

Conservation Advisory Council to the Town of Ancram

Ridgeline Protection

April 15, 2013

Ridgelines are integral aspects of Ancram's scenic areas which define our overall landscape character, provide wildlife habitat and help to keep our waters clean. Natural scenic areas support communities with substantial benefits such as quality of life and character, higher property values, increased tourism revenue and natural resources.

Building on a ridgeline or at the crest of a hill interferes with the natural profile of the land and allows buildings to dominate the skyline. Protecting our scenic areas by developing below the ridgeline preserves the natural landform and character of the land and allows our community to preserve its unique beauty and natural resources, build civic pride, improve property values and attract positive growth to the area.

Scenic Viewshed Protection Protects Natural Resources

Ancram's ridgelines include important contiguous wildlife corridors which support bird migrations and rare plants and animals. Some of our most pristine habitats – including talus slope ledges, older deciduous forests, hemlock ravines, and primary headwater streams – are located on our surrounding hillsides and ridgelines. Other negative environmental impacts of building on ridgelines include:

- Development on steep slopes can have an adverse effect on water quality as a result of increased erosion and sedimentation.
- Roads and driveways on steep areas tend to be longer and have more curves and switchbacks, which means that there are more impacts on the hillside, such as increased erosion and runoff.
- Other hazards associated with steep driveways include a higher potential for accidents and difficulty for emergency vehicles to access. Providing fire protection may be difficult due to the lack of water supply and pressure and the possibility that fire may be fanned by high winds.
- Individual septic systems are especially difficult to construct and maintain on steep slopes, both because of the slopes and because the soils tend to be shallow and poorly drained. This makes septic systems on steep slopes prone to higher failure rates, which puts ground water and surface water supplies at risk.

Negative Impacts of Ridgeline and Steep Slope Development

- Aesthetics
- Excessive cuts and fills
- Unattractive slope scars
- Erosion and stormwater drainage problems causing flooding and affecting water quality
- Steep slope stability
- Infrastructure difficulties
- Fire hazard and difficulty of control
- Habitat and natural resource loss

Summary Recommendations

- Include in the ridgeline protection regulations a discussion of the environmental benefits of protecting ridges. Relate to the Comprehensive Plan overall goals to preserve our natural resources and environmental qualities.
- Address issues relating to steep slopes within the regulations such as erosion, sedimentation, flooding and important habitat disturbance.
- Refer and relate to any steep slope building limitations such as clearing large areas to accommodate the cut and fill for house sites, driveways and septic systems.
- Address water and habitat protection within the ridgeline regulations.
- Refer to Visual Environmental Assessment Form (visual EAF addendum) or other visual assessment analysis in order to assist the reviewing board in assessing the visual impact.
- Include clear-cutting regulations such as in the Hillsdale, NY ridgeline protection ordinance in order to protect headwater streams from erosion and to protect tree lined ridges from visual scars.

Resources

New Hampshire Department of Environmental Services
Innovative Land Use Planning Techniques
October 2008
http://des.nh.gov/organization/divisions/water/wmb/repp/documents/ilupt_chpt_2.2.pdf

Scenic America
Strategies for Protecting Scenic Views and Vistas
<http://www.scenic.org/issues/scenic-easements-a-view-protection/strategies-for-protecting-scenic-views-and-vistas>

Shepstone Management Company
Community Planning and Management, LLC
Preserving River Valley Character
Report and Recommendations for Ridgeline Protection in New York State
<http://www.shepstone.net/Ridgeline.pdf>

Protecting Natural Resources
Scenic Viewshed Protection
State of Indiana
http://www.in.gov/indot/div/projects/i69planningtoolbox/_pdf/Scenic%20Viewshed%20Protection.pdf

Town of Hillsdale, New York
Hillsdale Zoning Law Section 5.4
Ridgeline Protection and Clear Cutting Regulations
http://hillsdaleny.com/wp-content/uploads/2010/02/TownofHillsdaleLocalLaw_6-2007_ridgeline.pdf