

**Town of Ancram  
Comprehensive Plan Committee Meeting with Town Board  
Draft Minutes  
April 13, 2009**

**Town Board Members present:** Tom Dias, Donna Hoyt, John MacArthur, Bob Mayhew, Jim Miller, Monica Cleveland (Town Clerk)

**Comp Plan Committee Members present:** Art Bassin, Suzanne Bressler, Barry Chase, Hugh Clark, Bonnie Hundt, Kyle Lougheed, Don MacLean, Jim Miller, Leah Wilcox  
**Others present:** Mr. & Mrs. Nickerson; Mr. & Mrs. Brandt; Mr. & Mrs. Dietter; Mr. & Mrs. Kirk; Madeleine Israel; Jane Shannon; Elaine Smith; Ms. Clark; Ms. McKee

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**1. Introduction:** Supervisor Dias called the special Town Board meeting to review the Comprehensive Plan to order, and asked Mr. Bassin how the Comp Plan committee would like to proceed. Mr. Bassin suggested opening things up for any questions the Town Board or the audience may have, and after dealing with those questions, walking through Draft 7 of the Comp Plan to discuss the highlights of the document.

Mr. Bassin indicated that the Comp Plan came in two volumes. Volume 1 was the actual Plan, and Volume 2 was a series of appendices which contained the detailed backup to the Plan, including the Profile and Inventory Document, Survey results, the Ground Water study, the Buildout analysis, the Laberge and Synthesis reports on hamlet revitalization and the maps. Mr. Bassin indicated that both Volume 1 and Volume 2 would be on the web site, and that printed copies of volume 1 were available for the public at the Towns Hall. Because volume 2 was over 300 pages, there were only enough printed copies for the Town Board and town clerk. There would also be one copy of volume 2 kept in the Town Hall conference room available to the public for review.

Mr. Bassin indicated that Volume 7 of the draft Comp Plan had incorporated about 20 specific changes to language and content based on community and town official comments during the January to March 2009 period. A list of these changes will be circulated separately.

**2. Questions and Comments:**

a) **Average Lot Sizes --** Ms. Hoyt asked how the 3.5 acres average lot size process would work if someone wanted to subdivide one lot from a larger parcel. Mr. MacLean indicated that the acreage of the one subdivided lot would be subtracted from the total parcel acreage, and depending on the size of the original parcel and the subdivided lot, the number of remaining lots associated with both parcels would be determined. For example, if we had a 35 acre parcel, it would have the possibility for 10 lots. If a 7 acre lot were carved off, the remaining parcel would be 28 acres and have 8 lots, while the 7 acre lot would have the possibility of further subdividing into two lots. If the 35 acres were subdivided into a lot that was less than 7 acres, it would have no additional subdivision opportunities, and the remaining parcel of over 28 acres would have 9 additional lots available.

**b) Implementation Committees** -- Mr. Mayhew noted that the Plan identified a lot of committees which would be needed to implement the Plan's recommendations, and asked how many there were. Mr. Bassin indicated there were 13 or so committees proposed in the Plan, but noted that many had already been established and were already at work (CDBG Committee, Ag Committee, Seniors Committee, Youth Commission etc.). Mr. Mayhew expressed a concern that it would be hard to find people to staff all the committees. There was a general agreement that the Town Board would have to set priorities and staff the committees that would have the most significant impact on Plan implementation, like the Zoning Revision Committee.

**c) Zoning Revisions Committee** -- Mr. Bassin noted that the Committee recommended that the Town retain Ms. Nan Stolzenburg to act as the Town's planning advisor for the ZRC effort, as she understood the Town, the Comp Plan and zoning. Mr. Dias commented that the town would have to be careful about costs. Mr. Bassin indicated that the costs of doing the zoning revisions would be 20,000-25,000, and could be partially funded by the \$25,000 Agriculture and Farmland Protection Plan grant, the CDBG grant and by grants from places like the Greenway. The zoning revisions effort also could be spread over the next 18-24 months, and fall in two or three budget periods, so the annual costs could be less than \$10,000.

