

**Town of Ancram**  
**Comprehensive Plan Committee Meeting**  
**July 7, 2008**  
**Revised**

**Present:** Art Bassin, Barry Chase, Jim Bryant, Bonnie Hundt, Don MacLean, Leah Wilcox; **Absent:** Kyle Lougheed

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The Comp Plan Committee meeting was called to order by Chair Art Bassin at 7 PM. Minutes of the 6/30 Committee Meeting were reviewed and approved. Mr. Bassin announced that Nan Stolzenburg was not able to join the Committee for this meeting, but would be available prior to her next scheduled meeting if the Committee wanted to meet with her before 8/4.

**1. Review of Strategies:** Mr. Bassin suggested the Committee continue to review and discuss the proposed Strategies in order to be sure each Committee member understood what each Strategy meant and how each worked. Once the Committee had worked its way through the Strategies for understanding, it would be important to identify which Strategies were high priority and essential for the Comp Plan to recommend, and which were less important and could be dropped.

Mr. Bassin commented that it was crucial that the Committee simplify the list of strategies and recommendations, cut the list down substantially from the current 24 pages, and find ways to summarize and communicate them clearly and understandably.

Mr. Bassin also suggested that the detailed zoning related strategies/recommendations might be best segregated in a section of “zoning recommendations” for the Zoning Revision Committee to consider once they were chartered by the Town Board to review and revise the town’s zoning and subdivision laws to reflect the priorities of the Comp Plan.

Several Committee members commented that the zoning changes were going to be the most challenging and most significant outcomes of the Comp Plan, and we needed to spend adequate time to develop solid zoning recommendations.

Specific items discussed related primarily to strategies which would support Goal 1 (Encourage Farming...) and Goal 2 (Protect the environment...) and included:

**a) County Agricultural District** -- The Committee discussed the importance of town participation in the County Agricultural District program. Ancram farmlands are in Ag District 1. The Committee discussed the importance of making sure that farmlands that should be in the Ag District were in the district. Ms. Wilcox commented that the boundaries of Ag District 1 were recently reviewed, but Ancram did not participate in the process. The importance and value of the County Ag District program to the Town and the individuals who owned farmland was discussed, especially in the context of securing agricultural exemptions on land used for agriculture. The Committee expects to explore

this subject further as part of the Farmland Protection Plan process, supported by a State grant which we expect to hear about sometime later in July.

**b) Town Agricultural Advisory Board** -- The Committee concluded it would be important for the Town Board to appoint a town Agricultural Advisory Board to coordinate and oversee the agricultural and farmland protection programs necessary to implement the agricultural and farmland protection portions of the Comp Plan.

**c) Town Agricultural Zoning Districts** -- The Committee discussed the possibility of establishing town Agricultural Zoning Districts in the existing rural residential zones to allow additional agricultural uses and provide more flexibility for farmers than is now provided. Things that could be permitted in the agricultural zoning districts include retail outlets for products from a variety of area farms, saw mills, farm equipment servicing and repair and small scale slaughterhouses. Ms. Wilcox noted that it would be very important to have guidelines and standards for these expanded agricultural uses. The Committee noted that Ancram's zoning currently designated all areas outside the hamlets as "rural residential", which limited how farmers could use their land for agricultural purposes. After some discussion, the Committee tentatively concluded that density calculations in the agricultural zoning districts and the rural residential districts should be no different, so densities across the town (outside the Hamlets) would be consistent, and the only difference in the Ag Zones would be increased flexibility for farmers to use their land for ag related business purposes not permitted in the non-agricultural rural residential zone.

**d) Average Density Concept** – Protecting and preserving open space and farmland are among the most important priorities of the people of Ancram. In an effort to support this priority, the Committee discussed the possibility of moving away from minimum lot sizes in establishing building lots to an "average density" concept. Under current 3 acre per parcel zoning outside the hamlets, if someone had a 30 acre parcel he could create a maximum of 10 three acre building lots. Under the "average density" concept, assuming each parcel perks, this same 30 acres could be divided up into a number of smaller than 3 acre lots and a number of larger than three acre lots, as long as the average still is 3 Acres or more. For example, 5 one acre lots, 4 two acre lots and one remaining 17 acre lot, or 8 half acre lots and two 13 acre lots – or any combination of lots which, on average, worked out to three acres or more per dwelling. The total 30 acres still averages at least 3 acres per parcel overall, but there is flexibility in the size of the lots as long as the average stays at 3 or more. In addition, average density zoning could be implemented with a minimum and maximum lot size – say 1 acre minimum and 2 acre maximum, with the remaining land being kept as open space. The Committee felt that this refinement might be getting unnecessarily complex, would not permit larger parcel sizes, and may not be as useful as some of the other ideas being discussed. In general, the Committee concluded that average density might be a much more flexible zoning framework than minimum lot sizes zoning, and would be especially useful in situations where families want to provide for affordable building lots for children and grandchildren without carving out the full 3 acres as is currently required.

