

Ancram Has a Bright Idea!

Free LED Lightbulbs, Improved Energy Efficiency at Town Buildings, and Solar Power

By Suzan Flamm

Fires in California. Severe weather events. Environmental migrants. Climate change is here and having an impact throughout our country. To address the challenge on a local level, Ancram established a Climate Smart Communities Task Force (Task Force) in 2015, with the mission of reducing greenhouse gas emissions and improving climate resilience in our town. The Task Force has had a particularly busy summer and fall, exploring ways to help town residents transition to energy-efficient Light-Emitting Diode (LED) lighting and solar power, and to implement clean energy improvements at town facilities. Ancram was recently awarded a \$80,000 grant from the New York State Energy Research and Development

Authority to help the town move closer to its goals.

The town will use a portion of the grant funds to distribute free LED bulbs to all interested residents, beginning in Spring 2019. Quality LED light bulbs use 75 percent less energy, last longer – up to 25 times as long – and offer comparable or better quality than other types of lighting. And, they emit very little heat, unlike incandescent bulbs which release 90 percent of their energy as heat. Widespread use of LED lighting would have a huge impact on energy savings in the United States, potentially equivalent to the annual output of 44 large electric power plants (1000 megawatts each).

Ancram residents can save energy, and money, by participating in the town's free lightbulb program. The number of bulbs to be provided for each residence, and other program details, are being developed now. The only obligation on the part of residents who wish to participate will be to replace existing standard bulbs in their homes with the new LEDs, and to responsibly dispose of the old bulbs. Details regarding responsible disposal will be provided with the new bulbs.

The remainder of the grant funds will be used to help the town identify and evaluate opportunities to reduce energy use at Town Hall and the Town Garage, and to pay for energy improvements at those facilities. The first step will be to hire an auditor to conduct a survey of the buildings and to report on potential energy efficiency measures, identifying the costs and savings associated with each measure. The town will then have the information it needs, and the funding, to implement selected improvements.

As for renewable energy, the committee is looking into "community solar" opportunities for town residents.



Many households do not have access to solar power because they rent their homes or have roofs that are unable to host a solar system. Community solar, where local solar facilities are shared by multiple subscribers, may be a solution. These are voluntary programs that provide power to, or are owned by, multiple community members, and allow participants to benefit directly from the energy produced by one solar array. Subscribers receive credit on their electricity bills for their share of the power produced.

Interested in helping to design and implement the LED lightbulb exchange program, in bringing renewable energy to the community, or any other climate smart initiatives? Please volunteer with Ancram's Climate Smart Communities Task Force to be a part of the solution. The tentative launch date for the LED lightbulb exchange program is May 18, 2019. Stay tuned for details in the Spring issue of the Town News.

For more information, visit the Climate Smart Communities Task Force webpage at ancramny.org/climate-smart-community-task-force

To volunteer, please contact suzan@rflamm.com

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Who's Who in Town Hall

Part I

By Bobbie Slonevsky

Everyone knows Town Supervisor Art Bassin...if not in-person than by email. But what about the other town officials who make Ancram run? Who are they and what exactly do they do? Here are four of their stories, with more to come next time.

Animal Control: Wes Powell

To say that Wes is "in Town Hall" is a bit comical, because he is virtually never there...nor should he be. He is, he points out, "either Animal Control Officer or Dog Control Officer for 12 of Columbia County's 18 towns, plus Hudson." As such, he is all over the county, rescuing animals in trouble, responding to calls about animal threats, dealing with cruelty to animals, placing orphan-animals resulting from evictions, and returning lost animals to their owners. 24/7/365. No weekends, no vacations.



Wes Powell is not just a lost dog's best friend, but a skilled professional trained to assist all animals in need with kindness and expertise.

Wes looks the part: outdoorsy, strong build, confident air. But don't think for a moment that he just muscles his way through the job. His list of credentials is impressive. He was trained as a New York State Peace Officer at the NYS Police Academy in Schenectady and studied Animal Cruelty issues at the Lollipop Humane Society in Rochester.



Marie McDermott and Ed Ferrato are the dynamic duo that has kept the Ancram Building Department running smoothly for 14 years.

Both come into play, he explains, when investigating and helping to prosecute such animal mistreatment as puppy mills or neglect/starvation of farm animals or pets.

Wes also has credentials in Animal Law from Hudson Valley Community College and is certified in Chemical Capture (darting), White Water Rescue, Ice Rescue, and Mountain and Ravine Rescue. "You have to know exactly how to strap the animal in," he says, "whether you are climbing up or down or hanging suspended from a cable." Or, as he saw recently, rescuing a horse that has fallen through pond ice.

