

**Town of Ancram
Comprehensive Plan Committee Meeting
September 22, 2008**

Present: Art Bassin, Barry Chase, Hugh Clark, Kyle Lougheed, Don MacLean, Leah Wilcox

Absent: Bonnie Hundt, Suzanne Bressler

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

The minutes of the 9/15/08 meeting were reviewed and approved.

New Committee Members -- Mr. Bassin welcomed Hugh Clark as a new committee member, appointed at the 9/18 Town Board Meeting. Suzanne Bressler was also appointed to the Comp Plan Committee at the 9/18 meeting Town Board, but had indicated she would be unable to join the committee until the October 13 meeting.

Strategy Outline Review – The Committee resumed its discussion of from last week possible strategies to implement the 2030 Vision and Goals related to open space and agriculture:

1. Agricultural Zones verses Residential Zones – The Committee reviewed the map of ag parcels and areas of town which were in Ag District 1. Because of the extent of the agricultural land in Ancram and the size of Ag District, the Committee concluded it was not appropriate to try and set up ag zones within the Rural Residential zone, and tentatively agreed to keep all areas outside the Hamlets as a single zone, but to consider renaming this zone “Agricultural”, from Rural Residential. The Committee also noted that there were lands not indicted as “agricultural” on the map that were being farmed.

2. Additional Agricultural Business Uses – The committee discussed and tentatively agreed that additional small scale agricultural support business activities would be permitted subject to special use permits and site plan review designed to protect the rural character of the Community. The Committee agreed that great care had to be taken to insure that the scale of these new ag support businesses was consistent with the rural nature of the Community and that large scale industrial/commercial ag support operations were excluded. Ms. Wilcox also noted that in addition to controlling the size of these ag support businesses, we would have to control levels of noise, set backs and screening from neighbors. Mr. Bassin suggested setting minimum acreage requirements for various kinds of ag support businesses. Anyone, not just farmers, would be permitted to engage in these business activities which could include things like equipment repair, farm stands and agricultural retail outlets, small scale slaughterhouses etc. Mr. Lougheed suggested looking at the current list of prohibited agricultural businesses to determine which to allow and which not to allow.

3. Lot Sizes in the Ag Zone – The Committee tentatively agreed to adopt the recommendation of the Water Study and change the average acres needed to build a home in the Agricultural Zone from a minimum of 3 acres as it is now, to an average of 3.5 acres. Mr. Bassin suggested going to 3.5 might not be essential at this point, and we could be as well off for the next 10-20 years with the 3 acre lot size outside the hamlets we have now. Mr. Chase suggested the 3.5 acre number had value because of the water study. Mr. Maclean commented that he thought the 3.5 acre number had merit, but believed the major value in what we have been talking about was requiring “open space” development design techniques and a mandatory site planning process and review which specifically supported the Towns goals to protect rural character, agriculture, opens space and scenic views. Mr. MacLean thought getting this open space development framework in place should be the major objective at this point, and the Town could deal with the right density formula down the road as more information about the effectiveness of open space design becomes available.

4. Average Lot Sizes in the Ag Zone -- The Committee tentatively agreed to shift the basis of zoning outside the hamlets from minimum lot size to average lot size. The importance of this change is subdivisions in the Ag Zone will now be permitted to be on lots as small as ½ acre as long as the land perks and water is available, and as long as the average lot size of all lots created from subdividing a parcel equal the 3.5 acre target.

5. High Density Residential Areas Outside the Hamlets -- The Committee noted there were a handful of areas outside the hamlets like the Rhoda Lake Community and along Carson Rd which had developed with small lots more typical of the hamlets than the Rural Residential/Agricultural 3 acre zone. The Committee tentatively concluded that because of the smaller, hamlet-like lot sizes in these areas should be, they should be granted substantial buffers from future agricultural business/support activities, and should also be given less stringent “hamlet-type” set back rules which will allow owners of these properties to build closer to the lot lines without first getting a zoning variance. .

6. Farm Housing – Mr. MacLean noted that there was new language about farm housing in the revised zoning document that he and the Planning Board had worked on several years ago. He will bring this document to a future meeting.

