

Town of Ancram
Zoning Revisions Committee
16 April 2012

Members Present: Hugh Clark, Barry Chase, Barbara Gaba, Donna Hoyt, Bonnie Hundt, Don MacLean, Bob Mayhew, Jim Miller, Bob Roche, Jane Shannon, Dennis Sigler
Members Absent: Terry Boyles, Kyle Loughheed
Others Present: Ann Rader, Ron Rader

The ZRC convened at 7:03 p.m., determined no recusals were necessary, and approved minutes for the 9 April meeting.

To help determine ZRC recommendations about density bonuses for affordable housing, within the development or elsewhere, and about payments in lieu of housing or amenity, the Chair reiterated Comp Plan Detailed Strategy 8.4, noting guidance to “consider” an incentive for affordable housing “to qualified Ancram residents.”

The Chair then reviewed Nan Stolzenburg’s answers to April 9 ZRC questions about A(3)(c) and also summarized Nan’s comments during a follow-up telephone conversation, including cautions about practicalities of administering a selection process and managing an affordable housing trust fund.

Members discussed options about density bonuses for affordable housing and determined:

- Density bonuses should be permitted when developers building houses offer a percentage of the homes in their development as affordable homes to qualified Ancram residents. Similarly, if the developer is simply selling lots, a bonus should be permitted for offering a percentage of the lots as affordable lots to qualified Ancram residents.
- Payments in lieu of affordable housing/lots or other amenities should not be allowed at this time due to difficulties and costs of establishing and operating an affordable housing trust fund, especially without supportive guidance and structure at the Columbia County level;
- Developers should have flexibility to offer affordable housing/lots either within the development or at another site or sites outside the development;
- The density bonus for affordable housing/lots within the development should be greater than for affordable housing/lots at another site or sites outside the development;
- Text in this section should ensure that a developer actually builds the affordable house(s) or designates the lot(s) as an integral part of the project—that there’s no delay whereby the developer never gets around to completing the affordable house(s) or lot(s).

-Rather than up to a 30% increase to the maximum unit density as written in the original draft, members prefer a maximum 20% density increase.

-Members also prefer the following percentages:

- A(3)(a) (Natural Areas/Open Space): Change “up to a 15% increase” to “up to a 10%...”
- A(3)(b) (Public Access/Rec Uses): Change “up to a 15% increase” to “up to a 10%...”
- A(3)(c) (Affordable Housing): As noted above, change “up to a 30% increase” to “20%.”
- A(3)(c)(Affordable Housing): Insert language to effect that offering at least 15% affordable housing/lots within the development may warrant a bonus up to 20%, whereas offering at least 15% affordable housing/lots at another site or sites outside the development may warrant a bonus up to 10%.

-Members recognize that the ZRC has consistently attempted provide clear guidance about responsibilities, criteria, and procedures in all zoning ordinance revisions and in its review of other local laws about land use. The committee considers itself obligated to maintain that pattern of providing specific guidance for density bonuses.

-To that end, a definition of “qualified Ancram residents” should be established. When making such a definition about residency, it appears necessary to consider various scenarios. For example:

- the person of whatever age who has lived in Ancram for a sustained period of months or years;
- the person of whatever age, but especially a young adult, who lived in Ancram for a sustained period, has moved away, but is now inclined to return to his/her Ancram roots;
- the senior who has ties to Ancram, may not currently live here, but will reside permanently if affordable housing is available.

Members opined that it may be helpful to establish a tiered system of qualifications, whereby persons who currently are residents of Ancram for a significant period have priority for affordable housing over other persons who have intermittent residency, and both over those who have no current ties to the Town. Members also suggested that it may be appropriate to give some degree of priority to those who aid the public: e.g. volunteer firefighters, emergency responders, teachers. The committee seeks Nan’s counsel about defining qualified Ancram residents within the context established by the Comp Plan.

During discussion, members noted that measures already enacted, such as provisions for smaller lot sizes, and other market forces are likely to aid the drive for affordable housing. As a point of interest, but not directly pertinent to ZRC action on density bonuses, members noted the value to individual citizens and to Ancram as a community if a non-profit organization or other entity acquired existing houses in the town that are empty or have been neglected, and renovated them into affordable housing. However, consensus among committee members is that such acquisition, renovation, and operation is not a role for town government.

The meeting adjourned at 8:45 p.m.