Of course, most calls are not so dramatic. Skunks under the porch, a bear on the deck, abandoned, stray or off-leash pets, cows, horses, goats or sheep out loose doing damage, mangy foxes and rabid racoons are Wes's stock in trade. (In fact, just in case he is bitten, he has a rabies antibody titer done every few years; if the count is inadequate, he gets yet another booster rabies shot.)

After 37 years, Wes still enjoys helping animals. "They have no voice; we are their voice," he reminds us. Which is why he laments his lack of authority with cats. "We have no contract, no shelter to take them to, and no

approval, if they are injured, to run up bills at the vet."

And bills, he emphasizes, are the biggest challenge. If the owner of a dog can't be found, the town has to pay a humane society shelter a significant amount of money to take it. So it is always a race to locate the owner before that transfer has to take place. Which leads to our Animal Control Officer's parting message: New York State law requires dogs to be licensed for the very purpose of identification.. If yours is not, he urges, get a license from the Town Clerk NOW.

Building Inspector, Zoning & Code Enforcement Officer: Ed Ferrato & Building Department Clerk: Marie McDermott

Marie started in the Department in 2003, Ed in 2004. After 14 years working together, they literally finish each other's thoughts.

He says: "I take photos of every inspection..." She says: "...Then I put them into the computer under the appropriate permit file." He says: "I look up the law, which can be different for the [Ancram and Ancramdale] hamlets versus the surrounding agricultural areas."

Almost before the words are out of his mouth, Marie whips out a zoning map to illustrate the point.

And that seems to be the division of labor. Ed is the doer-in-chief, while Marie is the follow-up-er-in-chief.

Besides Wednesday and Saturday office hours, Ed spends considerable time out in the field. As Zoning/Code Officer, he may check such things as compliance with use laws, siting and setback regulations, and environmental requirements. As Building Inspector, he examines structures many, many times during the construction process, from footings and foundations, to framing, electrical, plumbing, HVAC, insulation, roofing and ultimately the final walk-through with the contractor. After emailing inspection photos to Marie, he usually communicates verbally with her. And it's a testament to their working relationship that her follow-up is prompt and accurate.

On any Saturday (and occasionally on Wednesday), she can be found filing, sending out letters about expired permits, generating notices of compliance with building standards, issuing certificates of occupancy, answering search requests on newly purchased or refinanced homes, and reconciling the Building Department books.

Both Ed and Marie appear to be extremely organized and run "a tight ship," as proven by THE BOOK they keep that chronicles every telephone call and message (in black ink) and their subsequent response (in red ink). So, is there anything that flummoxes this dynamic duo? Well, the occasional complaint about neighbors can be a little uncomfortable—you know, excessive noise, or too many occupants, or roosters crowing too early in the morning (unlawful in the hamlets, OK in the agricultural districts). However, they agree that the biggest challenge and source of confusion to residents are building permits.

"They don't understand why they should need a permit to redo their own roof," Marie confides. The answer is that, in 2014, New York State changed its zoning laws. Permits are now required

for many of the replacements and renovations commonly made by homeowners: fixing roofs, changing walls, installing new windows, putting in new bathrooms or kitchens, updating electrical wiring.

So residents often come into the office confused, frustrated, perhaps even a bit agitated. "But," Marie is proud to report, "they don't leave that way." Her day job is teaching eighth grade social studies and she insists that that experience has imbued her with a gift for calming things down. A little commiseration, some patient explanation, and all is well. In fact, this is what she likes most about her job. She enjoys getting to talk with everyone, old or new to Ancram; and whether they have just purchased a new home or are upgrading an old one, she shares in their excitement.

Ed's side of the story is that "People are always complaining about the high cost of permits. They don't realize," he explains, "that there is tremendous expertise behind the permit — five inspections alone even before the start of framing." The expertise, of course, is his. He spent his entire life in construction, and finds it gratifying "to still be involved in the building process and to see that things are done properly." He also likes that he is always learning. "Codes are constantly changing," he points out, "and I have to keep up my certification."

Ed and Marie sit next to each other and, it turns out, regularly play musical desks. Might that explain why, when he advises: "If there's a question about whether or not you need a building permit, don't ask your friends," Marie just channels the rest of the thought: "Ask the right people," she says. "Come in and see us!"

