

Town of Ancram
Comprehensive Plan Committee Meeting
July 28, 2008
Revised

Present: Art Bassin, Barry Chase Jim Bryant, Kyle Lougheed, Leah Wilcox

Absent: Bonnie Hundt, Don MacLean

The Comp Plan Committee meeting was called to order by Chair Art Bassin at 7 PM. In addition to Committee Members, town residents Doug Brenner and Hugh and Sheila Clark attended the meeting.

The minutes of the 7/14 and 7/21 meetings were reviewed and approved.

1. Review of Strategies: The Committee continued to review Strategies supporting goals 4 through 8, covering community services, town infrastructure, the town centers, economic development and residential development. The Committee had reviewed the goals and strategies covering agriculture and open space, the environment and community character in previous meetings over the past 60 days.

Mr. Bassin reminded the Committee that the objective at this point was still to make sure we all understand each possible strategy, and the next, step after we all understand the strategies, would be to put the strategies in priority order and then decide which to recommend as part of the Comp Plan. Mr. Bassin noted that Ms. Stolzenburg would be at the next (8/4) meeting and we would have an opportunity at that time to resolve any questions. The Committee discussed the following items, and came to the following tentative conclusions:

A. Community Services:

a) Share Services – to the extent possible and practical, community services, recreational activities and facilities and town government services (Tax Assessor, Building Inspector, Zoning Enforcement Officer, Highway Department, Fire Company) should be shared with adjacent communities to expand capabilities, improve access to services and minimize costs; the town should examine these possibilities and explore all State and County programs available to stimulate the coordination and consolidation of these shared services programs to minimize property taxes;

b) Support Volunteers -- the Town should continue to support the Ancram volunteer fire company, the ambulance company and other volunteer groups in the town such as the Youth Commission, Neighbors Helping Neighbors, Ancram Preservation Group, etc;

c) Emergency Preparedness Plan -- the Town needs to develop an updated emergency preparedness plan and coordinate this plan with the County; responsibility could be placed with the Fire Company or with a separate Emergency Preparedness Committee

d) Telecommunications – to support economic development and the emergency preparedness plan, the Town should intensify its efforts to get adequate cell service, internet access and generally better telecommunications services, and seek the assistance of the county to achieve this; Mr. Bassin commented he had heard ATT wireless worked better in Ancram than Verizon;

e) Recreation Plan -- the Town should establish a Project Team (or ask the Youth Commission) to develop a long term recreation plan which identifies needed activities and facilities, estimates the costs of implementing this plan and identifies sources of funding for the plan;

f) Hiking and Biking Trails -- the Town should explore creating an interconnected system of open space corridors accessible by hiking and biking trails, and find grant funds to implement this project; this responsibility could be assigned to a new volunteer Committee, or could be done by the Youth Commission;

g) Trash Collection – because of the cost of gas, Mr. Brenner suggested the Town consider establishing sites in town collect recyclables to minimize travel to the dump for residents;

B. Town Infrastructure:

a) Roadside Vegetation and Trees -- to help preserve rural character, the Committee discussed establishing a policy requiring State, County and Town highway departments maintain trees and vegetation along roads and minimize road widening;

b) Access Management – the Committee feels that whenever and wherever possible, the Town should use “access management techniques” to improve road safety and protect rural character. Access management techniques include using shared driveways to reduce the number of curb cuts and protect roadside vegetation, placing parking to the rear of buildings and the use of landscaping and trees to screen parking and separate people and parking;

c) Capital Planning Committee -- the Town should consider establishing a Capital Planning Committee to establish a long term capital plan which would coordinate town and fire district needs for roads, facilities and equipment, identify sources of funding for these needed investments, and secure grants to help support the development of needed infrastructure;

d) Highway Committee -- the Town should consider establishing a Highway Committee to work with the highway superintendent to develop and implement plans to meet the town’s long term highway related needs at the least possible cost to taxpayers, taking advantage of any State and County programs designed to encourage the consolidation of highway services regionally;

e) Environmental Initiatives – The Town should explore the installation of solar panels on the Town Hall roof and on all future new town and fire district facilities;

f) Fees and Fines -- the Town should review and revise all fees and fines related to town services and violations of Town laws, make fines for violating town laws substantial enough to encourage compliance, and update these fees and fines annually;

