

Town of Ancram
Zoning Revisions Committee
10 March 2014

Members Present: Hugh Clark, Barry Chase, Donna Hoyt, Don MacLean, Jim Miller, Jane Shannon, Dennis Sigler

Members Absent: Terry Boyles, Barbara Gaba, Bonnie Hundt, Bob Roche

Others Present: Ann Rader, Leah Wilcox

The committee convened at 7:06 p.m. and approved minutes of the 10 February 2014 meeting.

The Chair reminded participants about Comp Plan guidance, including the Community's Vision, Goals 1 and 2, Detailed Strategies 2.10 and 2.11, and the TB's referral of tasks to the ZRC.

Focusing on the first of two recommendations requested by the Town Board, the committee conducted final deliberations to determine terrain that is topographically prominent and scenically important, thereby constituting a town scenic resource that warrants protection.

All present reviewed Map: Ridgeline Identification Visibility Analysis, 1-29-2014 [sic: 2-28] 800' & 4+miles; referred to Memo, 28 Feb 14, citing tasks and criteria for an eyeball assessment of terrain indicated on the map; and summarized findings resulting from their eyeball assessment. Conclusions verified that terrain shown in red on the map did warrant inclusion. Ms. Shannon and Mr. MacLean commented that some pieces of terrain below 800' appeared worthy of inclusion, but accepted that such terrain was outside the agreed-upon scope of this assessment. Mrs. Wilcox noted that much of the affected terrain in the northwest corner of town was visible only from a distance, was heavily forested, and that any structures built on that terrain probably would not be noticeable. Mr. Miller agreed.

As an update, the Chair reported that Don Meltz had found that recent focus on the 800' and 4+ miles factors resulted in some designated terrain not being steep slopes exceeding 15% and included some land that is less than 3.5 acres. (A ZRC decision on 13 January 14 had affirmed that only steep slopes 3.5 acres or larger would be designated.) During ensuing discussion, committee members explored the intent of the 3.5 acre provision; examined whether it should apply to the parcel itself or to the designated scenic terrain on a parcel; and considered various scenarios.

The committee decided that Don should refine this map so that 3.5 acres is not a factor in terrain designation: Terrain that is designated will be at least 800' in elevation, visible from at least 4+ road miles/211+ visibility points, and consist of steep slopes exceeding 15%. This map then becomes the document identifying terrain that is topographically prominent and a scenic resource to be protected. The committee also decided that text should be added to the supplemental regulation to state that *parcels* smaller than 3.5 acres within the designated scenic terrain are not required to apply the development standards. This directive coincides with the intent already stated in the supplemental regulation that no lot becomes unbuildable due to these development standards. In addition, the committee decided that the regulation should indicate in some way the stretches of roadway from which the designated terrain is most visible so that landowners and the Planning Board have a common base of information during any discussion.

Having concluded deliberations about what terrain to protect, the ZRC turned to the second major task given to it by the Town Board—determine how to honor Comp Plan guidance that ridgeline protection standards will be required for major subdivisions and encouraged for minor subdivisions.

Initial discussion focused on several scenarios, including a minor subdivision with four unregulated structures, each of which can become discordantly obtrusive within scenic terrain. Scenarios also included a minor subdivision that migrates to become a major subdivision with only the fifth and subsequent lots subject to minimally protective standards, and scenarios also included the stand-alone lot with a single obtrusive structure not subject to minimal standards. Mrs. Hoyt appeared to summarize the conclusions of most members: “If you’re going to protect scenic ridgelines, you’ve got to go for everyone, but protect the small landowner.”

After extensive debate, all members present except Mr. Miller voted to recommend that the Comp Plan vision and goals to protect and preserve important scenic views and to ensure new development minimizes negative impacts to visual and scenic resources are best attained by applying standards to all development within the designated terrain.

However, if the Town Board insists on adhering strictly to the letter of the Comp Plan that calls for protection standards to be required for major subdivisions and encouraged for minor subdivisions, all members agreed that text must be crafted that actually “encourages” structures within minor subdivisions and stand-alone structures to apply protective standards, especially standards that retain continuity of the tree canopy, such as H6a, and blend structure with the surrounding environment, such as H6d.

To that end, the ZRC will recommend to the TB that protective standards apply to all new development within the designated terrain, but shall exempt any structure that has certain qualities. The standards and the exemptions shall both apply to any structure—major, minor, or stand-alone. The exempting qualities will include a maximum height (in the range of a one-story structure, such as 15-20 feet) and a maximum square footage (e.g. 2000 sf) or perhaps levels of maximum square footages (e.g. 1500 sf vs. 2000 sf vs. 3000 sf) triggering various exemptions from standards. Note: When determining height, Mr. Sigler cautioned that the current definition that calls for measuring height at the front of the building may need alteration to ensure height is measured along the face of the building that is visible from publicly accessible locations. The ZRC requests the Chair and Nan draft text that implements these recommendations.

The ZRC will meet at 7:00 p.m., 17 March, to review the final map and draft text mentioned above.

The meeting adjourned at 8:47 p.m.