Town Clerk and Tax Collector: Monica Cleveland

Live-wire and bundle of energy are apt descriptions of Monica. And it's a good thing. Because the scope of her two jobs would exhaust a lesser person.

When Monica assumed the position in January 2004, "It was relatively simple," she says: "Clerk the Town Board



Town Clerk Monica Cleveland expertly fields two phone calls during a typically busy day.

meeting, give out dog licenses, collect taxes." Fifteen years later, the job has exploded.

On Mondays she's the Highway Department Secretary, handling its payroll and paperwork. On Tuesdays she acts as Assessor's Clerk, again attacking paperwork and filing. On Wednesdays and Thursdays she's Town Clerk, a world of disparate responsibilities all by itself—

- help compile the meeting agenda for the Supervisor, *CHECK*
- record the minutes of meeting and keep the minutes book, *CHECK*
- assist in the bidding process for Town purchases, *CHECK*
- document for Board approval who must be paid by the Town and how much, *CHECK*

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TOWN HALL

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- as Registrar of Vital Statistics, sign death certificates, issue Marriage licenses and birth certificates for Ancram-born babies and make copies of all these available, *CHECK*
- as Records Management Officer, oversee ALL files for Ancram, *CHECK*
- purge the files as needed (this year Monica got rid of 1,050 lbs. of paper), *CHECK*
- as Freedom of Information Act officer, respond to FOIA requests for the various departments, *CHECK*
- give out dog licenses and handicapped permits, *CHECK*.

But wait! We haven't even finished Monica's week, which includes Thursday evening working with the Assessor and Saturday morning again in the role of Town Clerk. And then, of course, at the appropriate time of year, she issues bills for and collects 1,200 tax payments. Mostly through the mail, although some residents like to pay in person. And if they appear to want to linger, Monica offers them a cup of coffee and takes time out of her day to chat.

Through it all, Monica is unfazed, even though, as she puts it, "You are never off the clock." People always have questions and complaints (especially about taxes). They have them at random times—not necessarily in accordance with the hat she is wearing on any particular day, and they have them everywhere—at the grocery store, in the doctor's office, at a restaurant. No matter; she "would never *not* speak to somebody," Monica says. In fact, that's what she finds most rewarding about the work. She likes seeing people, being able to help them and giving back to the community.

As a third-generation Ancram resident, Monica believes in and encourages civic engagement. Indeed, she can attest first-hand: Making people's lives better, she says, "begins at the town level."

A Progress Report on Broadband

By Bobbie Slonevsky

As of our Spring (April) 2018 issue featuring an article on broadband, no one in Ancram had fiber-based Internet service. In the nine months since, our two high-speed broadband providers have been busy. Much has changed...but some things haven't.

Consolidated Communications (formerly FairPoint)

Consolidated has finished laying the trunk fiber lines for all the census blocks covered by grants from the New York State "Broadband for All" program: 206 addresses in Ancram and 276 addresses in Ancramdale (none were awarded in Boston Corners). The company is still doing some final cable splicing preparatory to providing actual broadband service. However, all the state-assigned addresses can now sign up for service and most can get immediate installation.

As shown, the company is offering a range of speed packages from downloads and uploads of 25 megabits per second (Mbps) to 1 gigabit (1,000 Mbps) to match users' budgets and needs.

Fiber Speeds
25/25 Mbps
30/30 Mbps
50/50 Mbps
75/75 Mbps
100/100 Mbps
1G/1G

Once the state-mandated buildout is completed, Consolidated says it will offer fiber services to any addresses located across the street or a short distance from its existing fiber network. According to V-P of Consumer Products Rob Koester, it will then continue its expansion through 2019 and beyond via the company's own investment projects. Details of this expansion have not been provided, so what this means for non-fiber-wired Ancram residents is unclear. However, Koester says that Consolidated took pains to build its original fiber net-

work in such a way that its trunk lines would pass by a maximum number of addresses outside the assigned census blocks. Since this will facilitate extending fiber hook-ups to new customers, he is "confident that we will see exceptional coverage in the town."

Readers may remember that Consolidated/FairPoint has also been investing in DSL speed improvements—up to 50 Mbps—for the past several years. Customers can call Customer Service at 1-844-968-7224 to see if they are eligible for a DSL upgrade. They may also learn where broadband services are being launched and whether their address qualifies for fiber Internet service by calling 1-844-YOUR-CCI (1-844-968-7224).

Of course, Consolidated offers telephone services and hopes, ultimately, to provide cable TV as well. While the Federal and state governments regulate Internet and telephone service, it is the town that awards cable franchises; the company has recently begun the Ancram application process.

