

Heritage Resources Plan: A Framework for Town Revitalization

Introduction

The Town of Ancram Heritage Resources Plan provides a framework to promote economic development and town center revitalization by recognizing the Town's historic hamlets and buildings as unique assets that have value, are attractive for investment and appropriate development, and can contribute to making the Town a thriving and sustainable community.

As one of Columbia County's earlier settlements, Ancram occupies a special location at the crossroads between New England and the historic towns of the Hudson River Valley. This position was important to the development of the Town as early as the 18th century, and still remains key in guiding its future to becoming a prosperous community.

The Heritage Resources Plan will complement the Town's Agriculture & Farmland Protection Plan, Natural Resources Plan (in process), and Community Development Strategic Plan. Taken together, these plans provide strategies for successfully achieving the Town's goals of sustainable economic development with responsible stewardship of its natural and cultural resources.

This plan outlines six goals for the Town and strategies to reach them by 2020.

Goals & Strategies of the Heritage Resources Plan

Goal 1. Contribute to the Goals of the *Ancram Comprehensive Plan*. As expressed in the Comp Plan, Ancram residents want improvements to the Town while maintaining its current character. The plan recognizes that Ancram has "unique qualities" that help to define its character, and while the hamlets need to be revitalized through housing and owner improvements, and business development, it is important that those "unique qualities" are not lost.

Settlement patterns and historic buildings, public open spaces, roadways and landscapes distinguish Ancram from other towns in the region, and should be valued.

In fact, it has been demonstrated that preservation of heritage resources actually adds value and can spur economic development. Millerton and Hudson are two local examples.

In particular, the Comp Plan goals that address Town Infrastructure, Town Centers, and Economic Development overlap with the goals of this Plan, and the Plan's successful implementation will advance the overall vision described in the Comprehensive Plan.

Strategies for Goal 1:

a. Focus on the hamlets first. *These are Ancram, Ancramdale, and Boston Corner. Since the hamlets have the greatest concentration of historic and cultural resources, implementation of the plan can have real visible and economic impact, and generate momentum.*

A second phase will focus on the heritage resources in the rural areas of the Town.

b. Identify achievable projects. *Efforts and resources should focus on real projects that can be successfully implemented. This will also create momentum.*

c. Look for synergies with other Town initiatives in Agricultural and Natural Resource Planning. *Evaluate new and ongoing initiatives by the Town to identify areas of overlap and mutual goals and support. Adjust plans as required to achieve the best results.*

d. Coordinate efforts with other Town Committees and Boards. *In order to ensure that ongoing Town review and permitting activities support the goals of this plan, conduct a review to coordinate efforts, identify areas of conflict, and propose adjustments.*

Goal 2. Identify the historic and cultural resources of the Town. In order to implement a successful plan, we must first know what our resources are. A complete and accurate survey will serve as a tool to educate the community about our unique history. This in turn will create pride in our community and encourage both residents and outsiders to value its legacy.

A survey will also allow the Town to be more competitive in seeking both private foundation and government funding for projects that can advance the Plan.

Strategies for Goal 2:

a. Create a Historic and Cultural Resources Survey for the community; engage consultant. *The noted Columbia County historian Ruth Piwonka has been engaged, and the survey is underway.*

b. Focus the survey on the hamlets first. *Since the hamlets have the greatest concentration of historic and cultural resources, initiatives and improvements in the hamlets will have the most impact.*

A second phase will focus on the rural areas of the Town.

Goal 3. Maintain and enhance the unique character of the hamlets. Central to defining the character of each hamlet are their unique physical characteristics.

Topography, the relationship to the Roeliff Jansen Kill and other bodies of water, bridges, and the scale of roadways distinguish their settings. The mix of public buildings such as churches, the opera house and town buildings, with commercial, residential and early industrial buildings, like the mill and milk factory, create a variety of scales and uses that uniquely fit these settings. The density of settlement, the siting

and scale of buildings, and their relationship to public open spaces such as parks and cemeteries collectively create their character.