C. Town Centers

a) Hamlet Zoning -- we should consider amending hamlet zoning so each hamlet area (Ancram, Ancramdale, Boston Corners) and the Long Lake/Rhoda Lake areas have their own specific zoning rules;

b) Hamlet Boundaries -- we should make minor adjustments to hamlet boundaries to insure individual parcels are all in one zoning district, and examine if its feasible and desirable to add land to each hamlet to permit expansion;

c) Community Development Block Grant Project -- we should conduct the CDBG Study and consider adopting the recommendations of that effort regarding affordable housing initiatives, the revitalization of the hamlets, resolving the problem of the deteriorating buildings in the center of Ancram, the septic alternatives in Ancram, solving the 82/7 and 8/3/82 intersection traffic problems, creating building and visual design standards for future development in the hamlets and possible parking solutions in Ancram and Ancramdale;

d) Property Maintenance Law -- we should adopt a property maintenance law to deal with the deteriorating buildings in Ancram and in other parts of Town and property maintenance in general;

e) Jake Brake Noise -- to help solve noise of “jake brakes” and the problem with the 82/7 intersection, consider lowering the speed limit on 82 coming south toward Ancram to starting at the County dump on 82 to 35 mph or even lower;

D) Economic Development

a) Economic Development Committee -- consider establishing an economic development committee to work on making Ancram a more attractive place for businesses, helping attract businesses and jobs and to promote and market Ancram to possible new businesses looking for a place to set up; review with Copake and other neighboring communities their experience with their economic development committees; explore participation in the Columbia County Chamber of Commerce

b) Use Town Website to Promote Local Businesses and Agriculture – we should set up a section on the Town web site for town businesses and farmers to place ads and to place links to their business web site if available; town web site should allow users to search for local sources for any types of goods or services needed;

c) Expand Mixed Uses - consider allowing more of a variety of small scale, low impact mixed use commercial/residential facilities along Route 22 and in other parts of town, including the residential and agricultural areas, that would require site plan review and special use permits to insure suitability for hamlet and residential areas and be subject to commercial design standards which would insure such uses are consistent with the rural and scenic nature of the area;

d) Floating Zone -- review and revise the “floating” industrial zone to permit a mix of uses, larger uses and mixed uses as long as these uses are subject to site plan review and subject to design and performance standards which support the rural character, open space and environmental goals of the town;

e) Commercial Design Standards -- consider establishing commercial design standards for all commercial uses;

f) Hamlet Revitalization - explore the National Trust’s “Main Street Approach to Downtown Revitalization”, which could provide grant funds to support lighting, sidewalks and other hamlet improvements;

E) Residential Development

a) Additional Residential Density – assuming water and septic are adequate, consider allowing two family homes in the Hamlets and the R districts, one additional apartment within a single family dwelling in all districts and conversion of accessory buildings or parts of accessory buildings (barns, garages) into apartments, subject to development standards, site plan review and special use permits;

b) Senior Citizen Housing -- establish a residential use category called “senior citizen housing” in the hamlets and the R districts, covering appropriate senior living alternatives including but not limited to assisted living facilities and cooperative housing;

c) Require Cluster and Conservation Development -- consider a policy that all major subdivisions in Ancram shall be designed to protect the environment, open space and agriculture by requiring the use of conservation development or clustering techniques and access management strategies; require all subdivisions undergo site plan review; update the Residential Cluster Development section of zoning to include procedures for designing conservation developments, including the establishment of open space requirements, methods of preserving open space and other cluster/conservation design principals;

d) Apply for Housing Financial Assistance - seek funding from federal and state sources to rehabilitate sub-standard housing, facilitate home ownership and restore historic buildings; apply for funding to establish a Home Ownership Assistance Program to provide down-payment assistance, interest rate buy-down funds and rehabilitation assistance;

e) Affordable Homes in Major Subdivisions – the Committee discussed the idea of requiring all major subdivision of over 10 units to allocate at least 10% of the new development to “affordable housing” units. The Committee will review this idea again next week with Ms. Stolzenburg before drawing any tentative conclusions, but the Committee’s initial reaction was that this may not be a necessary requirement;

f) Hamlet Design Standards – Consider establishing residential design standards in the hamlets which would insure new development in the hamlets has lot sizes, set backs and other dimensions which are comparable to what exists now;

g) Mobile Homes – consider revising the town’s mobile home zoning regulations to require double wide trailers except in cases where existing single wide trailers are being replaced, and to require any new or replacement mobile home installations to under go site plan review and be sited and screened so as to not deteriorate the scenic or rural character of the area; also consider establishing design standards for mobile homes which would require peaked roofs and other features which would better integrate the mobile homes into the rural landscape;

