

**Town of Ancram
Comprehensive Plan Committee Meeting
June 2, 2008**

Present: Art Bassin, Barry Chase, Jim Bryant, Gene Aleinikoff, Don MacLean, Chris Sommerhoff, Leah Wilcox

Absent: Bonnie Hundt, Kyle Lougheed

The Comp Plan Committee meeting was called to order by Chair Art Bassin at 7 PM. The minutes for the 5/19 Committee Meeting were reviewed and approved.

1. 5/19 Meeting Follow-up Comments: Mr. Bassin asked if any Committee members had any additional comments about the 5/19 discussion on the Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) process. Mr. Bryant reiterated his concern that \$400,000 in no match grants, which could be available to the Town in the future, was not a lot of money, and we had to be very careful about what projects we decided to apply for. We also needed to use the monies for important issues, perhaps for the water and septic problem in the hamlets, the 82/7 intersection or the deteriorating buildings in the center of Ancram.

Mr. MacLean commented that it would be important to leverage the possible future \$400,000 grant to gain maximum value from it. He stressed the need to approach the grant funding opportunity with great caution, and to allocate the funds carefully with extensive public participation in the process. Mr. MacLean also commented that Ben Syden of Laberge was very impressive and clearly very knowledgeable and well connected to the world of grants and the GDBG process in particular. Mr. MacLean noted that the \$21,000 technical assistance grant we had been awarded should be used to develop information and approaches for things that were important to the Comprehensive Plan as our first priority, with the possibility of future grants being a secondary priority.

Mr. Sommerhoff reinforced this idea, commenting that we had to be very cautious in how we approached the grant process, and we had to be sure we concentrated on finishing up the Comp Plan, which was our only immediate responsibility.

Ms. Wilcox commented that having access to a resource like Mr. Syden was a definite positive, as Mr. Syden was extremely valuable to us in assisting in understanding and navigating the CDBG grant process.

Mr. Chase agreed, commenting that Mr. Syden had an excellent grasp of the CDBG process, was able to make a mysterious process clear to us, and brought a wealth of experience and knowledge to the table. Mr. Chase also noted the importance of being rigorous and thorough in our planning efforts on the Comp Plan itself, as well as on the CDBG grant project, to establish a credible and persuasive track record on which to apply for future grants.

2. Draft CDBG Project Outline: Mr. Bassin asked the Committee for comments on the Draft CDBG Project Plan Outline which Ms. Stolzenburg and Mr. Syden had presented at the 5/19 meeting. The Committee worked its way through the draft project plan outline and had the following questions and comments:

Mr. Aleinikoff asked whether this draft outline referred to the \$21,000 CDBG grant we had already been awarded, or to the possible \$400,000 grant. Mr. Bassin indicated it referred to the \$21,000 grant. Mr. Aleinikoff then asked who was going to be responsible for managing the \$21,000 CDBG grant.

Mr. Bassin indicated the Town Board would decide at the next Town Board meeting how to manage the CDBG grant, and would also be dealing with how to manage the entire implementation process after the Comp Plan process ended, including how to manage the \$25,000 Farmland Protection grant we expect to be awarded in July, appointing the zoning revision committee to revise the zoning and subdivision laws to bring them into alignment with a revised Comp Plan, and appointing other committees to focus on other aspects of the Comp Plan's recommendations.

Mr. Aleinikoff then asked if the Comp Plan Committee would be asked to assume responsibility for these activities, and Mr. Bassin said that was possible, but even if the Comp Plan Committee was given the responsibility to oversee the effort, it was likely that the Town Board would want to get more people involved in various sub committees and teams to work on housing issues, on hamlet revitalization and on economic development. Mr. Bassin commented that Supervisor Dias had asked recipients of a recent town-wide email to step forward if they were interested in serving on committees to work on the CDBG grant efforts involving housing, hamlet revitalization and economic development. Mr. Bryant commented that he was not aware of any volunteers as of yet.

Mr. Bassin added that after discussing the CDBG draft project plan outline and other implementation issues over the next few meetings, the Comp Plan Committee should present its recommendations to the Town Board about how best to deal with the CDBG grant implementation process, and the other implementation issues that need to be decided as we move forward.

The Committee agreed it made sense that the CDBG consulting project team meet with the Comp Plan committee (or with the group responsible to guide this effort) to settle on a detailed project plan and to prepare of review of existing planning documents and issues as outlined in Tasks 1.1 and 1.2 of the draft project plan.

The Committee felt Phase II – Housing and Hamlets Analysis -- was important and useful. Mr. MacLean commented that this first effort (Task 2.1) seemed focused on the whole town, not just the hamlets, and suggested that might not be too valuable and we should not spend a lot on this. He then noted that Task 2.2 focused on the hamlets, which he felt would be more useful. Ms. Wilcox suggested the hamlet analysis could help us

understand if and how the hamlets might be expanded. Mr. Bassin commented that the effort had to cover all three hamlets, not the two mentioned, and we had to expand the focus of the CDBG project to include Boston Corners.

