

These “Frequently Asked Questions” have been compiled from conversations with hundreds of Ancram residents and property owners who have been following the progress of the Comp Plan over the past 18 months. Reviewing these questions and answers tells you what others in Town are thinking about, and may help answer some of your own questions. If you have any other questions, come to the Workshops or talk to or email any member of the Comp Plan Committee. We will get you an answer, and will add your question to the list.

1. How does the Comp Plan help the Town?

If adopted and implemented, the Comprehensive Plan will keep Ancram looking and feeling pretty much the way it is today – rural, agricultural, with lots of open space. The plan also will help solve problems we face today so we can better protect farmland, develop more affordable housing, attract more businesses and jobs, improve the 82/7 intersection, and revitalize the center of Ancram. Because it identifies where residents want Ancram to be in twenty years and how to get there, the Plan can guide Town, County, and State officials as they decide local issues. As the basis for zoning updates, it gives us better ways to manage growth and better protect current residents from future, large-scale developments. Having a current Comprehensive Plan also makes Ancram more competitive when we apply for private, State and Federal grants to implement the ideas in the Plan. Finally, the Comp plan is based on what we say we want, so adopting it and implementing will take us in directions we all said we wanted to go.

2. What is the problem with our current zoning? Why do we need to change it?

The problem with our current zoning is it does not let us do things we say we want to do. There are at least six things the Community says are very important which are not supported under current zoning. Specifically, our current zoning does not allow us to: 1) protect farmland, open space and rural character; 2) provide smaller lots and accessory apartments in single family homes, barns and garages to improve our base of affordable housing; 3) provide for flexible lot sizes; 4) expand the commercial zones and mixed-use commercial-residential uses to attract businesses and jobs; 5) support agriculture-related businesses outside the hamlets; 6) properly protect groundwater and the environment. All these priorities require that we make changes to zoning.

3. How does the Comprehensive Plan help protect open space, the environment and farmland?

Open Space: The Plan recommends the Town adopt zoning which requires “open space development” designs with at least 60% of the parcel in open space. This kind of

development concentrates all development in 40% of a parcel, leaving the balance of the land available as open space.

Environment: The open space development design outlined above will help protect 60% of our land. To protect the environment and groundwater, the Plan proposes adopting the 2008 NY Rural Water Association Study recommendations of going to an average density of 3.5 acres outside the hamlets, prohibiting any development in floodplains or other environmentally sensitive areas and determining the number of buildable lots on a parcel based on the environmental capacity of the land.

Farmland: Farms are businesses. When they are profitable, they can stay in business and use farmland productively. So the best way to protect farmland is to find ways to keep active and sustainable farming businesses in the Town. The proposed Comprehensive Plan helps several ways: 1) With the proposed average density system of zoning, farmers will be able to sell off smaller lots and keep more land in farming under their own direct control; 2) Developers will have to leave 60% of a parcel in open space, suitable for farming use; 3) more farm related support businesses will be permitted in the Ag Zoning District; 4) the Agriculture & Farmland Protection Plan effort will develop additional strategies to help farmers become more profitable and to protect farmland.

4. How does the Comprehensive Plan help get more businesses and jobs into town?

The Comprehensive Plan devotes an entire section to economic development. Recommendations range from zoning changes to expand hamlet business districts and mixed commercial/residential uses to hamlet revitalization, additional farm-related businesses, and upgraded telecommunications services. But, for a business to want to be here, we have to demonstrate we are dealing with our problems, especially in the center of Ancram, and the Comp Plan recommends additional actions to help do that. The Plan also proposes building an economic development plan to address the future, market Ancram, and attract new businesses and jobs. And because our population is not really large enough to support local retail businesses, the Plan recommends we figure out, through the economic planning effort, how to develop businesses or attractions which will draw visitors to Ancram.

5. How does the Comprehensive Plan help get more affordable housing?

Outside the hamlets the Plan proposes zoning changes to allow lots as small as ½ acre where water and septic permit, as long as an average density per parcel of one house per 3.5 acres is maintained. In the hamlets, the Plan also recommends zoning changes to permit lots as small as ½ acre if water and septic permit. Town-wide, the Plan recommends zoning changes to allow accessory apartments in homes, barns, and garages and allowing multi-family dwellings.

6. Why a 3.5 acre average lot size, not one or two?

The 2008 Ancram water study done by the NY Rural Water Association recommended a 3.5 acre average density to protect ground water. This recommendation is based on ground water recharge rates, soil types and the septic draining rates associated with these soil types.

