

**Town of Ancram  
Comprehensive Plan Committee Meeting  
August 11, 2008**

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

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

The minutes of the 8/4/08 meeting were reviewed and approved, subject to revisions proposed by Mr. MacLean. The revised minutes of the 8/4 meeting have been posted on the town web site.

**1. Review of Strategies:** Mr. Bassin asked the Committee to express their views on rank ordering the strategies for each goal.

**2. Priority Ranking of Goals:** Mr. Bryant proposed a revised priority order for the Goals themselves, indicating he thought Open Space was first, Agriculture second, Residential Development third, Town Infrastructure fourth and Environment fifth. Mr. Bassin pointed out that the Committee had spent a considerable amount of time developing the eight goals in priority order based on the survey results, which had resulted in environment being the highest priority, and that the Town had indicated support for this ranking at the 4/26 Town meeting.

**3. Definition of Environmental Goal:** Mr. Bryant suggested we had to be careful when we use the term “environment” as it meant different things to different people in town, and we did not want the Community to misinterpret what we were talking about and think we were focused on bog turtles. In addition, Mr. Bryant suggested that local law may not be as appropriate as DEC and Federal environmental guidelines in managing environmental issues, so we might want to defer to those rules and not place as much of an emphasis on environmental issues in the Town Comp Plan.

Mr. Bassin noted that land use was a town responsibility, and that was what the Comp Plan was focusing on when we talked about things the town could do to help protect implement the environmental goals, which focused on protecting groundwater and the wetlands and woodlands that provided the groundwater recharging systems necessary to protect groundwater supplies. Mr. Bassin also noted that this definition of environmental issues was the most important of all the issues, with over 90% support from people who responded to the survey. Mr. Bassin also suggested the results and recommendations of the Water Study, which was commissioned to help the town Plan deal with water issues, should be incorporated in the environmental recommendations of the Plan.

**4. Importance of Survey Results:** Ms. McKee suggested that since only 434 people responded to the survey, it might not accurately reflect the view of the entire Community,

and the Committee should use its judgment to reflect what it thought the Community really believed. Mr. Bassin noted that the 28% response was typical of these kinds of surveys and represented a 95% confidence level with a 5% margin of error. The 95% confidence level indicated that we can be 95% sure the survey reflects the Town's wishes. Mr. Bassin also said the survey was the best, most comprehensive and most objective information we had on what the Ancram Community thought about the issues facing the town, and not relying on the survey, or moving away from the survey without having something better to rely on would be a serious mistake.

**5. Agriculture/Open Space Goal:** The Committee had an extensive discussion of how to best support the goal to support agriculture and protect farmland. Mr. Maclean suggested that to protect agriculture in Ancram it would be important to review and update the ag district, implement ag zoning districts within the rural residential zones, move to density averaging and consider sliding scale zoning. Mr. MacLean also believed we should provide incentives to encourage cluster development and the use of conservation development techniques. Mr. Bassin suggested making clustering and conservation developments mandatory, but Mr. MacLean thought that might be going too far. He suggested reduced densities for non-cluster, non-conservation developments and density incentives for using clusters and conservation developments. Mr. MacLean also suggested the incentives to use clustering and conservation techniques guidelines had to be clear, and available to anyone without political intervention. Mr. MacLean also suggested we needed to resolve the issue of the AG Zones and the rural residential zones and the format of our density based zoning rules – whether to use sliding scale or density averaging, or both depending on where we were talking about. Mr. Maclean also suggested density numbers could be different in the ag zones versus the residential zones. Mr. Bassin suggested tying the ag zoning land use benefits to ag exemptions, not to the land per se. The Committee decided to check with Ms. Stolzenburg to see if this was possible or desirable. (Note: Ms. Stolzenburg indicated that the town could define the proposed ag zoning district based on ag exemptions, but did not recommend this approach. She cautioned this approach could exclude new farms which did not meet the State's ag exemption requirements, and ag exemption guidelines could be changed by the State without Town participation, disrupting the Town's intent in providing incremental farm related land uses for active farms). Mr. Bryant suggested all of Ancram not classified as rural residential could end up as agricultural, and wondered if it made any sense to do that. Ms. Hundt brought up the issue of farm housing and if it was easy to obtain. Mr. Chase suggested the process needed streamlining.

**7. What We Have Agreed On:** Mr. Chase suggested that there were some things we appear to have a general agreement on: 1) mandatory site plan review; 2) density based zoning, not minimum lot sizes and 3) incremental land use benefits for farmers via an Ag zone. The committee agreed. Mr. Chase also suggested we keep track of what we have agreed on as we continue our discussions. The Committee agreed with this as well.

**8. Site Plan Reviews:** Mr. Chase noted that Planning Board Site Plan reviews could help minimize the visual impact of development, and protect farmland and rural character. The Committee discussed the value of mandatory site plan review for all new buildings.

Mr. Bassin noted that the Town could use outside planners to do these site plan reviews, and that the petitioners would be expected to pay for these site plan review services. Mr. MacLean cautioned that we do not make the process excessively expensive by needing outside consultants to support the site planning process. Mr. MacLean suggested that Planning Board members could be trained to do site plan reviews to control costs for the petitioners. The committee discussed using mandatory site plan reviews only for large subdivisions, but Mr. MacLean pointed out that in Ancram the experience of the last 30 years was a series of single home developments and minor subdivisions, and over time, if there was no site planning reviews for these smaller projects the land would eventually be eaten away. Ms. Hundt asked for clarification on what a site plan review could and could not do. The committee concluded mandatory site plan reviews for all projects to protect farmland, agriculture, environmentally sensitive areas, rural character and scenic views could be a valuable tool to help support our agriculture/open space and environmental goals. Ms. Mckee suggested that the site plan guidelines we develop be strong enough to support the 2030 Vision and Goals, but that the Planning Board be given the flexibility to waive certain requirements if there are good reasons. Mr. Bryant commented that the planning board will need to handle all future applications on a case-by-case basis with an understanding that all PB decisions must bear in mind the overall goals of the comprehensive plan. Mr. Bryant also noted that any applicant should be required to show that the intended subdivision is consistent with the overall goals of the comprehensive plan and not just show that the application is not a violation of our existing zoning, which is now the case.

**9. Summary of Where We Are:** Mr. Bassin noted that Ms. Stolzenburg had said last time that we had really two issues to decide – one , how many building we wanted in Ancram long term, and two, where we wanted them. Mr. Bassin commented that we now had about 900 buildings in town, and current zoning would permit up to about 5400, according to the Build Out analysis. We know from the water study that we have water resources to support homes on 3.5 acres on average, and we know from the build out analysis that we if we exclude all environmental constraints, we would reduce the number of potential total building lots to about 2400, based on the current 3 acre zoning. We also know that the Community, based on the workshops and the survey, wants to protect ground water, wetlands, woodlands, agriculture, farmland, open space, scenic views and ridgelines, wants more affordable housing, a pace of development about the same as over the last 20 years (10-20 new homes per year), no major developments, and on balance, is satisfied with the current mix of lot sizes. Mr. Bassin suggested that the Committee might be able to craft a Plan do almost everything the Town says it wants by using mandatory cluster and conservation development techniques and site plan reviews, and by moving to an average density based zoning process. Mr. Chase said this all sounded pretty good to him, and suggested Mr. Bassin try to write all that down.

10. The meeting adjourned at 9:10 PM.