The Committee then turned its attention to a review and discussion of how to improve the number of affordable building lots and rentals in the hamlets and in the Agricultural Zone:

7. Affordable Hamlet Housing – The Committee discussed and tentatively agreed to recommend that all landowners in the hamlets be allowed one subdivision regardless of the size of the existing parcel, so long as the resulting new lots are not less than ½, acre and there is available water and septic. Ms. Wilcox commented that as part of this change the zoning law should permit and encourage fewer curb cuts and the use of existing driveways wherever possible. The intent of this would be to create more affordable building lots in the hamlets. The committee will ask Don Meltz to calculate how many new lots this possible change could create.

8. Simplify Hamlet Zoning – The Committee discussed the elimination of the R-1 (2 acre zoning) and R-2 (1 acre zoning) zones and establish a single ½ acre building lot standard in the hamlets. The intent of this proposed change would be to develop higher housing and population densities in the hamlets, which in turn could attract retail and restaurant businesses which in turn would help stimulate economic activity generally. The Committee will ask Don Meltz how many new homes this change could create.

9. Affordable Lots Outside the Hamlets – The Committee discussed the possibility of permitting any landowner outside the hamlets with less than 3.5 acres to subdivide one time, as long as the resulting lots were not less than 1 or ½ acres, and subject to adequate water and septic. The intent of this change would be to provide affordable lots outside the hamlets in areas where there is already residential development. The Committee will ask Don Meltz to estimate the number of new lots which will be created by this possible change.

10. Affordable Rentals – The Committee discussed and tentatively agreed to recommend that Tow family and or 1-4 family homes be permitted in the hamlets, subject to access to water and septic, and that and apartments in existing barns and garages be permitted town-wide, again subject to water and septic being available.

11. Issues related to Increased Densities – The Committee discussed the possible problems (environmental, traffic, roads) related to increasing building lot and rental densities like and agreed to clarify and discuss these issues with Ms. Stolzenburg at the next meeting.

12. Limiting Building Permits – The Committee discussed and rejected the idea of controlling major development by limiting the number of building permits that would be issued to a fixed number. The Committee believes, however, that the Town Board should carefully track the number of new home permits issues monthly and determine if intervention is needed in the event of a sudden spike in new building permits.

13. Garden Apartments and Senior Citizen Housing – The Committee discussed recommending that zoning make provisions for garden apartments (need to precisely define what a garden apartment is, but it will be bigger than a 4 family home) and senior citizens housing. The committee concluded that both types of housing could have merit as a way to provide relatively low cost rental units to residents, and tentatively agreed to recommend these types of housing subject to special use permits, and site plan review to insure these facilities are of a size and scale that is consistent with the rural character of the Town and are built in a way that is consistent with the “open space” design concepts we will require for residential development. The Committee noted that a senior facility like Noble Horizons would have to be of large enough size to be economically feasible, and able to provide the long term care its residents expected. The Committee recognized the desirability of that kind of facility to bring good jobs to the town.

14. Mobile Homes and Mobile Home Parks – The Committee discussed and tentatively agreed that mobile homes and mobile home parks (subject to a special use permit) should be permitted subject to the same open space design standards and site planning process and reviews as any single family home, minor subdivision or major sub division would undergo. The Committee discussed and rejected the idea that we should require double wide mobile homes except to replace an existing single wide mobile home, concluding that single wide trailers were a more affordable solution, and could be sited and screened to be as attractive and unobtrusive as any single family home.

15. Expand the Hamlets – The Committee discussed and tentatively decided to propose that the hamlets be expanded to “follow the lot lines” to include the portions of parcels which were not now totally in the hamlets. Mr. Clark suggested we consider expanding the hamlet boundaries by several hundred yards to increase the number of affordable lots.

Next Meetings: Mr. Bassin indicated the Committee would meet next on 9/29 (with Ms. Stolzenburg), 10/6 (with Ms. Stolzenburg), 10/13, 10/20, and 10/27. In addition, the CDBG Project Team would meet next on Wednesday 10/15 at 7 PM at the Town Hall.

The meeting adjourned at 9 PM.