Charter/Spectrum Communications

In July 2018, Charter announced it had upgraded its existing video network and could offer broadband Internet service to its current cable customers in parts of Columbia County, including Ancram. The company proudly points out that this work was completed "more than five months ahead of the [state-imposed] December 31, 2018 deadline" and "passes" more than 350 homes and businesses in Ancram.

Spectrum Internet speeds start at downloads of 100 Mbps and uploads of 10. The company also offers an "Ultra" tier of 400 Mbps and a gigabit connection. A low-cost 30/4 Mbps tier called "Spectrum Internet Assist" is available for qualified seniors and families. Additionally, customers have access to phone and enhanced video services.

What needs to be clarified is that some of those 350 "passed" homes and businesses are located along the path of the Charter network, but were not

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Harlem Valley Rail Trail Comes to Boston Corners in 2019

By Marie-Claude Stockl

Like The Little Engine That Could, the Harlem Valley Rail Trail Association (HVRTA) is slowly realizing its vision to transform 46 miles of abandoned railroad tracks into recreational trails, linking Wassaic to Chatham, New York. When done, it will be one of the most impressive trails on the East Coast.



To date, half of the trail is either built or funded to be built, and an 8-mile section between Millerton and Under Mountain Road in Boston Corners is scheduled to open this year.

Dick Hermans, Chairman of the Board for HVRTA, has served on the board for nearly 30 years. “The rail trail changed the character of the village of Millerton for the good, not in big ways, but in a very substantial positive way,” says Hermans. “Boston Corners could become a little bit more lively. It used to be a thriving place, maybe some of that energy will return.”

As shown in green on the map in the side bar, there are three completed paved sections of the trail: 10.7 miles between the Metro North Station in Wassaic and Millerton; 5 miles from Under Mountain Road off route 22 to Bash Bish Falls, the highest waterfall in Massachusetts; and 1.5 miles just south of Hillsdale. That section was built by HVRTA in 2017, and made possible by grant matching funds raised from the local community.

The new section in Boston Corners will cut through an impressive wetland lying beneath the overhanging ridges of the Taconic and Berkshires. As with

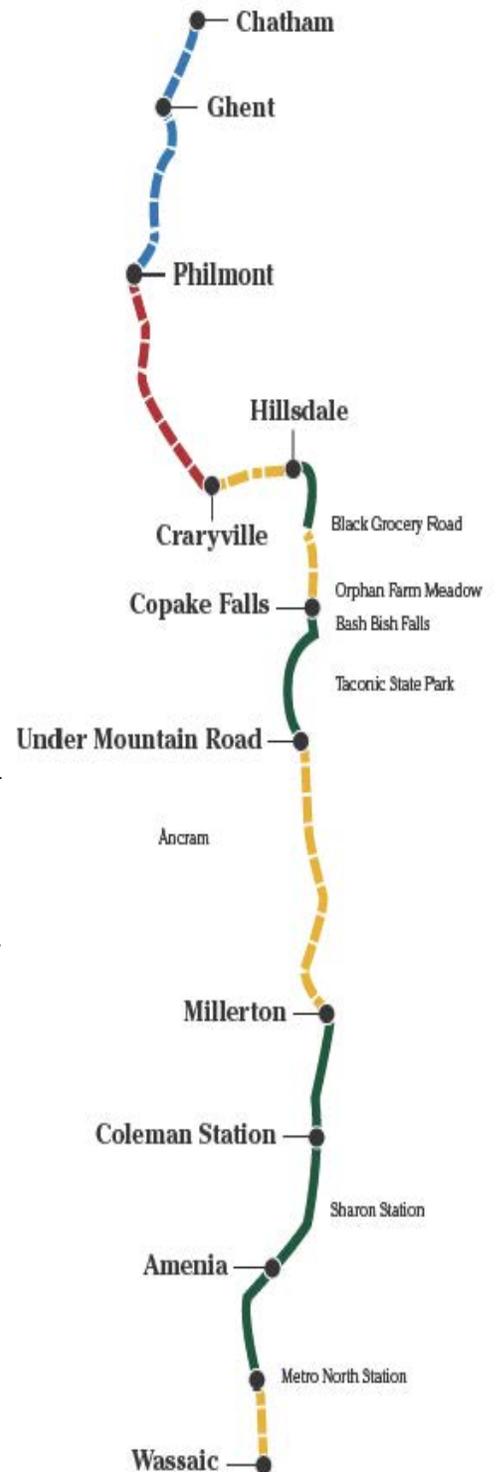
the other sections, it is a place with significant history beginning in pre-Revolutionary times. It is also an ecologic experience at any time of year. Starting in February, the first red-winged blackbirds arrive, along with Canada geese and mallards. And if you hear barking next month, that will most likely be the red foxes mating. More on the wildlife of the trail year round can be found on the association’s website hvrt.org.

