

Town of Ancram
Zoning Revisions Committee
27 January 2014

Members Present: Hugh Clark, Barry Chase, Barbara Gaba, Donna Hoyt, Bonnie Hundt, Jim Miller, Jane Shannon, Dennis Sigler
Members Absent: Terry Boyles, Don MacLean, Bob Roche
Others Present: Drew Hingson, Madeleine Israel, Ann Rader, Leah Wilcox

The committee convened at 7:00 p.m. and approved minutes of the 20 January 2014 meeting.

The committee is focused on the first or two tasks requested by the Town Board: Determine which (if any) ridgelines and steep slopes merit protection.

Sanctioned text at Supp Reg 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.

Following intent voiced at the 20 January meeting, the ZRC examined six electronic maps showing Ancram terrain that is at least 800' in elevation. Maps showed terrain visible from 106-158 visibility points (2-3 road miles), 158-211 points (3-4 road miles), 211-264 points (4-5 road miles), 264-317 points (5-6 road miles), and 317-1116 points (6+ road miles). One map was a composite. Consensus favored terrain visible from 211-264 points (4-5 road miles) as most worthy of on-the-ground assessment about scenic importance from publicly accessible locations. However, before making a final decision, members requested the Chair obtain from Don Meltz one composite hard copy map that shows terrain visible from 158-211 points in one color and from 211-264 points in another color.

Continuing its 20 January discussion about criteria to be used during the upcoming "riding the roads" assessment, participants discussed several points, including:

The scenic quality of a view frequently depends on where the viewer is located along a stretch of roadway and on the direction the viewer is travelling. Under some circumstances, a relatively brief view may be striking, even though all criteria might not be present.

The proximity and visibility of noteworthy terrain from a hamlet warrants consideration, as does terrain that has special significance as a town landmark.

Terrain that is most visible in the "green seasons" (spring and summer) should take precedence over terrain in the "brown seasons." A related point was that the cloudy haze of winter frequently precludes a clear view of otherwise distinctive terrain.

The importance of terrain silhouetted against the skyline was again mentioned.

After considering examples of criteria evaluated using a 3-point scale and a 5-point scale, consensus was to "keep it simple" and use a 3-point scale in which a rating of 1 ranks the

terrain relatively low for meeting a criterion, 2 indicates that the terrain meets the criterion to a moderate degree, and 3 indicates that the terrain meets the criterion to a significant or high degree. Consensus also was that instructions about the 3-point scale should permit assessors to enter rankings between the 1, 2, and 3 when circumstances or judgment warrant. For example, an assessor might insert 2.5 in some instances.

After deliberating about which roads and other publicly accessible locations within the town will be used when assessing the scenic importance of nominated ridgelines and steep slopes, consensus was that all roads in the town should be used and that Old Croken, Round Ball Mountain and its newly constructed trail, and Mount Alander should be used as view platforms. Discussion also cautioned that dead end roads that serve de facto as driveways for one resident may not merit the same consideration as all other roads in town.

Participants then deliberated about who should be designated to “ride the roads” and conduct the visual assessment leading to recommendations about which ridgelines and steep slopes are scenically important and merit protection. Ms. Shannon advocated maximum inclusivity, opening the assessment to all in town. While endorsing the concept, others cited difficult logistics and the need to expedite research and recommendations. Consensus was that all ZRC members should conduct the assessment and that members of the PB should be invited to participate. Inclusion of a few other representatives will be considered on 3 February.

When to conduct the visual assessment received preliminary discussion; full deliberation will occur on 3 February.

As the meeting concluded, Ms. Hoyt noted her personal concerns about personally participating in the visual assessment. She endorses the concept of designation via a minimal elevation and computer generated points of visibility, but is not comfortable with visual assessment leading to recommended designations. Members urged her to continue to participate.

The meeting adjourned at 9:00 p.m.