

Town of Ancram
Zoning Revisions Committee
20 January 2014

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

Members Absent: Terry Boyles, Barbara Gaba, Bob Roche, Jane Shannon

Others Present: Ann Rader, Leah Wilcox

The committee convened at 7:04 p.m. and approved minutes of the 13 January 2014 meeting.

Noting that the Town Board had referred to the ZRC Supplemental Regulation H, Ridgeline/ Steep Slope Protection, the Chair reminded all that two tasks must be accomplished. The committee currently is focused on the first task: Determine which (if any) ridgelines and steep slopes merit protection.

The Chair also reminded all that existing, sanctioned text at H1b2 stresses no lot shall be unbuildable, and H2f, g, and h provide waiver authority if project site does not coincide with mapped R/SSPOD, or is not visible from publicly accessible location, or PB site visit verifies that intent and standards are met, or if standards render lot unbuildable.

Given ZRC intent to use some minimum elevation as the initial discriminator of topographical prominence and given ZRC interest in visibility at 4 cumulative road miles (211 points @ 100' per point) versus 6 miles (317 points), members examined a map showing elevations at 100 foot intervals, including 800' and 900', and a map dated 1/15/2014 showing 211-317 points of visibility. While examining maps, members also were introduced to potential factors that might affect assessments about the scenic importance of elevated terrain.

After map examination and discussion, all but one member favored 800' as the minimum elevation to be used as the initial discriminator of what might become protected ridgelines and steep slopes. Mrs. Hoyt favored 900'. The committee charged the Chair to request from Don Meltz electronic maps that show terrain that is at least 800' in elevation and is visible from approximately 2 miles and from 3 miles, in addition to terrain at least 800' that is visible from approximately 4 miles (211 points) and from 6 miles (317 points).

The committee also reviewed a list of potential factors that might be used when assessing the scenic importance of elevated terrain. Among the points emerging from that discussion:

The visual continuity of terrain is important. Even if the terrain does not have topographical continuity, it may "come together" and be perceived as a ridge, not just as a spot in the terrain.

The ability of the terrain to show a true skyline is important—to be silhouetted against the sky rather than against some other terrain which serves as a relatively close backdrop.

The terrain should be readily visible—a viewer should not need binoculars to see it, nor should it be likely that a viewer will miss the view if he/she blinks.

The frequency with which terrain is visible from various points throughout town is important. The terrain should appear with sufficient frequency to repeatedly nominate itself as scenically important.

Terrain that is forested, especially if the crest is relatively unbroken canopy, makes it somewhat more important than cleared land.

The angle at which terrain is viewed, whether straight ahead or to the side, may affect its scenic importance, which also may be affected by the distance to the terrain.

Working should be added to the list of activities that viewers may be engaged in—e.g. driving, riding, cycling, walking—especially if the work site is likely to be on a publicly accessible location.

One member noted that, given Ancram's roads, cyclists should be concentrating on safely navigating the road and its surface rather than on scenery. Absent a cycling path, the member opined that not much weight should be given to cycling as a viewing activity.

Also opined was that time and speed of viewing need not be factored when determining scenic importance.

Several members noted that, when considering scenic ridgelines and steep slopes visible from publicly accessible locations, those publicly accessible locations should include areas such as Mount Alander, Old Croken, and Round Ball Mountain and the trails that are evolving from Round Ball.

With the Chair's request that members use this discussion and the list of potential factors to consciously examine ridgelines and steep slopes as they go about their week's activities and determine what characteristics actually cause high terrain to be scenic, the meeting adjourned at 9:00 p.m.