

**Town of Ancram
Comprehensive Plan Committee Meeting
June 23, 2008**

Present: Art Bassin, Barry Chase, Leah Wilcox

Absent: Gene Aleinikoff, Jim Bryant, Bonnie Hundt, Kyle Lougheed, Don MacLean, Chris Sommerhoff

The Comp Plan Committee meeting was called to order by Chair Art Bassin at 7 PM. Approval of the minutes of the 6/16 Committee Meeting was deferred until next time.

1. Discussion with Building Department: Mr. Bassin noted that John Florio had resigned as Building Inspector and Zoning Enforcement Officer (ZEO) earlier in the week, but Mr. Ed Ferratto, who is the Town's deputy Building Inspector and Zoning Enforcement Officer, has agreed to discuss the role of the Building Inspector and the Zoning Enforcement Officer with the Committee. Mr. Ferratto was joined by Ms. Marie McDermott, the secretary of the Building/Zoning Enforcement department. The discussion was a combination of comments from Mr. Ferratto and Ms. McDermott, combined with responses to questions from Committee members and Mr. Hugh Clark, an Ancram resident who attended the meeting, and covered the following points:

Mr. Ferratto told the Committee he currently serves as ZEO of Copake and Hillsdale, and had previously served as deputy and then acting Building Inspector in Hillsdale after the resignation of the Hillsdale building inspector. In Hillsdale Mr. Ferratto indicated he had been responsible for correcting problems and improving the Building Inspection process, and had experience solving the kind building department problems Ancram faced. Mr. Ferratto is certified as a Building Inspector and Zoning Enforcement Officer by NY State, and is required to maintain his certification by attending a minimum of 24 hours of training annually. Mr. Ferratto was a contractor earlier in his career, but no longer does building or construction work.

Mr. Ferratto presented an overview of what the Building Inspector and Zoning Enforcement Officer was responsible for, and outlined his approach to these jobs. He emphasized the importance quick turnaround of permits and inspections, and indicated he intended to provide building permit applicants with a complete written list of requirements for the total process, from permits to inspections to COs at the beginning of the process so applicants understood what was going to happen and what was expected. Mr. Ferratto said that once all the information supporting a building permit application had been presented, a permit should be issued within a week, and indicated that it could be done in a matter of days or even the same day, as had been the case this week.

He noted that the Building Inspector serves a wide variety of "customers", including homeowners, builders and contractors, architects, engineers, mortgage companies and abstract companies, as well as other town departments like the Planning Board and the ZBA. Mr. Ferratto stressed the importance of the Building Department being well

organized, communicating well and operating with a predictable set of guidelines and reliable hours open to the “public”. He indicated the importance of having the Department Secretary, Ms. McDermott, available during the department’s public hours so administrative work could be done on the spot if possible and documents could be produced for the department’s customers as quickly as possible. He also noted that it was important to have staff members in the building department who were competent, personable and respected by the various kinds of “customers” the department served – the property owners, builders, contractors, lawyers etc.

Mr. Ferratto commented that the time required to complete the inspection process was difficult to predict, but his approach was to do the inspection the day (and time) scheduled, but if he got behind schedule for whatever reason as sometimes happens, he would work late and get the job done after hours. On the Certificate of Occupancy, Mr. Ferratto indicated that once the necessary inspections had been done and the paper work had been filed, a CO should be issued in a couple of days.

Related to the zoning and code enforcement role, Mr. Ferratto commented that he had the authority in Hillsdale to issue appearance tickets to zoning or code violators who were not responsive to requests from the ZOE to correct zoning or code deficiencies. He indicated that the process he uses in zoning/code enforcement is to talk to the property owners first both by phone and in person, follow up with a letter and additional phone calls as necessary, and issue the appearance tickets only as a last resort if there are multiple repeat offences and there is no effort on the part of the property owner to correct the problems which had been identified. Mr. Ferratto said he believed that Town fees imposed for zoning enforcement violations should be consistent with the NY State’s guidelines of \$250, \$500 and \$750 for multiple or continuous violations, and noted that the enforcement fees now used in Ancram were quite low and should be reviewed.