F) Zoning Specific Items

a) Zoning Revisions Committee – The Town Board should, appoint a Zoning Revisions Committee to review the adopted Comp Plan and implement the zoning related changes necessary to bring the town’s zoning and subdivision laws into alignment with the Comp Plan;

b) Ongoing Zoning Review Board – The Town Board should appoint a zoning review board to annually review and recommend changes to the town’s zoning and subdivision laws;

c) Special Use Permits - Consider shifting the responsibility for issuing special use permits from the ZBA to the Planning Board. This should speed up the permit process and will allow the ZBA to become a pure “appeal” board with no responsibilities for the granting of building permits;

d) Fees – the town should consider establishing a fee schedule which covers all town expenses related to zoning and subdivision reviews and building permit review and issuance, excluding the hiring of professionals, which should be dealt with separately per Local Law 1 of 2003;

e) Purpose and Policy -- review the zoning purpose statements and the subdivision declaration of policy to insure the vision and goals of the Comp Plan are addressed;

f) Definitions -- review all zoning definitions to be sure all use identified in the zoning use schedule are defined in the zoning law;

g) Consistency -- make sure local zoning is consistent with NYS law;

3. Effect of “Peak Oil” On the Ancram Comp Plan -- Mr. Brenner asked how the Comp Plan took into account the very high current cost of oil and gas, and the probability that fuel costs were likely to stay high and spike much higher as the world runs out of oil over the next 20 years. Mr. Bassin commented that the Comp Plan did not explicitly deal with this problem. Possible impacts on Ancram during the next 20 years that Mr. Brenner identified were 1) dramatically reduced driving, which could curtail many weekend visits to the country; 2) a population shift back to the city from the country, so people could walk to work and shop and not have to drive, which would have the effect of slowing or reversing growth in rural areas like Ancram; 3) the need to grow food locally to eliminate high shipping costs; 4) the need to use alternative sources of fuel, including wood, solar, wind, geothermal, water and waste products; 5) the need to design rural communities so people could walk to where they were going to shop etc and not have to drive; 6) the need to impose building design standards which required new development to be self sufficient in meeting energy needs and “carbon neutral” in environmentally harmful emissions. Mr. Bassin asked Mr. Brenner to email the Committee with his thoughts on the “peak oil” problem and recommendations on how the Comp Plan should deal with this situation.

4. Community Development Block Grant Project: Mr. Bassin reported there were now eight people on the CDBG Project Team—Donna Hoyt, Trish MacArthur, Suzanne Bressler, Libby McKee, Kit White, Mary Watkins, Lucy Eldridge and Will Lutz. Mr. Bassin indicated he had circulated the “final draft” of the CDBG project plan and budget to the Town Board, the Comp Plan Committee and the CDGB Project Team, and planned to discuss these documents with the CDBG Project Team on Wednesday 7/30 (at 7 PM in the Town Hall conference room).

5. Questions For Ms. Stolzenburg – Mr. Bassin asked if everyone had had a chance to review the answers from Ms. Stolzenburg to the Committees questions, and suggested this Q&A be reviewed again and discussed with Ms. Stolzenburg at the 8/4 meeting. In addition, Mr. Bassin suggested the Committee identify any additional questions we should be going over with Ms. Stolzenburg at next week’s meeting.

6. Revised Profile and Inventory/Comp Plan Organization/Next Steps – Mr. Bassin noted that Ms. Stolzenburg had circulated by email an updated version of the Profile and Inventory Document, and would bring hard copies on 8/4 for the Committee and the Town Board. Mr. Bassin also indicated that following the completion of the Strategies portion of the Comp plan, which he hoped would be done in August, the only additional steps necessary to complete the Comp Plan would be to write up an introduction and decide on the organization of the Plan Document itself. Mr. Bassin asked the Committee to start thinking about the organization of the Document, and suggested a short, 10-12 page “Plan Summary” which covered what the purpose of the Comp Plan was, how the Committee went about it, what we learned, what we concluded, and what the resulting Vision, Goals and Strategies and Action Programs were that came out of the process. Mr. Bassin suggested this Plan Summary was something which we would mailed to all

residents and property owners in Ancram along with the notice and invitation to the Public Hearings on the Plan that would be scheduled for the fall. In addition to the Plan Summary, Mr. Bassin suggested the comp Plan Document would contain a variety of appendices containing the over 300 pages of supporting details including the Profile Document, the water study, the workshop results, the survey results, the Buildout Analysis, the Maps etc. Copies of the full 300-page plus document would be available on the town website and as hard copy on the Town Hall. Mr. Chase expressed concerns about how much it would cost to mail a 10-12 page document to everyone in town. Mr. Bassin said he would find out. Several committee members thought that sending the Plan Summary to everyone would be a very good thing to do.

7. Setting Strategy Priorities -- Mr. Bassin asked Committee members to come to the 8/4 meeting prepared to identify strategies for each goal in priority order, and to review all strategies to make sure we have covered everything we need to cover and have not inadvertently left anything out.

8. Next Meetings: 7/30 (7 PM with CDBG Project Team); 8/4 (4 PM with CDBG Consultants, 7 PM with Nan Stolzenburg); 8/11; 8/18; 8/25. DOT and DEC have still not been scheduled.

The meeting adjourned at 9:10 PM.