**d) Pace of Plan Implementation:** Mr. Dias mentioned that he and Mr. Bassin had received two emails earlier in the day which expressed concerns that the Comp Plan process was taking too long, that the 2030 Vision was too far into the future to be useful, that the deteriorating buildings in the center of Ancram were symbolic of the deterioration of the Town and the Community's indifference to this deterioration, that the Town should become more aggressive fining property owners who let their properties deteriorate and that the and the town should remove the deteriorating buildings if the owners did not take care of this themselves. The Committee and the Board agreed that the 2030 Vision might communicate a longer and slower implementation process than was intended. Ms. Hoyt suggested using language like "over the next 20 years" instead of "by 2030" to communicate that the process was going to start now and be ongoing. There was agreement that Plan should be implemented as quickly as possible, and that Plan implementation priorities should be moved up to the beginning of the document from close to the end, or that a summary of the implementation Plan could be moved up to the front end of the Plan document. Ms. Hoyt and Mr. Mayhew suggested that a short term plan to deal with the center of Ancram be developed. Mr. MacLean noted that there were some things that could be changed right away. Ms. Hoyt noted that during the two years of the Comp planning process things had gotten worse in the center of Ancram. Ms. Nickerson suggested starting the Plan document with language stating what we want to do, and the importance of a Comp Plan to secure the grant funding needed to support what we want to do. Mr. Mayhew supported this approach. Ms. Hoyt suggested pulling out the implementation plan section of the Plan or the Priority Action Schedules and having them as separate handout for the public hearing on 4/25.

**e) Scope of Plan** -- Mr. MacArthur asked if the focus of the Comp Plan was the hamlet of Ancram, or the Town of Ancram, including Ancramdale and Boston Corner. Mr. Bassin indicated the focus was the entire town, including Ancramdale and Boston Corner, but that the hamlet revitalization efforts were initially being directed at the hamlet of Ancram, where conditions were much worse than in Ancramdale or Boston Corner.

**f) Readability of Plan** -- Mr. Mayhew asked Ms. Shannon what the reading level of the Comp Plan document was. Ms. Shannon indicated the Comp Plan was written at a 12<sup>th</sup> grade reading level, which she thought was appropriate for a document like this. Ms. Smith suggested we could improve the readability of the Plan by adding clip art to help make points.

**3. Walk through of Plan Document** – The Town Board and Comp Plan Committee proceeded to walk through the Plan document. The following issues came up:

**a) Ag Zoning District** – Supervisor Dias asked why the Plan recommended changing the name of the Rural Residential Zone to the Agricultural Zone. The Committee indicated this was done to reinforce the Community’s desire to protect and promote agriculture. Agriculture was one of the highest rated issues in the survey, with over 90% of the respondents to the survey indicating the town should take actions to protect agriculture and open space.

**b) Helping Farmers stay in Business** – Mr. Dias mentioned that the Sommerhoff dairy farm had decided to sell its milking herd. Mr. Dias expressed frustration that the Town and the Town Board could not have done more to help keep the Sommerhoff farm operating. Mr. Miller, also a dairy farmer, commented that farmers had to diversify to stay in business. Mr. Chase, who recently retired from dairy farming, noted that the economic conditions affecting farmers were never good, but were very bad at this point, and reinforced the need to diversify into higher value products. Mr. Chase mentioned his son had recently introduced a line of cheeses which were sold at local food stores. Ms. Hoyt noted that farming was a business, and like any business had to diversify and change to stay viable and competitive. Mr. MacLean commented that the Town could not really help any one farm or farmer, but through good planning and zoning, a town could protect farmland and keep it open for future farming activities. Mr. MacLean also noted that Ancram had excellent farming soils, adequate water supplies and millions (maybe 15 million if you include NYC, Albany and Boston) of consumers within a couple hours of the area.

**c) Communications and Community Character** – Mr. Bassin noted that many of the recommendations for better town government (more town meetings, more communications from town government, more information on the web site, a newsletter etc) had already be acted on by the Town Board.

**d) Center of Ancram** -- Mr. Dias noted that there has a considerable discussion going on for years about what to do about the dangerous 82/7 intersection and deteriorating buildings in the center of Ancram. Mr. Dias commented that some people in Town

wanted to preserve and restore the deteriorating buildings in the center of town, while others just wanted them to be removed as they were eyesores and dangerous. Stiehle House (the yellow house next to the Tavern) is perhaps the most controversial issue. The Ancram Preservation Group has initiated a stabilization project to try to improve that building's appearance. Mr. Dias said he would discuss the status of that building with the APG. There was discussion about the possibility that the Town could condemn the building and have it torn down by enforcing the existing NYS building code, but in that case, the Town would have to pay for the demolition, and that could cost \$20,000 or more. Mr. Mayhew suggested the Town look for grant funding from either the CDBG or the stimulus fund to deal with this problem and other similar problems.

**d) Historic Sites ---** Mr. Bassin noted that the Town Historian had, for many years, been actively collecting data, old photo's and taking pictures of the historic places in Town to document the history of the area, and had several historic places in process for designation as historic sites by NY State. Ms. Hoyt asked what historic sites would be included in the historic site assessments required for major sub divisions. Mr. Bassin indicated they would include National and State designated historic sites, as well as any local historical sites identified by the Town Historian and approved by the Town Board.

**e) Financial Analysis Advisory Committee and Highway Advisory Committee –** Mr. Bassin indicated that these committees were intended to provide “staff support” for the Town board and the Highway Superintendent. Mr. Bassin noted that there had been suggestions to combine thee two committees, but given the fact that the highway department spent around 85% of the town's annual budget, dedicating separate support for the highway function might make sense.

