

**Town of Ancram**  
**Comprehensive Plan Committee Meeting**  
**May 19, 2008**

**Present:** Art Bassin, Barry Chase, Jim Bryant, Gene Aleinikoff, Bonnie Hundt, Kyle Lougheed, Don MacLean, Chris Sommerhoff, Leah Wilcox, Nan Stolzenburg, Ben Syden (Laberge Group)

Also present: Hugh Clark, Sheila Clark, Donna Hoyt, Kit White, Sue Bassin

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The Comp Plan Committee meeting was called to order by Chair Art Bassin at 7 PM. The minutes for the 5/12 Committee Meeting were reviewed and approved subject to the correction of a typo identified by Mr. MacLean.

**1. 4/26 Town Meeting Follow-up:** The Committee decided to hold a follow up to the 4/26 special town meeting on June 16 at 7 PM. The 6/16 meeting will allow residents a second chance to review and discuss the draft of the Vision and the Goals. This meeting will be for anyone who was unable to attend the 4/26 meeting, or for anyone who has additional questions or comments about the Comp Plan Process or the draft Vision and Goals. Residents will be invited to this June 16 meeting by postcard in early June, and announced by public notice in the Independent, on the web site and via the Town email list.

**2. Next Committee Meetings:** The next regular Committee meeting will be June 2. No meeting on Memorial Day, May 26. In June the Committee plans to meet on June 2, June 9 (with Nan), June 16 (Special Town Meeting to discuss Vision and goals), June 23 (with the Building Department) and June 30. June Committee meetings will focus on planning the CDBG study of affordable housing, hamlet revitalization and economic development, completing the Profile Document review and working on strategies, action plans and recommendations. In addition to its regular committee meetings, the Committee will meet with the ZBA at 7.30 PM on 5/27 and with the Planning Board at 6.30 PM on 6/5.

**3. Community Development Block Grant (CDBG):** The Committee welcomed Nan Stolzenburg (Community Planning & Environmental Associates) and Ben Syden (Laberge Group), who had joined the Committee to discuss the \$21,000 CDBG grant the Town has recently been awarded to support a \$35,000 planning study to research and identify specific opportunities to implement Comp Plan goals related to housing, hamlet revitalization and economic development. Ms. Stolzenburg introduced Mr. Syden as an individual she had worked closely with for over 10 years, indicating Mr. Syden and his firm had skills and capabilities that complemented those of her firm, which included deep experience and expertise with the Community Development Block Grant program. Mr. Bassin asked Mr. Syden to outline what was involved in implementing the CDBG grant the Town had been awarded, how the Town could best use the grant funds, and what the results of the grant funded effort would likely be.

**CDBG Overview** -- Mr. Syden began by stating he and his firm had helped communities win over \$90 million in CDBG and related state grant money over the past 7 years. He indicated there was over \$100 million in grant monies available annually to NY communities for housing, economic development and community development/revitalization. Ms. Stolzenburg commented that the process to seek these funds was perceived to be complex, and was, if you did not know how to go about it. Many smaller municipalities did not compete for the available funds because of the perceived complexity of the process. Mr. Syden stated that if a community planned to compete for these CDBG funds it was very important to do a Comprehensive Plan, as Ancram was in the process of doing, and following up the Comp Plan with a "Community Development Strategic Plan", which could be done using the CDBG grant funds awarded to Ancram to develop a "blueprint for action". These efforts would assist the Town to identify and qualify for additional "no match" grants of as much as \$400,000 annually for affordable housing and hamlet revitalization efforts, and up to \$750,000 annually for economic development efforts to implement the goals of the Comprehensive Plan. Mr. Syden also noted that CDBG Technical Assistance grants like the one we had been awarded recently were available annually.

He mentioned that CDBG grant applications were generally due by April of each year, so if Ancram were interested in applying for additional grants in 2009, it would be very important to have both the Comp Plan and a Community Development Strategic Plan done by the end of 2008, so follow-up CDBG grant applications could be prepared and submitted by 4/09. Mr. Syden also stated that it was not unusual for a community to not be awarded substantial "no-match" grants the first year they applied, so even if we were to apply in 2009, as a practical matter, Ancram may not be successful in getting any additional grants until 2010.

Mr. Syden noted that the CDBG grant that Ancram had been awarded was targeted at developing specific next steps in the areas of housing, economic development and hamlet revitalization, and could also be used to revise the town's zoning and land use laws to support the conclusions of the Comp Plan and the CDBG grant analysis related to housing, hamlet revitalization and economic development.

Mr. Syden also described the process by which specific building owners were "funded" for approved CDBG housing and community development grants, and how contractors were screened, "approved" and compensated for CDBG project work. While both the funding process and the contractor management process sounded complex, Mr. Syden indicated firms like his routinely managed these efforts for municipalities and were compensated for this service from the grant funds, so the Town would not have to add to its paid staff to handle these activities. Mr. Loughed commented that the bonding requirements for these kinds of grant construction and renovation contracts could be onerous and could disqualify small community based contractors if care was not taken to avoid that kind of situation.

**Housing** -- Mr. Syden commented that the housing dimension of the effort would focus on the need for affordable housing in general, home rental affordability, home purchase

affordability, general housing conditions, the need for “special needs” housing for seniors or vets, the need for down payment support programs, etc. The analysis of affordable housing needs and opportunities would require examining income levels via an income survey and interviews.

**Economic Development** -- The economic development aspect of the CDBG grant study would focus on how to “create wealth” in the community, and would involve doing a local economic analysis to determine how much money residents spend in and out of the community, what kinds of jobs and businesses the Community wants to attract, and how to create the kind of local economy that will allow our kids to live and work in the area. This phase of the effort will include interviews with local business people, local government officials and school officials. The economic development aspect of the CDBG study/analysis would include agriculture as a line of business that can be expanded to attract more farm operations and create more farm related jobs. Expansion of home based businesses would be examined, as would the opportunity to move current home based businesses to newly formed Hamlet “business centers”.

