

**Town of Ancram
Comprehensive Plan Committee Meeting
June 9, 2008**

Present: Art Bassin, Gene Aleinikoff, Bonnie Hundt, Kyle Lougheed, Leah Wilcox, Nan Stolzenburg

Absent: Barry Chase, Jim Bryant, Don MacLean, Chris Sommerhoff

The Comp Plan Committee meeting was called to order by Chair Art Bassin at 7 PM. The minutes for the 6/2 Committee Meeting were reviewed and approved.

1. Strategies: Ms. Stolzenburg distributed copies of the first draft of strategies and recommendations for implementing the Ancram 2030 Vision and Goals. She reminded the Committee that the Comp Plan process had three phases – the first phase was defining where we are, by collecting and analyzing as much information about Ancram today as we could, which we did through the Profile and Inventory Document, the Water Study, the Build Out Analysis and the development of the GIS maps of the Town; the second phase was defining where we wanted to be in 20 years, which was done through the workshops, the survey and the development, based on the workshops and the survey, of the 2030 Vision and Goals; and the third phase was to define how we want to get there, which will be done by developing strategies and action plans to support each of the Goals and the Vision.

Ms. Stolzenburg described the Strategies document as a starting point – it represents the universe of ideas and actions she recommends the Committee should consider in deciding how to implement the 2030 Vision and supporting Goals. At the same time, she indicated it was unlikely that every strategy presented was appropriate for Ancram, and it would be up to the Committee to determine which strategies would work and which would not. She indicated that all the strategies were legally and technically doable, and were in use in others communities. But she reiterated that not all of them would be useful or practical in Ancram, or necessary to achieve the 2030 Vision and Goals.

Ms. Stolzenburg noted that her approach in developing the strategies was an “environmental planning approach”, which compared the goals of the Town to the realities of the physical environment the Town faced (water, septic, terrain, environmentally sensitive areas, wetlands, steep slopes, geology, etc). She also commented that the strategies as presented were not in any priority order, and were written in varying degrees of detail, depending on the complexity of the issues addressed. Each of the eight Draft Goals was presented with a series of strategies supporting each Goal. Ms. Stolzenburg stressed the importance of not just developing the right strategies, but on the importance of the communication of the strategies to the Community, in terms of tone, context and level of detail.

The Committee and Ms. Stolzenburg focused on the first two goals – Agriculture and Open Space, and Environment – and discussed each proposed strategy for both Goals.

In discussing the Agriculture and Open Space Goal (“Encourage farming and the rural small town, scenic character of Ancram...”), Ms. Stolzenburg pointed out that no one thing would achieve this goal, but a variety of things would be necessary to make this happen. She commented that this would be true for all the goals. She noted that Ancram’s current zoning had principally two types of zoning districts – the hamlets and “rural residential”. She suggested the Committee consider setting up an agricultural zoning district as well, or multiple agricultural zoning districts, with different guidelines, which would be more farm friendly than they are now in the rural residential district. She also pointed out it was important not just to protect farmland, but to permit Ag related businesses to take place on the farm, including processing and retailing, if we wanted to help encourage farming.

As a first step to protecting agriculture, Ms. Stolzenburg suggested that the town may want to appoint an agricultural advisory committee to work on important agricultural issues and deal with farmland protection as well as ag business development.

Ms. Stolzenburg also commented that many of the strategies which could help protect farmland and promote farming and open space could also help protect the environment, which was the Town’s second goal (“Develop programs to protect our natural environment – groundwater, watersheds, streams...”).

Examples of strategies which could help both agriculture and the environment included conservation subdivisions, clustered subdivisions and moving towards an “average density” zoning concept, not a minimum lot size based zoning system. Ms. Stolzenburg described a conservation subdivision as one which required that buildings be placed on the land so as to protect farmland, scenic views, water and wetlands, etc, but not necessarily in clusters. In a clustered development the building would all be in one concentrated area of the parcel. Under both conservation and clustered subdivisions, a large portion (50% or more) of the land could be left open for farming, scenic views and wild life habitats.

The “average density” strategy would permit subdivisions which could be of various lots sizes, as long as the total number of lots averaged the targeted (currently 3 acres outside the Hamlets) acres per house. Using “average density” the minimum lot size could be as small as whatever would be needed for appropriate water and septic, and could be a quarter acre, a half an acre, an acre or whatever. If average density were in use in Ancram, and if 3 acres per house on average was required, a 9 acre parcel could be split up into 3 lots a variety of ways – either as two half acre lots and one 8 acre lot, or 2 one acre lots and one 7 acre lot, or 2 two acre lots and one five acre lot. This approach would give the landowner more flexibility, and could make smaller, more affordable building lots available while encouraging open space.

In addition to developing strategies which guided development away from areas in need of “protection” like farmland, wetlands, etc, Ms. Stolzenburg also suggested that the Committee consider using “net acreage” as the basis for calculating the number of buildable lots on a parcel, not “gross acreage” as is now used. The net acreage method would exclude from the calculation of the number of lots any unbuildable land, like wetlands or steep slopes. The Ancram Build Out Analysis determined that about 5400 additional homes could be build in Ancram based on the Town’s current zoning (compared to the 900 that we have now), which uses a “gross acreage” calculation to determine buildable lots. If Ancram were to move to a net acreage calculation, and excluded wetlands, steep slopes and other environmentally sensitive areas from the buildable lot calculation, the number of new homes which could be built would drop to about 2400.

Other strategies which would help protect the environment would include front ended driveways, conservation zoning districts where appropriate, limiting or restricting development in floodplains and increasing the average lot size outside the hamlets from 3 acres to the 3.5 acres recommended by the NY Rural Water Association Groundwater Protection Plan study.

By 9.30 PM the Committee had been able to briefly and initially review the several dozen possible strategies which could support the preservation of agriculture and environment goals, and decided to resume the strategies review at the next meeting. The Committee concluded there it would attempt to complete its preliminary review of the entire Strategy document prior to the next meeting with Ms. Stolzenburg in early July.

2. Profile and Inventory Document: Mr. Bassin noted that he had sent the Committee’s comments and proposed changes to Ms. Stolzenburg and would be discussing the edits with her later in the week.

3. CDBG Grant: Mr. Bassin commented that the Committee had discussed the CDBG grant project extensively at prior meetings, and he would be in touch with Ms. Stolzenburg and Mr. Syden to communicate the Committee’s comments to them and to set a direction for next steps.

4. Meetings: Mr. Bassin mentioned that he, Mr. Chase and Mr. MacLean met with the Planning Board on Thursday, 6/5 for an hour. The Planning Board volunteered to assist the Comp Plan committee any way they could. Other meetings on the agenda include: 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 9.45 PM.