

**Town of Ancram
Comprehensive Plan Committee Meeting
June 16, 2008**

Present: Art Bassin, Barry Chase, Gene Aleinikoff, Bonnie Hundt, Kyle Lougheed,

Absent: Jim Bryant, Don MacLean, Chris Sommerhoff, Leah Wilcox

The Comp Plan Committee meeting was called to order by Chair Art Bassin at 7 PM. The minutes for the 6/9 Committee Meeting were reviewed and approved.

1. Public Discussion of Comp Plan Progress, Vision and Goals: Mr. Bassin welcomed the 10 community residents who attended the meeting. Mr. Bassin noted that this was a ‘second chance’ to comment on the Vision and the Goals, as the first meeting was held on 4/26 with about 70 residents attending. After briefly outlining the process the Comp Plan Committee had gone through over the past year to develop the 2030 draft Vision and supporting Goals, Mr. Bassin indicated the purpose of the meeting was to make sure the Vision and Goals were on the right track, and accurately represented what the Community wanted to see happen in Ancram over the next 20 years.

The questions, issues and comments discussed included:

a. Why Change -- Many people in Ancram are happy with things the way they are today, and wonder why we need to do anything different, and why we even need to do a Comp Plan. Mr. Bassin said that to help keep things way they are now over the next 20 years would require changes to the town’s zoning laws, in that current zoning would permit over 5300 homes to be built -- a house on every three acres outside the hamlets -- compared to the 900 we have now. If that were to happen, he suggested Ancram would look and feel be very different than it was today, and would be inconsistent with what Ancram residents have said they want. In addition, Mr. Bassin said there were things that the community was very interested in seeing happen, like protecting farmland and open space and encouraging agriculture, protecting groundwater and the environment in general, improving the town centers, especially in Ancram, and more affordable housing. Doing these things will require the Town to change some of its policies and laws.

b. Conflicting Issues -- How do we deal with conflicting issues or conflicting priorities, like protecting agriculture and the environment verses residential development, or maintaining the rural character of the town verses economic development? Mr. Bassin suggested that the only way to resolve these issues satisfactorily was “to talk them to death” and keep talking about how to balance the apparent conflicts until logical, reasonable solutions became clear. He also noted that often apparently conflicting issues were not actually in conflict when the right solutions were developed and understood.

c. Deteriorating Buildings in Ancram -- Concern was expressed about the deteriorating buildings in the center of Ancram and the risk that if they were not restored or renovated soon, they could deteriorate to the point where they were no longer salvageable. Mr.

Bassin indicated the problem was one which required money to fix, and indicated that while about 75% of the survey respondents supported historic preservation, most would like to see a combination of public and private money used to support preservation. He indicated that part of the CDBG grant money the town had just received would be used to look at the problem of the deteriorated buildings in Ancram, and the Town would try to identify additional sources of grant funds to help solve that problem. Mr. Blechman noted that NY State may have a historical preservation office that can assist towns with the money, legal work and engineering related to preserving historic properties, and he will research this and provide the contact information to the Committee.

d. Rte 82/7 Intersection -- A concern was raised about the 82/7 corner and the need to provide better visibility looking south and north. There was general agreement that this problem had to be resolved as it was an accident risk, and would be addressed in the Comp Plan.

e. Population Trends in Ancram -- A question came up about the average age of the population in Ancram, which is about 42, what the population trends affecting Ancram were, and what kinds of things we could do to attract or keep younger people in the area. The discussion that followed pointed out that the trend in Ancram and in most rural communities like Ancram across the US was for kids to leave rural areas after school looking for jobs that were not available close to home, while older people looking for second homes or retirement homes tended to move into the area, driving up home prices and making homes too expensive for many people starting out.

f. Economic Development and Affordable Housing -- There was a discussion about the kinds of economic development that could help retain younger people in the area. After the Mill, agriculture is the largest employer in Ancram and is one of the largest business activities in NY State. There was discussion about creating a “business center” that people could use to telecommute, with adequate DSL and cell service support. Everyone agreed that better internet and cell access was important to stimulate “home based” business opportunities. Creating an Ancram Chamber of Commerce was not seen as crucial as there was a Columbia County Chamber of Commerce which was more broadly focused and more useful to home based businesses. Mr. Chase noted that construction and building trades jobs are strong in the area, and commented that during the Youth Focus Group held in December, our kids expressed concerns that Ancram’s popularity with “weekenders” made buying a home in Ancram very expensive, as prices were going up, but that the weekenders were also an excellent source of jobs, as they needed work done on their houses and their yards. Mr. Loughheed confirmed that building, home care and construction jobs were still strong in the area, but that it was virtually impossible for a young person or family starting out to buy or rent a home in the area. Solving this ‘affordable housing’ problem was an important issue facing the Comp Plan. There was discussion about the desire among residents for retail stores and restaurants in town. But there was recognition that the demand may not be here to support additional retail stores and restaurants given the closeness of those services in Copake, Pine Plains and Millerton.

g. Cost to Implement the Comp Plan -- There were concerns about how the Town would be able to pay for all the ideas that came out of the Comp Plan. Mr. Bassin commented that he thought it unlikely that the Town Board would raise taxes dramatically to support the ideas in the Comp Plan, but that the Town would be very aggressive in trying to secure grant funds from the CDBG program and other programs to support Comp Plan implementation programs, and could reallocate town funds from current uses to support Comp Plan priorities without raising taxes.

h. Following the public comments on the issues related to the Comp Plan, Mr. Bassin asked if the draft 2030 Vision and supporting Goals accurately reflected how people wanted Ancram to be in 20 years. There was unanimous agreement that the Vision and Goals were on the right track.

2. Continued Review of Strategies: The Committee then focused on draft 1 of the strategies document, reviewing the first two strategies (related to agriculture and the environment) which had been discussed last week, and working through strategies three through six (Community Character, Community Services, Town Infrastructure and Town Centers). Related to the strategies for Agriculture and the Environment, Mr. Aleinikoff asked for clarification on the “average density” concept. The Committee discussed “average density” and concluded its effect was to provide the same number of lots per parcel, but with a variety of lot sizes, as long as the average of all the lots worked out to the targeted ‘average’. The example used was with a 1 home per 3 acre “average” target (which the Town now has in the hamlets) a nine acre parcel could have three lots – but instead of all being three acres as they would be now, under an “average density” concept, two lots could be 1 acre each with one at 7 acres, for an average of 3 acres. This approach could make lots more affordable and maintain more open space at the same time. The initial review of strategies three to six moved along quickly as they were less complex and relatively easy to understand. The Committee agreed after its initial first review of all the strategies, which should be done at the next meeting, it would focus on identifying high priority and low priority items and start to winnow down the number of strategies in total.

3. Town Board Meeting: Mr. Bassin asked Mr. Chase to represent the Comp Plan Committee at the 6/19 Town Board meeting, and to present the Comp Plan Committee report if asked to.

4. Meetings: Next meetings scheduled are June 23 (Town Building Department); June 30 (Town Assessor); July 5 (Rhoda Lake Association); July 7 (with Nan). DOT and DEC have still not been scheduled.

The meeting adjourned at 9.00 PM.