Taken together, these elements combine to establish the distinctive quality of each hamlet. To alter any of these elements in a substantial way would undermine the Town's unique character, and diminish its value.

Big box stores, shopping centers and other typical forms of suburban development are inconsistent with the character of Ancram and not desired by residents. Case studies have shown that this type of development would degrade the value of the Town's historic and cultural assets, and its potential for long-term sustainable economic viability.

Strategies for Goal 3:

a. Consider the overall fabric of the hamlets as important as individual buildings. *All of the physical features of the hamlets contribute to their unique characters. Decisions regarding the development of the hamlets should therefore consider maintaining, preserving and enhancing the whole as well as the individual parts. These include buildings, their scale and materials, as well as density, setbacks, public open spaces, roadways and other patterns of hamlet settlement.*

b. Identify vacant lots for possible infill projects by moving buildings when necessary and/or building new ones to improve the overall hamlet. *The density of buildings in the hamlets creates a "street wall" that is character defining. Vacant lots interrupt the street wall and diminish that character. Therefore, rather than promote development outside of the hamlets, infill projects should first be encouraged. The siting of new or relocated buildings should maintain the same relationship to the street as existing buildings*

c. Rehabilitate buildings in the hamlets. *Appropriate uses and buyers should be identified for abandoned and empty buildings. The Town should provide incentives and assistance to owners, buyers, developers or businesses willing to sensitively rehabilitate these structures. This assistance could range from funding by a privately financed Economic Development Corporation to collaboration with the County Department of Health on septic issues.*

d. Incorporate incentives and exceptions for preservation in Town Zoning. *As Town zoning is updated, regulations that impede preservation should be modified, and provisions that facilitate preservation added. These could include permitted uses, density and setback requirements. All aspects of the Town's zoning and land use laws should be coordinated to reflect the goals of this plan.*

Goal 4. Revitalize the hamlets. Maintaining the historic character of the hamlets does not mean that they should be frozen in time. Instead, appropriate new uses should be found for historic buildings (adaptive re-use), and new buildings that are sympathetic in size, scale, materials and position should be

developed in empty lots. The Ancram Opera House and Farmer's Wife are good examples of historic buildings that have been given new life through adaptive re-use.

These new uses and buildings will strengthen the overall fabric of the hamlets and activate them both socially and economically.

Strategies for Goal 4:

a. Investigate appropriate new uses (adaptive re-use) for historic buildings. *New uses that are economically sustainable and fit the scale, character, and siting of the building should be considered.*

b. Coordinate efforts with APG, and other local, state-wide and regional organizations: the Preservation League of New York State, Historic Hudson Valley, NY SHPO, others. *There are many public and private organizations that support preservation and adaptive re-use projects through financial and technical assistance. Others are implementing projects locally and regionally. Town initiatives should be coordinated with these groups to ensure the most efficient use of resources, and to explore possible collaborations and partnerships.*

c. Coordinate efforts on the Tinsmith House. *Any plans for the house resulting from the improvement of the intersection should be evaluated with regards to the goals of this plan. Creative opportunities for sensitively rehabilitating the house should be pursued in coordination with the proposed road work.*

d. Explore partnerships with the Mill (SWM) and others. *As the largest landowner and employer in the hamlet, SWM has a stake in the community and can benefit from improvements in Ancram. Corporate leadership should be consulted about opportunities for partnerships and investments that are mutually beneficial.*

e. Identify "quick wins" or projects having a big impact with minimal cost or effort. *In order to publically demonstrate a commitment to the goals of this Plan, and show progress that will create momentum, pursue projects that can be implemented soon that have big impact with minimal cost or effort.*

f. Create a "critical mass" of projects to increase impact and create momentum. *Projects that are in proximity to each other or involve multiple buildings should be encouraged to maximize positive impact, demonstrate progress, and promote investment and revitalization.*

g. Research building code compliance issues with historic structures. *The New York State Building Code has provisions to encourage preservation projects by granting exemptions where compliance is not feasible for historic structures. The Preservation League of New York State can provide technical assistance as needed to our local building official and owners undertaking these projects.*

h. Continue efforts to find achievable solutions to the water and septic problems in Ancram, at both the individual and Town level. *Additional studies and research should be undertaken on systems, financing and capital funding to mitigate Ancram's septic and water issues. In the meantime, The Town, Ancram Preservation Group, and other affected property owners in the hamlet should work with the County*

Department of Health to establish guidelines for individual above-ground systems for historic buildings so as not to impede the purchase of and improvements to hamlet buildings.