7. How can you protect farming, farmland, the environment and open space with only 3.5 acre average lot sizes – don't we need to go to 20 acres?

Our research indicates that the 60% open space development design requirements and site plan review for careful and smart layout of new development can protect important environmental and farmland locations.

8. How will "open space development" affect my property values?

It should not change your property values; if anything, they may go up because property values are enhanced when open space is preserved.

9. What if I don't want to do an "open space design".

Most developers prefer the clustering that a 60% open space design requires, as it reduces the cost of infrastructure and improves profits. Home buyers prefer it too, because a development that has a lot of open space maintains the rural, country "feel." A single family home built on a lot that is not part of a larger subdivision will not have a problem with this, as you will have more than 60% open space by definition.

10. What good are these ½ acre lots if we don't have the water or septic to support them.

There are many ½ acre lots in town already, dating back before 1972. They work well in places where the soils can support septic and water, but not everywhere. As one more thing to accommodate affordable housing, we want people who can build on smaller lots to have that choice. And as septic technology improves, more small lots could be buildable.

11. What about mobile homes?

They are treated like any other single family home.

12. What is an "environmental constraint"?

An environmental constraint is land that you can't build on due to water, wetlands, or very steep slopes. The Comprehensive Plan recommends that development not exceed the capacity of our land to support it, parcel by parcel. A developer will be asked to demonstrate he can build all the homes (up to the permitted density) he plans

while meeting the Town's density and other requirements, or be limited by a formula which lowers the number of homes based on the amount and type of unbuildable land.

13. What's about the scenic overlay zone?

It stays pretty much as it is, but the Plan suggests that the Overlay Zone boundaries be slightly adjusted to reflect sight-lines based on terrain, and not be based simply on a fixed distance on either side of Route 22.

14. Route 22 may be the best place in town for a commercial zone. Are businesses allowed in the Scenic Overlay Zone?

Using the proposed Floating Zone concept, any business that makes sense and is consistent with the rural character of the Town could be approved in the Scenic Corridor Overlay Zone except bus stations, airfields, vehicle/equipment repair shops and gravel mines. This is how it works now, and remains the same in the Comp Plan.

15. Why can't gravel miners run their business without the burden of all this regulation?

Gravel Miners are regulated by DEC. The Comprehensive Plan adds no new regulations. It only says that the Town should apply existing rules that DEC has already set up. These rules include deciding where gravel mining can and cannot be done, to protect the Community. We want the gravel miners to be able to operate their businesses per the DEC guidelines, but we also want to protect the Community from mining practices that could damage our environment and disadvantage people living near mines.

16. What are these "commercial design standards"? Does that mean I have to paint my house a special color?

No need to repaint your house. The proposed design standards are targeted at new commercial operations to keep them looking appropriate for our small town rural environment. Standards could include building in a style consistent with the existing architecture of the Community, placing parking behind or on the side of structures, not right on the road, and making sure signage and lighting are appropriate for the area.

17. How does implementing the Comp Plan actually happen, and how much does that cost?

The Town Board will take the leadership role in implementing the Plan. They will decide on what gets implemented, when and how. Some recommended actions will require funds to implement, and the Plan recommends the use of grant money, not town tax dollars. The most important first step for the Town Board after the Plan is adopted will be to appoint a zoning revisions committee to redo the Town's zoning and land use laws to reflect the wishes of the Community and the recommendations of the Plan. Zoning

changes could cost \$20,000-\$30,000.

18. How much will my taxes go up because of this Plan?

They should not go up at all because of the Comprehensive Plan *especially* if the Town Board decides to implement the ideas in the Comprehensive Plan by getting grant money when possible. If the Town incurs costs above and beyond what we can get in grants, that may cause taxes to go up.

19. What about grants – it seems like the more grants we get, the more it costs us in tax money.

Either we can pay the whole cost of work we decide we need to do, or we can go for grants and pay only part of the cost. Paying part seems the better way to go. If we don't use available grant money, some other Town will, and we will be less competitive when it comes to attracting businesses and jobs. Once we have decided to do something, getting a grant to help with the funding is like getting free money. But grants are difficult to get – there is a lot of competition for them, and they require a real commitment from the Community and the Town Board to the project, and a solid Comprehensive Plan.