“The trail has two kinds of personalities,” says Lisa DeLeeuw, Executive Director, HVRTA. “During the week, you see dog walkers in the morning, senior groups out for a stroll, mothers with carriages, children learning how to ride bikes. On the weekends, you are more likely to see people who are coming to the area as tourists.”

Access to the trail is free. In Dutchess County, the Harlem Valley Rail Trail is a County Park, built and maintained by the County with help from the towns of Amenia and North East, the Village of Millerton and HVRTA. HVRTA is a non-profit, educational and activist organization which has not raised its dues since it began its efforts in 1986. A single membership is \$15, family membership is \$25. Members receive a newsletter and an invitation to the annual meeting. Donations go toward matching funds for grants that help design and build the trail.

The trail also benefits from annual fundraising events such as the Roe an Ramble. On September 22, 2018, a record 418 riders participated, a 40% increase from 2017. Of these, 51 were children under age 18. A quarter of the participants were from Columbia County, most from the towns of Ancram, Copake and Hillsdale. The Ancram Town Hall was one of three rest stops.

But there is no need to wait for an organized event to reconnect with nature on the Harlem Valley Rail Trail. Winter, Spring, Summer or Fall, any time of year is good for an outing on the trail. Bundle up the children and the dog, bring your friends, and enjoy!



Green – completed and open
 Yellow – in advanced planning stage
 Blue – in early planning stage
 Red – in pre-planning stage



Overmountain Conservation Area, located in Ancramdale and part of the Columbia Land Conservancy's portfolio, is now open to the public. With more than 10 miles of hiking trails and 1,700 acres in size, it is a spectacular resource for our community. Read more about it at clctrust.org/public-conservation-areas/overmountain-conservation-area/

BROADBAND

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existing customers and so are not actually connected. (The number of these locations is considered proprietary information). To date the company's existing network and broadband service have not been expanded to non-legacy addresses in Ancram.

Potential customers can order service by calling 1-855-757-7328. In addition, residents may check if their address is included as part of Charter's future buildout plans by calling that same number or visiting bldlkup.com, with the caveat that any information provided is subject to change. Residents not included may request a survey to find out the cost of required buildout work.

A further issue is Charter's license status. As a condition of the Public Service Commission's approval of Charter's 2016 merger with Time Warner Cable (now Spectrum), the company agreed to make high-speed Internet available to an additional 145,000 unserved or underserved addresses in

the state beyond its existing customers. Claiming that Charter/Spectrum misrepresented its progress in this effort, this past summer PSC ordered the provider to exit the New York State marketplace. While the order remains in place, the company and PSC are currently engaged in what has been described as a productive dialog." In the meantime, according to Director of Communications Andrew Russell, the company is continuing its broadband buildout across New York.

So, where are we?

Both companies now have some Ancram customers receiving broadband Internet service. However, neither company will divulge just how many such customers there are. Based on his knowledge of the community, Town Supervisor Art Bassin maintains that there are only "... a handful of households with high-speed broadband today. [However,] by the end of 2019, anyone who wants broadband will probably be able to get it." Indeed, the number of utility vehicles on our roads suggests that significant strides are being made in the "Broadband for All" program. But we are definitely not there yet.

Mark Your Calendar!

Saturday, February 9. *Town of Ancram 2019 Updated Comprehensive Plan Public Hearing. 9:30am. Ancram Town Hall, 1416 County Route 7, Ancram, NY 12502.*

The Ancram Comprehensive Plan Review Committee will hold a public hearing to solicit public comments on the 2019 Draft Updated Comprehensive Plan.

If you are unable to attend the public hearing or wish to comment in writing, you may submit written comments by mail to: Ancram Comprehensive Plan Committee, 1416 County Route 7, Ancram NY 12502 or by email addressed to abassin@townofancram.org.

Written comments will be accepted until February 15. A copy of the 2019 Draft Updated Comprehensive Plan is available at ancramny.org and hard copies are available for review at Town Hall.

The Committee may make additional edits after the public hearing, prior to submitting to the Town Board for consideration. There will also be a second public hearing to solicit public comments after the draft has been submitted to the Board.