

Minutes of the Comprehensive Planning Committee
Wednesday August 20, 2014
7:30 p.m.

Present: Ted Brumleve, Chairman
Bettie Jackson Ray Clifford
Paul Doyle Laura Fallon
Jeremy Ezra
Ann Gallelli, Board of Trustees liaison
Frank Fish and Susan Favate, BFJ planning consultants
Dan O'Connor, Village Engineer

The Comprehensive Planning committee will meet on the second Wednesday of every month, and therefore, the next meeting will meet on September 10th at 7:30 p.m.

1. Status of Rezoning

Frank Fish and Susan Favate updated the committee on the good news from Westchester County in which no objections were raised about the RA-60 and PRE rezoning proposal. The county stated in a letter to the Village Board that Croton could proceed with the rezoning. Frank also attended the Planning Board meeting in July and the Planning Board voted in favor of the rezoning.

2. Customary Home occupations

Customary home occupations had been discussed in May, and a draft based on that discussion was distributed at tonight's meeting.

Mr. Doyle commented that it may be restrictive to limit non-residential employees to one person.

Mr. Fish explained that one non-residential employee seems to be the norm in many communities. It has been observed at public hearings with respect to customary home occupations that residents worry about parking and visitors overwhelming the neighborhood in addition to being concerned about increased traffic to the street.

Mr. Doyle asked what were some of the typical home occupations. Mr. Fish stated that it used to be certain professions—doctor/dentist offices (other professionals); the current trend is that many home occupations are computer based.

After further discussion, the committee agreed that keeping the current zoning code of limiting a customary home business to one non-residential employee is simpler, acknowledges the current trend of today's digital work life, and preserves the residential quality of residential areas.

Mr. Fish also noted that based on the last meeting, the draft zoning stated that approvals of customary home occupations were to be made by the Village Engineer. The intent of this proposal was to eliminate the necessity of an applicant obtaining a special permit from the Village Board and thereby requiring a public hearing. The approval process would be a more administrative process and less burdensome to a resident seeking to have a customary home occupation.

Another proposed change to the code is downgrading the size of the home occupation to 20% (from 30%) of the total floor area of the principal building but not greater than 600 sq. feet.

The committee discussed what constituted a home occupation—was it working at home, and if so, how many hours would constitute a customary home occupation. Ms. Gallelli stated that she thought one of the distinguishing characteristics of a home occupation is when a person comes to your place to conduct business and therefore requires parking. It boiled down to the impact on the neighbors. The committee agreed that some of the essential issues that most impact a residential neighborhood were the number of employees and the number of visitors or deliveries made, and the impact on parking.

Ms. Favate mentioned that once the RA-60 is adopted, this section of the code would be moved to the RA-60 section under which all other districts will be included. There were no other issues raised, and Mr. Fish stated he would proceed to write an EAF/CAF and send to the Village Board.

3. Potential Revisions to the Accessory Apartments Law

Mr. Fish explained that the mayor had wanted the committee to look into the current law about accessory apartments given the housing issues that HUD has with the county. Ms. Gallelli mentioned that the age restriction seems to be one of the key problems with the Affirmatively Furthering Fair Housing (AFFH). Croton's accessory apartment law is restricted to those 55 and over.

Mr. Fish stated that according to a recent court case, the court objected to restricting residence of an accessory unit to blood relations. However, there was no objection to the requirement that an owner must live in either the primary dwelling or accessory apartment.

Mr. Fish stated that although there is always a need for senior housing, HUD believed the real housing need is for families and younger people. HUD is urging that communities not have age restrictions and therefore make housing more affordable for younger people.

There was discussion about how younger people are having a difficult time getting jobs and therefore cannot afford to live in Westchester. Eliminating the age requirement of 55 and over for accessory apartments could open up more housing opportunities for younger people.

At present a special permit is required for an accessory apartment. Mr. Doyle stated that historically it was difficult to get a special permit for an accessory apartment. The village engineer commented that there are a lot of two-family zones that contained pre-zoning houses and these can have apartments in them. The apartments that exist in two or more family houses however are not considered in the affordable housing assessment.

Mr. Fish also recommended that the village not require a three year time limit for a special permit for accessory apartment; rather, have the special permit run with the ownership of the house. He suggested deferring to the village attorney to ask if this was possible. Mr. Fish will create a draft to distribute for comments.

Note: since the meeting the Village Engineer has had the opportunity to review this matter in further detail related to enforcement and may have additional comments on the proposed draft code revision prepared for the committee's next meeting.

5. Overview of SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats)

Chairman Brumleve stated that in the last meeting there was discussion about updating or amending the comprehensive plan, and an interest by the committee to discuss what potentially is important about our village going forward.

Mr. Clifford stated that it is desirable to have short-term achievable goals; for example, improved signage would not only help with directions (i.e. Village gateways, and directions to where the train, dam, river and waterfront, historic districts are) but would help communicate to visitors the identity of the village and inform people as to what the village is all about. Mr. Clifford stated that the village is a big river town and we don't promote the waterfront enough.

Ms. Jackson agreed that Croton doesn't have a brand and the village needs to agree as to what the "brand" is.

Chairman Brumleve stated that there had been discussion about building a marketing plan and one outcome of this plan would be a "brand creation." Ms. Jackson noted that since there is no Chamber of Commerce, it is important to get buy-in from local businesses otherwise they might feel disenfranchised.

Ms. Gallelli mentioned that there is a business development group that is a subsidiary of the Hudson Valley Chamber of Commerce. Mr. Clifford suggested that

the committee invite local business owners to a meeting so that there can be a dialogue about promoting Croton.

Mr. Ezra stated that it would be helpful to ask local businesses what their feelings were about their businesses and the village —was business down and why? Have the right businesses come to the town and can they thrive here?

There was agreement that the new restaurants in town were exciting. Ms. Fallon raised the idea about a welcome center and information about Croton Landing. Ms. Jackson said it would be helpful to have literature on the village. Chairman Brumleve stated that there is information but it is not continually updated. He highlighted the appeal of Croton in its cultural aspects and natural beauty.

Mr. Ezra commented that there is a lot of retail vacancy. The committee agreed that some research was needed on getting businesses and retailers to come to Croton (demographics, what is the appeal of Croton).

Chairman Brumleve suggested that there might be some case papers from the Urban Land Institute and International Council of Shopping Centers on this subject. Also it might be helpful to talk with Cynthia Lippolis, a local realtor, and others involved in village commerce who could be invited to part of the discussion. It might also be helpful to discuss with former Mayor Elliott, currently active on Hudson River Valley matters, on how the word “river” could be leveraged in characterizing Croton.

The meeting was adjourned at 9:10 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Ronnie L. Rose