20. What happens if the Plan is adopted? What if it is not adopted?

If adopted, the Town Board will start implementing, will appoint committees to work on recommended actions, and we will make slow but steady progress. The most important first step in the implementation process will be to appoint a Zoning Revisions Committee to fix the Town's zoning and land use laws to make them consistent with the revised Comp Plan. If the Plan is not adopted, things will stay as they are, and we will miss an opportunity to protect farmland, the environment and open space, provide for more affordable housing, promote economic development and jobs and better control large scale development.

21. Can we adopt the parts of the Plan we like, and not the rest?

During the upcoming public hearing process, the Comprehensive Plan Committee and then the Town Board can modify the Comprehensive Plan based on public input, so the Plan finally adopted should be one that the Community supports. It's important to remember that all the Strategies, taken together, are recommended to achieve the Goals and Vision. So if we don't implement the entire Plan over time, there will be holes in the Vision. Once the Plan is adopted by the Town Board, the Town Board will have to set priorities about what to do first and what to do later, because we will not be able to do it all at once. So as a practical matter, the Town Board will control the pace of progress and what gets done, in what order, over time. It probably makes sense to work on the items that are most important to the Community like the zoning changes to protect agriculture, water, the environment and the zoning changes to provide more affordable housing and more opportunities for economic development. The other thing

we should think about starting early in the process are the long lead time projects, like fixing the intersections and the Town centers.

22. How much does fixing the zoning cost? Why can't we do that ourselves?

Zoning revisions could cost \$20,000-\$30,000. We do not have the capability in Town to do the zoning revisions on our own. We need professionals to help rewrite our zoning laws so they are done correctly and can stand up to legal challenges in court. We tried rewriting our zoning on our own about 10 years ago, and the people involved with that effort say we really do need outside expert help to do it correctly and in a timely way. Zoning laws are complex legal documents, requiring extensive knowledge of land use concepts, definitions, and state laws.

23. Can we vote on the Plan?

NY State law says the Town Board must adopt a plan by a resolution of the Board. There is no option to have the public vote to approve or reject a Comprehensive Plan. But if the Town Board wanted to let the Community “vote” on the Comprehensive Plan, it could send around another questionnaire asking people to express an opinion on the Plan, and indicate if they are in favor or against the Town Board adopting it.

24. This all just seems too complicated to me. Why can't we just leave things alone, and keep Ancram just as it is?

Everyone at the Workshops and everyone who responded to the survey agreed we wanted to keep Ancram the way it is, as long as we fix some of the obvious problems. But to keep Ancram the way it is now is a very difficult thing to do, and requires that we do some things differently to keep most things the same. That is what the Strategies try to do.

25. Does anything get “grandfathered?”

Yes, some things will be grandfathered. The zoning revisions committee will develop recommendations about what those things are. Certainly any “non-conforming” existing uses will be grandfathered.

26. What other Towns have gone through this process, and what have the results been?

Lots of towns have gone through this process. Some have had good experiences; some have not. Success depends on whether the Plan reflects the vision and goals of the Community and especially on the committed leadership of town officials over time to implement the Plan.

27. Does this open space plan mean I am going to have to look at a clustered development?

Hopefully not – the Plan recommends that new developments must provide visual buffers between their structures and their neighbors.

28. What happened to the “Planning Issues List” we developed last year? Does the Plan deal with all the issues we identified?

Yes – we used the Planning Issues List as a checklist for developing the Vision, the Goals and the Strategies. Every item on the Planning Issues List has been addressed, one way or the other.

29. What is the Site Plan Review Process For?

The site plan review process will let the Planning Board review where structures are going to be located in a subdivision or on a lot. The process is designed to make sure structures are kept away from environmentally sensitive areas and prime farmland. The requirements for a single home lot are going to be a lot less complicated than for larger subdivisions.

30. So what happens next?

The next steps are 1) the Comprehensive Plan Committee will mail updated Comp Plan information to all households and hold a series of Community Workshops during the first quarter of 2009 to review the Plan and answer questions; 2) the Plan will then be officially presented to the Community at a Public Hearing in March 2009; 3) after the March Public Hearing, the Plan will be presented to the Town Board, which will review it and hold another Public Hearing, probably next summer; 4) If the Town Board decides to adopt the Plan, it will then appoint a zoning revisions committee to work on bringing the Town’s zoning laws into alignment with the new Comprehensive Plan; 5) the Town Board will then decide on how to implement the approved Comprehensive Plan, and will appoint the implementation committees and task forces needed to keep the momentum going.