Mr. Bryant noted that since the Town had just completed a revaluation, there may be relevant materials in the files which could help facilitate the housing trends part of the analysis, if it does not have to be done from scratch.

The Committee felt Phase III of the project plan – Economic Development – was very important. Mr. Bryant noted that the objective of economic development was not necessarily to attract businesses or jobs, but “to increase the wealth of the community”. He commented that we needed to think through how to best encourage the kinds of economic expansion we wanted both in the hamlets and town-wide, and we needed to think about how to encourage home-based businesses without necessarily establishing specific commercial zones all over town.

Ms. Wilcox mentioned that Chatham had created a floating industrial/commercial zone which could be approved by the Town Board on an as needed basis. Mr. Chase and Ms. Wilcox both commented that we had to be careful to balance economic development with the rural character of the town, noting that the survey clearly indicated the town favored rural character, agriculture and open space more than economic development. Mr. MacLean commented that agriculture was also an economic development opportunity, but that the usual solution of supporting a “farmers market” generally was more popular with consumers than with farmers.

The situation with Larry Eckler’s auto business came up as an example of how our zoning did not allow Mr. Eckler to set up his business out of his home and forced him to move it to Copake. Mr. Sommerhoff commented that if we had had a floating zone, Mr. Eckler could have been accommodated. Ms. Wilcox noted that Ancram zoning currently permitted customary home based businesses, but Mr. Eckler’s auto related business might not be considered a customary home based business.

Mr. MacLean commented that the economic development section of this study will be very useful in helping us understand what we can and cannot do. Ms. Wilcox pointed out that there were no obvious places in the hamlets for the kind of retail, food and eating places favored by town residents. Even if buildings in the center of Town were renovated and made into useful retail space, there were parking issues, and water and septic issues to be solved before retail businesses would be attracted to the center of Ancram. There might be more opportunities in Ancramdale and Boston Corners. Mr. Sommerhoff commented that any new businesses had to be economically viable.

Other issues that came up included:

1. The need to appoint advisory sub committees or “teams” of town residents to focus on economic development, the hamlets and housing. The hamlet revitalization committee probably should have 2-3 people from each hamlet. The Committee made a list of

possible sub-committee members and will be in contact with them over the next few weeks to see who will be able and willing to participate on the “teams”.

2. The Committee was concerned that affordable housing did not seem to be addressed explicitly in the draft project plan. Mr. Bryant noted that there were only a handful of properties in Columbia County which were “affordable” based on the Town’s average income levels, and commented that the affordable housing problem may be very hard to figure out a solution to. Mr. Sommerhoff noted that the need for affordable housing may not be large, as the town has not grown much in the last 20 years and does not want to grow much over the next 20 years. The Committee concluded it would be important to try to “size” the affordable housing need, so we know if we are talking about needing 20 affordable homes or rentals, or 50 or 100 or whatever, over the next 20 years. The Committee also concluded that permitting additional dwelling units to be built in existing single family or non-residential structures could help alleviate the problem by increasing the supply of rentals relatively quickly. Mr. MacLean suggested that as part of the CDBG effort we try to get a projection of how many affordable homes (for rental and purchase) we will need over the next 20 years by price point.

3. The Committee noted that the CDBG grant effort could provide a head start on the process of reviewing zoning and subdivision laws.

4. Mr. Sommerhoff and Mr. Chase expressed concern that the development of “design standards” (part of Task 4) for the hamlets might not be realistic. Mr. MacLean and Mr. Chase noted that standards covering color, style and trim may not be as appropriate as standards covering building guidelines to permit the future installation of sidewalks, lights and trees.

5. Mr. MacLean commented that infrastructure issues (septic and water) in the hamlets should get a lot of attention in this effort.

6. Mr. Bryant commented that there was a Columbia County Population Trends study done by Cornell a year or two ago, and suggested we get a copy of this study if we could.

7. The Committee briefly reviewed a one page document called “Draft: CDBG Possible Projects @5/19/08 which had been distributed at the prior meeting. This document identified specific items and issues that the CDGB grant project should cover. The Committee decided to request that Ms. Stolzenburg review the list and determine with Mr. Syden which of the projects on the list could be included in the CDBG effort and which could not.

3. Profile and Inventory: The Committee reviewed, commented on and edited the last half of the Profile and Inventory Document. Mr. Bassin will revise the document and send the proposed changes to Ms. Stolzenburg.

4. Meetings: Mr. Bassin mentioned that he and Ms. Wilcox attended the ZBA meeting on 5/29 to discuss the Comp Plan, and that a meeting with the Planning Board was on

Thursday, 6/5. Other meetings on the agenda include: June 9 (with Nan to review the first draft of strategies); June 16 (“Second Chance” Town Meeting to review Vision and Goals); June 23 (Town Building Department); June 30 (Town Assessor); July 5 (Rhoda Lake Association). DOT and DEC have still not been scheduled.

The meeting adjourned at 9 PM.