Goal 5. Create opportunities for economic development that both support local needs and position the Town as a destination. While the hamlets currently have many buildings that are abandoned or for sale, the combination of low prices with distinctive buildings in a unique setting creates real value that is poised for development, if incentives can be put in place that will attract the right buyers, investors, and business owners.

It has been demonstrated across the country that preservation brings value and economic development. The Town should recognize the value of its historic and cultural assets, and enhance them through a program of preservation and incentives, as well as benefit from the experience of similar successful programs in other towns.

It is unlikely that the local population of Ancram alone is sufficient to support the level of economic development necessary to sustain the Town's commercial centers. In order to create a sustainable local commercial economy, it will be necessary to have a blend of businesses that can attract and serve both local and regional users, expanding the Town's economic base.

Ancram occupies a special location at the crossroads between New England and the historic towns of the Hudson River Valley. This position was important to the early development of the Town, and also remains key in guiding its future to becoming a thriving community. The growth of cultural and agricultural tourism in the region presents a timely opportunity to use the Town's historic and agricultural resources to attract sympathetic investment and sensitive development that will promote the Town as a destination. Its proximity to the Taconic Parkway facilitates access, making it more attractive for investment and appropriate development.

Strategies for Goal 5:

a. Research public and private funding opportunities. *A consultant should be identified and funding secured to research grants and other funding opportunities for historic preservation and town infrastructure and revitalization initiatives. These could cover both design and construction costs.*

b. Attract/reach out to potential owners and developers of historic properties. *Business owners and developers from surrounding historic communities who have successfully undertaken relevant projects should be invited to meet with Town representatives to discuss ways to make Ancram attractive for investment.*

- c. Create incentives for investment: tax, other. *The Town should explore tax and other incentives for investment in historic properties. The New York State Office of Historic Preservation (SHPO) and the federal government have several tax credit programs.*
- d. Incorporate incentives and exceptions for preservation in Town Zoning. *All aspects of the Town's zoning and land use laws should be coordinated to reflect the goals of this Plan.*
- e. Explore the creation of a privately funded Community Development Corporation. *Such Economic Development Corporations are established by cities and towns as private not-for-profits to provide financing and other incentives for projects that fit their development goals.*
- f. Integrate preservation into Town planning efforts. *Create pedestrian circulation and parking plans for the hamlets to support economic development and revitalization.*
- g. Continue efforts to find achievable solutions to the water problem in Ancram, at both the individual and Town level. *Additional studies and research should be undertaken on systems, financing and capital funding to mitigate Ancram's septic and water issues. In the meantime, The Town should work with the County Department of Health to establish guidelines for individual above-ground systems for historic buildings so as not to impede the purchase of and improvements to hamlet buildings.*
- h. Promote and develop Ancram as a destination for cultural and agritourism. *Work with County and regional associations to include Ancram in their initiatives. Hire professional consultants to position the Town as a destination.*
- i. Consult with the Preservation League of New York State on their real estate program that matches buyers and renters with historic properties.

Goal 6. Provide responsible stewardship of historic and cultural resources. As inheritors of Ancram's unique legacy, we must learn to become responsible stewards, not only to preserve its value, but also to grow it for future generations.

Stewardship is the responsibility of both property owners and Town government. As members of the community, individuals can contribute to the overall appearance of the Town, demonstrating their pride in the community, and a commitment to maintaining its value. This will benefit neighbors and make the Town more attractive for investment. The Town can encourage and assist in these efforts through programs and legal support, such as zoning.