**e) Cluster and Conservation Developments** -- The Committee discussed the possibility of requiring all major subdivisions to be designed to protect 50-60% of the land and open space either by concentrating new homes in “clusters” or by consciously locating new homes in such a way as to conserve and protect farmland, open space and scenic views (“conservation development”). The Committee discussed how the Town could insure the 50%-60% of a parcel that was left open as part of a clustered or conservation development would not be used in the future, and concluded there were ways to do this through the normal Planning Board review process, easements, homeowner association ownership and other techniques.

**f) No Change in 3 Acre Lot Sizes** -- The Committee discussed the recommendation of the Water Study to increase the minimum lot size from 3 acres to 3.5 acres in order to match future development more appropriately against the Town’s water resources. The Committee tentatively concluded that there was no need to increase the minimum lot size to 3.5 acres for three reasons: first, water and septic were site specific issues, so increasing the minimum lot size to 3.5 from 3 would not have a material effect, as some parcels would perk with a half acre, and some 3.5 acre lots would still not perk; second, the Committee has tentatively concluded that we should consider moving to an “average density” concept where the smallest lot size could be less than 3 acres and as small as a quarter or half an acre if adequate water and septic were available; and third, the Committee tentatively concluded that if it was necessary to protect ground water and sensitive hydrogeologic areas as suggested by the water study, that could be best done by protecting these sensitive areas specifically, by creating “sensitive environmental area” zones which could regulate development in these areas to protect groundwater, streams and stream beds and wildlife habitats.

**g) Environmental Constraints** -- The Committee discussed the possibility of changing zoning and land use regs to exclude environmental constraints in the calculation of the number of permitted new homes on a parcel. Based on the Buildout Analysis, current Ancram zoning would accommodate about 5400 new homes, compared to the 900 we have now. Eliminating all environmental constraints from the calculation of building lots would reduce the potential number of building lots to about 2400. Long term, the Committee felt this change was likely to have the most positive affect on the environment, water resources and the town’s rural character of any of the possible actions the town could take, and could make larger building lot size targets unnecessary.

**h) Require or Encourage Desirable Development Practices** -- The committee discussed the alternative of requiring developers to use density averaging, clustering and conservation developments, or encouraging them to use these techniques by a series of incentives, or a combination of both. If we were to require use of these techniques for all development, keeping the current 3 acres average lot size target seems to work. If we do not require these techniques, it may be necessary to move to an average lot size target of 5 or 6 acres with incentives if these techniques are used which will get the average lot size number back to 3 acres, or perhaps back to more than 3 acres, depending on the terrain features of the specific parcel if necessary to maintain rural character and protect agricultural and environmental resources. Similarly, if we conclude that we should

eliminate environmental constraints from the building lot calculation, we may want to create incentives to permit builders who are affected by environmental constraints to recapture some or all of the lost lots through adoption of the clustering and conservation development techniques, again depending on the terrain features of the specific parcel.

**i) Stronger Site Plan Review to Coordinate Desirable Development Practices** -- The Committee discussed how the average density concept, clustering, conservation development and excluding environmental constraints would work together, and how these techniques would need to be managed by the Planning Board through a more rigorous site plan review process which would deal with the placement of a property on a parcel, screening, protection of views, etc.

**j) No Sliding Scale Zoning** – The Committee discussed and rejected “sliding scale zoning”, which is a technique which would restrict the number of lots per parcel based on the size of a parcel as parcels get larger. For example, a three acre parcel could have 1 building lot while a 30 acre parcel could be limited to 5 six acre building lots, not 10 three acre lots; and a 300 acre lot could be limited to 30 ten acre building lots, not 100 three acre lots. The Committee felt this was an unnecessarily complex tactic, did not feel this made much sense as a technique, as the same results could be achieved by excluding environmental constraints, clustering and conservation developments with strong site plan review.