**Community Development/Hamlet Revitalization** -- The Hamlet revitalization portion of the CDBG study would deal with the geographic limitations of the Hamlets, address water and septic problems and would deal with special situations in Ancram like the 82/7 traffic intersection, the deteriorating buildings in the center of Ancram, the possible uses of the 28 acres of land around the Town Hall, the need to move the Town garage and find a new economic use for that land, the possibility of the Mill expansion and the need for improved recreational facilities for the Town’s young people. This aspect of the effort would involve the appropriate technical and engineering work, a visual inspection of all buildings in the hamlets, and the development of standards for establishing and maintaining the desired visual appearance of the hamlets.

**Grant Management Timing and Process** -- Ms. Stolzenburg and Mr. Syden told the Committee that the major issue was when to start the work outlined in the approved grant application. They suggested the alternatives were 1) that the work could start now, and get folded into the Comp Plan, or 2) be started after the Comp Plan had been adopted, as an amendment. Ms. Stolzenburg indicated that if we were to start the work now we could modify our existing agreement with Community Planning & Environmental Associates to include the CDBG work. If we waited until we were done with the Comp Plan, CDBG rules require we issue a new RFP and go through a consultant selection process again, which would take several months. If we were to move ahead now, Ms. Stolzenburg would manage the effort and subcontract parts of the effort to Mr. Syden’s firm or to other firms as appropriate, and the program paperwork would be handled by Ms. Stolzenburg or Mr. Syden or their associates. Identifying and applying for additional grant opportunities consistent with the Ancram Comp Plan Vision and Goals would be part of this next effort.

**Preliminary Draft of the Grant Work Plan** – Ms Stolzenburg distributed a draft project plan outline which she and Mr. Syden had prepared to show the Committee how the CDBG planning efforts related to housing, hamlet revitalization and economic

development could be achieved. This draft project plan outline is attached. Ms. Stolzenburg and Mr. Syden stressed the importance of getting as many of the “stakeholders” in Town involved in the CDBG planning process as possible, and suggested that local business owners, local government officials and interested residents be asked to participate in the process. The Committee will review this draft project plan outline at the June 2 meeting and will provide Ms. Stolzenburg with its reactions, comments and questions.

**Town Oversight of the CDBG Grant Process** – Both Ms. Stolzenburg and Mr. Syden stressed the need for a Town “oversight” group to manage the CDBG process, oversee the work of the consultants engaged to assist with the effort, and represent the Town’s interests and priorities both in securing the appropriate grants and in implementing the grant funded projects. While the Comp Plan committee was available to perform this “town oversight” role now, after the Comp Plan has been completed and the Comp Plan Committee has been disbanded, Ms. Stolzenburg noted a new group would have to be designated to continue to oversee the CDBG effort, if the Town wished to continue to pursue CDBG funds for implementation of the Vision and Goals of the Comp Plan. She indicated that if a Comp Plan envisioned seeking CDBG funding for implementation projects over the next 5-10 years, the Comp Plan could recommend that a CDBG coordinating group be designated by the Town Board.

**Committee Reactions/Impressions** -- The Comp Plan committee was inclined, unanimously, to move ahead with the CDBG grant effort now, and integrate it into the Comp Plan. Ms. Hundt commented that including the CDBG work product with the Comp Plan would complement, strengthen and bolster the overall Comp Plan and help people understand exactly what we want to do with the Comp Plan. Mr. MacLean agreed, noting that the inclusion of the CDBG grant opportunity in the Comp Plan would be a major positive and a tangible benefit for the Community, balancing the possible negative reactions to revised zoning and land use laws. Mr. MacLean also commented that we needed to be careful we did not become “grant happy”, and pointed out that in the scheme of the Town’s needs, \$400,000 annually was not that much money. Ms. Wilcox commented that the understanding we would get about affordable housing options and issues by moving ahead now would be invaluable, and very important. Mr. Bryant and Mr. Lougheed believed that having the “meat” of the CDBG study included in the Comp Plan would be an excellent addition to the Comp Plan effort, and Mr. Lougheed added that folding the CDBG into the Comp Plan process would make the combined effort more substantial and professional. Mr. Sommerhoff and Mr. Chase also agreed folding the CDBG grant work into the Comp Plan process was the right thing to do. Mr. Chase commented that having professional consulting help (Mr. Syden and Ms. Stolzenburg) to assist with the work and the management of the process was critical to the Committee’s and the Town’s capacity to take on this additional work at this time. Mr. Aleinikoff asked how the Comp Plan would have dealt with the issues of housing, hamlet revitalization and economic development if this grant had not been available. Ms. Stolzenburg replied that the Comp Plan would have recommended these kinds of implementation grants be sought and this kind of work be done when the funding became available.

Mr. Bassin thanked Ms. Stolzenburg and Mr. Syden for the presentation on the CDBG program, and commented that the presentation was thorough, a bit overwhelming, but very helpful, as it provided the Committee and the Community with a way to pursue funding for the housing, hamlet revitalization and economic development efforts that would be important to the successful implementation of the Comp Plan.

Mr. Bassin suggested the Committee members review the Draft Project Plan, think about what we had heard tonight and plan to discuss and decide next steps at the June 2 meeting. The Committee would be able to review issues related to the CDBG grant project again on 6/9 with Ms. Stolzenburg, and then present its recommendations to the Town Board at the June Town Board meeting on 6/19.

The meeting adjourned at 8.55 PM.