Strategies for Goal 6:

- a. Educate Town residents about the value of Ancram's history and preservation as a generator of economic development and town revitalization. *Programs and events to educate the community about the findings of the Historic and Cultural Resources Survey will create interest in the Town's unique*

history, generate pride and lead to consensus around the goals of this Plan, facilitating its implementation.

b. Encourage historic property owners to apply for National Register listing. *The Historic and Cultural Resources Survey, currently underway, will identify properties eligible for listing, an honorific designation with no regulation that brings opportunities for possible funding and tax credits. The Town should find ways to support owners in making their applications.*

c. Provide incentives for residents to maintain restore and/or improve their properties. *The Town should develop community-based programs to assist residents in improving their properties. These could range from providing house paint, to neighborhood clean up events.*

d. Integrate preservation into Town planning efforts. *Make regulations preservation-friendly.*

Implementation

The following initiatives should be undertaken to begin implementation of the Heritage Resources Plan:

PHASE 1 – Research and Education

1. Prepare a Historic and Cultural Resources Survey for the hamlets. (Underway)
2. Research public and private funding opportunities for preservation projects. These include, but are not limited to:
 - Foundation grants
 - Preservation League of New York State grants
 - SWM (Mill) partnerships
 - NYS Rehabilitation Tax Credit
 - NYS Tax Credit Program for Investment Producing Properties
 - Federal Investment Tax Credit Program for Investment Producing Properties
 - New York State Council on the Arts grants
 - Other
3. Invite successful developers and business owners from nearby historic towns to explore ideas about attracting appropriate investment throughout Ancram.
4. Research the use of tax incentives and other tools to attract investment.
5. Explore the creation of a privately funded Ancram Community Development Corporation.

6. Organize talks and workshops with the Preservation League of New York State, NY SHPO, and others on grants, tax credits, real estate, technical assistance, building code exemptions and other programs.
7. Create a temporary exhibit on historic Ancram. Consider the Simons Store, Ancram Opera House or a church facility as a venue. Consider a permanent exhibit at Town Hall.
8. Explore both Town-wide and individual solutions to the water and septic/sewer issues in Ancram hamlet.
9. Consider applying for Historic District listing for the hamlets, an honorific designation with no regulation that brings opportunities for possible funding and tax credits.

PHASE 2 – Coordination with Town Initiatives, Marketing, Projects

10. Establish a Town Program to assist and encourage residents to maintain, restore and/or improve their properties.
11. Identify “quick wins”, or projects having a big impact with minimal cost or effort, to show progress that will create momentum.
12. Identify a model project based on funding opportunities or partnerships. This could be a new infill building, or an adaptive re-use of an existing building.
13. Write or revise Town zoning regulations to be preservation-friendly.
14. Integrate preservation into Town planning efforts by creating pedestrian circulation and parking plans that support revitalization of the hamlets.
15. Assist residents with National Register applications, an honorific designation with no regulation that brings opportunities for possible funding and tax credits. Develop literature to inform owners.
16. Promote Ancram as a historic town, as well as an agricultural community. Develop events and create marketing materials to support cultural tourism and agritourism, as well as natural recreational assets.

Budget

The following budget items and estimates are projected for Plan implementation over the next 24 months. As the Plan advances and scopes of work are developed, these estimates will be refined. Whenever possible, pro bono services will be solicited. Funding of the budget will be done primarily through voluntary community contributions and grants.

1.	Historic Resources Survey	\$10,000.*
2.	Grant Researcher/Writer	\$ 6,500.
3.	Professional Services Fees	\$12,000.
4.	Real Estate Studies	\$ 2,000.
5.	Site and Building Surveys	\$ 3,500.
6.	Advertising and Outreach	\$ 8,000.
7.	Printing and Reproduction	\$ 2,500.
8.	Heritage Exhibit and Community Outreach	\$ 6,000.
9.	Marketing Materials	\$ 4,500.
10.	Heritages Resources Plan	<u>Pro Bono</u>
ESTIMATED TOTAL		\$55,000.

*Funds already raised through community contributions