

Frequently Asked Questions 9/14/07

The questions that come up most frequently concerning the comprehensive planning process are answered here. If you have any other questions or comments, contact Comprehensive Plan Committee Chair Art Bassin at 329-0921, or by email at abassin@aol.com.

1. What is a Comprehensive Plan? A Comprehensive Plan is a road map that guides a town's decisions related to future growth and development. It is also a process that lets the current residents of Ancram define what they want the future of Ancram to look like, and how they want the Town to develop. It is the basis for the Town's zoning, land use and subdivision laws, and will provide a framework for all town, county and state officials as they make decisions which will affect the town. A comprehensive plan deals with basic issues like growth and development, revitalizing our hamlets, maintaining open space, agriculture, the rural character of the Town, historic preservation, affordable housing, recreation and parks, traffic, road maintenance, natural resources, infrastructure, economic development and other topics of concern to residents.

2. Why Are We Doing a Comprehensive Plan? The previous Development Plan was done in 1972, and has served the town well. But things have changed in the last 35 years. What made sense back in 1972 may not make sense today, and what the residents of Ancram thought was important and wanted in 1972 may not be what we think or want today. We already know that many townspeople today are interested in affordable housing for residents, protecting the Town's agricultural economy, open spaces and rural character, and doing what is necessary to help revitalize the hamlets. The 1972 "Plan" and resulting land use and zoning laws do not adequately support these priorities, so doing a "new" comprehensive plan may be the only way to enable some of these interests to be addressed.

3. When was the Comprehensive Plan Committee appointed, and what has happened since then? The Town Board appointed the Comprehensive Planning Committee in April, 2007. In May, the Committee prepared and issued a Request for Proposal (RFP) outlining the consulting support the Town needed to help develop the comprehensive plan. We received 8 proposals by the early June deadline, interviewed six consultants and selected Community Planning and Environmental Associates. The RFP/consultant selection process took 90 days, and was completed by the middle of July. In the last six weeks, the Committee and the consultant have been laying out the Comprehensive Plan schedule of events and activities, gathering basic profile information about Ancram, and designing the public participation process.

4. How Does the Comprehensive Planning Process work? The process involves answering three important questions. First, **where are we today?** We will profile the current situation in all important aspects of the town today – natural resources,

environment, history, culture, population, demographic trends, traffic and road issues, economic issues and the like - and will gather opinions and input on all these issues from the Ancram community. Second, **where do we want to go in the future?** Based on the information we collect and the public input/opinions we gather during the inventory and profiling process, we will develop a vision for the future of the town, along with a set of goals which define how we as a community plan to achieve our vision. Stage three is **how do we want to get there?** We will develop a series of strategies, policies, actions and programs that will over time implement the town's vision and goals.

5. How do townspeople participate? Community involvement is crucial to the successful development of a Comprehensive Plan. All Comprehensive Plan committee meetings are open to the public. In addition, there will be public workshop meetings, small group meetings, individual interviews and a questionnaire/survey to solicit community opinions. Community input will define what we like and do not like about the way things are now, what things we want to change, what things we want to leave as they are, and how best to make the changes we want to make.

6. How much time will this take, and how much will it cost? The comprehensive plan will take 12-18 months to complete. The Town Board has asked the Comp Plan Committee to try to complete a draft plan by July, 2008. The Town has set aside a budget of \$60,000 to support the comprehensive planning effort over the next year. We believe we will be able to secure grant money to partially fund the development of the Comprehensive Plan, so the actual cost to the Town could be substantially less than the budgeted amounts.

7. Can we spend less than \$60,000 to have a consultant do this work for us? The consultant is budgeted to cost \$33,000, not \$60,000. In addition, we have budgeted \$6,500 for a water study to determine where future development can and cannot be accommodated, \$3500 for grant writing support to attempt to reduce the net cost of our effort, \$11,000 for mailings, postage and printing to communicate regularly to the Community, and another \$5,500 for contingencies.

8. Why do we need a consultant -- can't we have someone in Town do it on a volunteer basis? We decided to retain a professional planning consultant to have the most impartial and objective assistance and advice we could get, and to make sure all points of view were carefully collected and accurately understood. We reviewed 8 consultants, and selected the one we thought was the best of the group, and fortunately, was the least expensive as well. The Comprehensive Planning Committee did not feel it was realistic to depend on volunteers from Town to provide the expert guidance we need to do the Comprehensive Plan well.

9. What happens if we do not do a Comprehensive Plan? Many townspeople have already identified things that they would like to see permitted and encouraged in the future, like more opportunities for affordable housing, preservation of open space and agriculture and revitalization of the hamlets. If we do not do a Comprehensive Plan, we

are less able to make these hopes a reality. In addition, without a “current” comprehensive plan, the Town will be on shakier legal ground when making changes to zoning and land use regulations, the Town Planning Board will not have a current comprehensive plan against which to evaluate proposed new development, and the Town is less likely to be successful when seeking State grants, as the State looks to the Town’s Comprehensive Plan for guidance when evaluating Town grant proposals.

10. Will the Comprehensive Plan influence what we can do with our land? Yes, it could. If the Comprehensive Plan is approved, the Town will then appoint a Committee to review and change our land use and zoning laws to make them consistent with the Plan. The Comprehensive Plan itself is not a law, but a description of what the town wishes its future to be. The Plan may recommend, based on Community input, to impose more restrictions in some aspects of land use, and reduce restrictions in others. And the Comprehensive Plan may recommend things that are now not permitted under current town law, like smaller lot sizes and multiple dwelling units on a property, for example.

11. What are the legal implications of the Comprehensive Plan? The Comprehensive Plan is not a “law”, but to avoid legal challenges which are costly to the Town, the Town’s laws and the decisions of Town officials have to be consistent with the approved Comprehensive Plan. To do this, the Town will have to amend its current zoning, land use and subdivision laws so that they are consistent with the Town’s Comprehensive Plan.

12. Do Ancram voters vote on the Comprehensive Plan? No. NY state law requires that the Town Board votes on the Comprehensive Plan after the Board goes through a formal review, holds a public hearing and secures County Planning Board approval. This is why we have developed a process with many opportunities for townspeople to offer their ideas *before* the plan is finalized.

13. How Was the Comp Plan Committee selected? The Ancram Town Board selected the seven person Comprehensive Plan Committee. The committee includes the chairs of the Planning Board and Zoning Board of Appeals, and a representative of the Town Board. The other four members of the Committee were selected to provide the committee with a broad and balanced range of experiences and backgrounds. The committee includes farmers, landowners, business people and hamlet residents.

14. How can I become a member of the Comprehensive Planning Committee? Vacancies are filled by the Town Board based on recommendations from the existing Comprehensive Planning Committee, which interviews prospective new committee members. If you are interested in becoming a member of the comprehensive planning committee, contact Committee Chair Art Bassin at abassin@aol.com or at 329-0921.