aleinikoff suggested the Comp Plan should address Fire Company related issues, as adequate fire protection was crucial to the peace of mind of the Community.

Some Committee members expressed concern that major spending to expand the Fire House at the same time there may be a need to spend substantial funds on a new town garage could cause substantial property tax increases at a time when property taxes, without these major projects, were already causing serious concerns among the town's taxpayers.

The Committee discussed the consistently exceptional job the Ancram Fire Company had done over the years, and how important it was to maintain a strong the Fire Company as both a social force in the community and as an essential fire fighting group. Mr. Bassin asked if there was any discussion in the Fire District about merging with neighboring fire companies as part of the NY State consolidation initiatives mentioned by Highway Superintendent Jim MacArthur at the 5/5 meeting. Mr. Bryant said there had been some discussion of this, but nothing formal was underway that he was aware of.

4. Next Committee Meetings: The next meetings will be May 19 (with committee Planning Advisor Nan Stolzenburg and Ben Syden of Laberge Group). No meeting on Memorial Day, May 26. In June the Committee plans to meet on June 2, 9 (with Nan), 16, 23 and 30. June Committee meetings will focus on completing the Profile Document review and working on strategies, action plans and recommendations. In addition to its regular committee meetings, the Committee will meet with the Planning Board at 6.30 PM on 6/5.

Meeting adjourned at 9.05 PM.