**f) Roadside Trees –** The Town Board noted that the Town has no authority over state, county or electric company road crews and could not influence them to change their roadside tree and vegetation management practices. The Town Board suggested making the roadside tree preservation strategy apply only to the Town road crew.

**g) County Approval of Septic Systems –** The Town Boars suggested adding language to the Plan indicating that wherever development is subject to septic approvals, that these approvals had to come from the County Health Department, not from the Town.

**h) Commercial Design Standards –** Ms. Hoyt asked about the content and extent of the “commercial design standards” mentioned in the Plan. Ms. Wilcox noted that commercial design standards currently existed in the Town's zoning, and were standard things. Mr. Bassin indicated that the commercial design standards would be set by the Zoning Revisions Committee based on guidance from the Town Board, and would eventually have to be approved by the Town Board.

**i) Hamlet Zoning Changes –** Mr. Bassin noted that the Plan recommended making changes to the hamlets of Ancram and Ancramdale to expand the business/residential zones and to permit ½ acre zoning in these expanded parcels business/residential zones. In addition, the Plan recommends reclassifying the parcels on the Poole's Hill Road border

of the hamlet past Five Roses East and West to agricultural from 2 acre residential. Mr. MacLean noted that the Committee believes these lands are already deed restricted and cannot be further subdivided, so this change should not negatively affect any of the property owners. The Plan also recommends making changes to the Ancram hamlet boundaries on the western end of Route 7, and proposes that all the remaining 2 acre zones in Ancram, Ancramdale and Boston Corner be reclassified as average lot size areas with 60% open space requirements.

**j) Logging** -- Mr. Bassin noted that the logging permit requirements were intended to protect neighbors by limiting the time of day and days of the week logging could be conducted. Mr. Mayhew suggested requiring that the logger seeking the permit be required to have a survey map of the properties he was going to log, so there would not be any confusion about logging the wrong parcels. Mr. Mayhew also suggested requiring the logger to post the permit. Ms. Hoyt suggested requiring both the property owner and the logger to have permits.

**k) Gravel Mining** – Mr. Bassin commented that the Committee had spent time during the Comp plan process with representatives of the gravel mining industry (including mine owners and mine operators) and were impressed by the reported changes in DEC control over mining activities, which included higher bonding requirements and a reclaim as-you-go approach. Mr. Bassin also noted that the Town has had excellent experiences with several miners over the years. The Committee, however, decided that there was no compelling reason to change the prohibition against additional gravel mining in the Scenic Corridor Overlay Zone and that the potential risks of expanding mining in the Scenic corridor Zone to the environment and disruption to adjacent property owners were not offset by any community benefit. Ms. Wilcox noted that DEC had denied a mining application in the Scenic Corridor Overlay Zone in 2003 citing environmental concerns, and noted that doing full environmental assessments was a normal DEC procedure in evaluating mining applications. Towns were also allowed by DEC regulations to require SEQRA evaluations of mining projects which do not require DEC approval. Ms. Hoyt asked about mining outside the Scenic Corridor Overlay Zone. Ms. Wilcox commented that mining was allowed anywhere else in Town subject to DEC and Town oversight.

**k) Scenic Corridor Overlay Zone** – Mr. MacArthur suggested that the language of the Scenic Corridor Overlay Zone be reviewed and revised to make it less restrictive toward business. Ms. Wilcox noted that the Scenic Corridor Overlay Zone already allowed any business allowed elsewhere in Town except four – gravel mining, airports, bus stops and equipment sales and service, and suggested there might be a misconception about the restrictions on business in the zone. Mr. MacArthur noted that his understanding was there were unnecessarily restrictive requirements for businesses in the zone, and thought they should be reviewed and revised to make it easier for businesses to set up along Route 22. The Scenic Corridor Overlay Zone language will be reviewed as part of the Zoning Revision Process, as will all Town zoning and land use laws, to make sure these laws are consistent with the adopted Comp Plan.

**4. Conclusion** – Ms. Wilcox suggested that it would take time for the Town to understand what is in the Plan, and that an educational process to help everyone understand what was in the Plan would be a good thing. The Comp Plan Committee thanked the Town Board for their support and efforts to review and suggest improvements to the Plan. Ms. Hoyt commented that the Plan was a positive document. Ms. Smith noted that the planning process had helped the town come together as a community. Mr. Miller indicated he thought the meeting tonight was productive. Mr. Bassin noted that while the committee had been working on the plan for two years, the implementation process was the important part of the Plan, and we were just getting started with that. Supervisor Dias thanked the Committee for its hard work and commitment to the Plan and planning process.

The meeting adjourned at 9.15 PM.