**k) Long Lake/Rhoda Lake Area** – The Committee briefly discussed if it made sense to create a new hamlet which would include the Rhoda Lake and Long Lake areas. It was not immediately clear if this would be desirable, or how this would benefit the residents of those areas. The Committee also discussed if it made sense to permit commercial uses in this area to allow small retail outlets and grocery stores to set up. Again it was not clear if this would benefit the area, or if the neighborhood would be able to support additional retail outlets, as there were established retail services in Copake, just 5 minutes away.

**l) Other Ideas to Support Farming** – The Committee discussed including the importance of agriculture and open space in the purpose statements of the zoning and subdivision laws, passing a Town “Right to Farm Law” to complement the existing County law, reducing road frontage requirements to permit more flexibility in site planning, requiring buffers between new development and farms provided by the new development, requiring all new development be placed outside of areas with prime farmland and soils of statewide significance, and making farm worker housing easier to get approved.

**m) Keep the Plan Simple; Review it Often** -- The Committee concluded that it was important to keep in mind that whatever we came up with as Strategies in the Comp Plan, they had to be easily understandable to the Town’s residents and officials. The Committee assumes the Comp Plan will be reviewed at least every five years to keep the Plan current with changing priorities, and believes the Plan can be modified every five years to reflect changing priorities and concerns. Given this, it may not be essential to

load the Comp Plan up with every possible idea out there now, but rather to focus on the handful of really important Strategies, ideas and changes that will help move the Town toward the Vision and Goals.

**2. Next Steps** – Mr. Bassin suggested the Committee continue the review of Strategies next week and try to be done with the development of Strategies by the end of July. He reported he had discussed next steps and timing with Ms. Stolzenburg, and confirmed that if the Committee was done with the Strategies by the end of July, we were likely to have a draft of the completed Comp Plan by 9/1, and could plan the first public hearings in October. The Comp Plan will not be “officially” presented to the Town Board until after our public hearings and after we are done with the CDBG grant project, which should be before the end of the year. What Ms. Stolzenburg needs from the Committee in addition to the Strategies is the desired organization of the Comp Plan document – a table of contents, a sequence of schedules and appendices etc. In addition, we will have to draft an introduction to the Plan.

If the Draft Comp Plan is ready around 9/1, it the Committee discussed the possibility of the Town Board to designate the Zoning Revisions Committee at the September Town Board meeting so that committee can start its work in parallel with the completion of the Comp Plan, with the idea of being done with both efforts by year end 2008 or the 1Q09.

### **3. Other Items:**

**a. New Town Garage Issue:** The Committee discussed Mr. Citrin’s email to the Town board expressing concerns about the proposed Mathews site and concluded it was not necessary to comment on this issue unless asked to by the Town Board (note: The Comp Plan Committee received an email directly from Mr. Citrin after the 7/7 meeting asking if the proposed Mathews location of the town garage was consistent with the Town’s priority to “maintain rural character” as expressed in the workshops and survey and captured in the Draft Vision and Goals).

**b. Community Development Block Grant Project:** Mr. Bassin reported there were now five people on the CDBG Project Team—Donna Hoyt, Trish MacArthur, Suzanne Bressler, Libby McKee and Kit White of the Ancram Preservation Group. Mr. Bassin said he had talked with Don Peck at Mr. Chase’s suggestion, by Mr. Peck was not available. Mr. Bassin also indicated he had emailed Carl Butler, Will and or Colleen Lutz and David and Jen Boice, but had yet not heard back from them. In addition, Mr. Bassin reminded the Committee that Nancy Bryant, Clara Van Tassel and Dorcas Sommerhoff had been asked to join the CDBG project team but were unable to participate. Mr. Bassin indicated he had received the next version of the CDBG project plan and budget, and that we were getting close to a viable Plan and budget which he hoped we could review and approve at the next meeting.

**c. Rhoda Lake Association Meeting** -- Mr. Bassin reported he attended and Supervisor Dias attended the Rhoda Lake Association annual meeting on 7/5. Mr. Bassin presented

brief overview of the Comp Plan process and responded to questions. Mr. Dias talked about what was going on in town and also responded to questions.

**4. Next Meetings:** July 14, July 21; July 28; 8/4 (with Nan Stolzenburg). DOT and DEC have still not been scheduled. The meeting adjourned at 8.55 PM.