Mr. Ferratto mentioned that he thought the deteriorating buildings in the center of Ancram were safety problems, posed a liability risk to the owners and to the Town, and as a minimum should be boarded up to make it less likely that kids could get into the houses and get hurt. Mr. Ferratto also commented that he felt the ZEO should act when he/she noted zoning or code violations even if there were no complaints from neighbors.

Mr. Ferratto and Ms. McDermott indicated that in 2007, 106 building permits and 36 COs had been issued, and so far in 2008, 49 permits and 30 COs had been issued. Mr. Ferratto commented that he would be reporting these kinds of numbers as well as the dollars collected related to these activities and inspections made monthly to the Town Board. Mr. Ferratto commented that NY State required any payments received by the Building department to be turned over to the Town within 10 days, but he personally thought it should happen as soon as possible -- within a couple of days at most.

In closing Mr. Ferratto suggested the Comp Plan encourage “going green” in all aspects of building, and provide incentives to property owners to use solar and other alternative sources of energy. He also suggested the Town evaluate the economics and feasibility of installing solar panels on the town hall. He also said it was very important that the Town

plan to automate the building department with software available on the market. He estimated the software and training would cost the Town about \$8000 on a one time basis.

Mr. Ferratto was asked if the Building Inspector and ZEO jobs could be done by one person, or whether the jobs should be split and needed two people. He responded that it could be done either way, and depended on how much activity there was at any given time, whether there was a strong certified deputy in place and whether the processes were well defined and well managed. Mr. Ferratto stressed the importance of getting the right people with the right experience and training in the jobs, as the projects were getting more complex and a higher quality staff to deal with them. Over time, Mr. Ferratto said he thought the Building Inspector and ZEO jobs will be taken over by the County so the quality of the work and the quality of the people doing the work could be better managed, and a better more consistent job would be done overall.

Mr. Ferratto was also asked if he was dealing with contractors who had excellent reputations for doing high quality work and had personal experience with their quality, would he agree to “cut corners” and waive certain requirements to help speed up the process. Mr. Ferratto responded that every contractor, regardless of reputation, would be required to meet all requirements and would not be given any special treatment.

2. Continued Review of Strategies: The Committee deferred further discussion of the Strategies until the next meeting.

3. Other Items:

a. Mr. Aleinikoff: Mr. Bassin announced that Mr. Aleinikoff had resigned from the Committee. Ms. Wilcox and Mr. Chase thought it might be difficult to replace Mr. Aleinikoff at this point in the process, and suggested the Committee may want to operate with 8 members for the duration of the effort. Mr. Bassin suggested this issue be discussed again next week.

b. New Town Garage Issue: Mr. Bassin mentioned that Mr. Mike Citrin, a property owner adjacent to the Mathews’ property on Roche Lane (the Hornet’s Nest paint ball facility, which is being considered as the site for the new town garage) had sent an email to the Town Board and the Chairs of the Planning Board, the ZBA and the Comp Plan Committee objecting to the use of the Mathews’ property as the new town garage. Mr. Citrin’s email raised a variety of questions and concerns about the new town garage project, including the cost to property tax payers of borrowing \$1 million or more to create a new town garage, and the likely negative effects on the value of properties located in the area. Mr. Bassin indicated he had circulated Mr. Citrin’s email to Committee members and suggested the Committee discuss at the next meeting whether it needed to address this matter at this time.

c. Community Development Block Grant Project Team: Mr. Bassin asked for comments on the proposed Public Notice seeking volunteers for the CDBG Project Team.

The Committee suggested several modifications and proposed several additional names of possible Project Team members. Mr. Bassin said he would arrange to run the Public Notice in the Independent starting Friday 6/27, would send it around to the Comp Plan email list, and would be in contact with certain individuals by phone and email to encourage participation on the Project Team.

4. Next Meetings: Mr. Bassin reminded the committee that we are meeting with the Tax Assessor, Ken Legget, on 6/30, and asked if anyone had any questions for Mr. Legget to let Mr. Bassin know so he could communicate them to him. In addition Mr. Bassin recommended the Committee plan to meet weekly in July to continue and finalize its' work on the Strategies document.

Next scheduled meetings are: June 30 (Town Assessor); July 5 (Rhoda Lake Association); July 7 (with Nan); July 14, July 21; July 28. DOT and DEC have still not been scheduled.

The meeting adjourned at 8.50 PM.