

Village View

by Andrea Leonard

When the life-style of the nation is at stake, most of us shrug our shoulders and sigh, "Ho hum, I can't do a thing about it," and the nation is the worse for it.

When the life-style of the community appears threatened, however, people turn out in force. That's the way it was the night of May 17th when the Osterville Village Association met at the library.

There were even people standing outside hanging in through the open windows, straining to hear statements of those who'd arrived early enough to get seats. The concern is the recent spurt of growth in parts of the village zoned for business.

"Can we pass an ordinance to bar further growth in Osterville?" was one question. It wasn't answered directly. Let me. No.

Barnstabletown has a Planning Board to study and make zoning recommendations to the voters at the town meeting. The second annual town meeting, held every fall, is devoted to zoning and other non-money items. Zoning in Osterville as well as the other six villages is decided by the voters' representatives from all the Town of Barnstable.

There were a few dreamers at the meeting who deplored the evident plans of some local business people to take advantage of the opportunity to make money at the expense of "Rural charm". Few present wanted to hear the speaker who truthfully stated the almighty dollar has, does, and always will control.

Few at the meeting wanted to be reminded their own presence in the village contributes to traffic congestion, or hear of further population increases in Osterville. Most wanted to feel Osterville belongs to them because they now live here and hope no one else will be permitted to move into the neighborhood or even visit it.

Anyone who's not personally involved can readily see the futility of this; it's impossible to limit population and remain a democracy. The only way to limit growth in Osterville is to make the entire village a private corporation. Use the almighty dollar, and buy the place.

To most of us, that's unthinkable. Only the wealthiest among us can afford to own even a small acreage, such as Oyster Harbors, and maintain it as a private enclave. Should enough money be gathered to purchase Osterville outright, and should the would-be purchasers be capable of persuading every present land-owner to sell or join the corporation, however, it would be possible to post sentries on roads leading to our tiny peninsula and total control could be achieved.

Property tax assessments might change considerably, but it's possible. In Texas, for example, there are ranches, far larger than our village, belonging to corporations and individuals. So it can be done. At a price.

There are other methods, too. We can hike land prices to the point no one will purchase any. We can put vacant land into conservatorship to escape or greatly reduce tax obligations.

As things are, with most of the village in private individual ownership, can we control business development where zoning permits it? Of course not. Spot zoning is illegal.

We can't take away a person's income-producing property any more than we can take residential real estate from him. With enough cash, though, almost anything's for sale.

If we care enough to put our money where our mouths were at the Village Association meeting, we can form a corporation and purchase all the remaining undeveloped land and all the vacant business-zoned property in Osterville and simply let it sit there, unused.

That's where the almighty dollar comes into the picture. It can be put to good use if we care enough about maintaining the village, preventing growth and eventual ultimate decline.

As was honestly said at the meeting, there is more business being conducted in residential areas of the village, as non-conforming use, than is carried on in the village center. In time and with a lot of dollars that could be corrected.

And one thing we can do immediately and inexpensively is support the effort to revitalize downtown Hyannis. If successful, the effect will go a long way toward relieving congestion in downtown Osterville.

We should think clearly through the question of expanding parking facilities. If we pave all of Osterville from the Wool Shop to Bumps River bridge, we couldn't accommodate all the cars that come now and will in the future.

But, if we did that, no one would want to come, for Osterville would be destroyed. We have only to look at the acres of macadam in Hyannis to witness the result of plentiful parking. Pouring tons of macadam, painting it with white lines, and peppering it with parking meters not only creates an eyesore, it guarantees economic suicide.

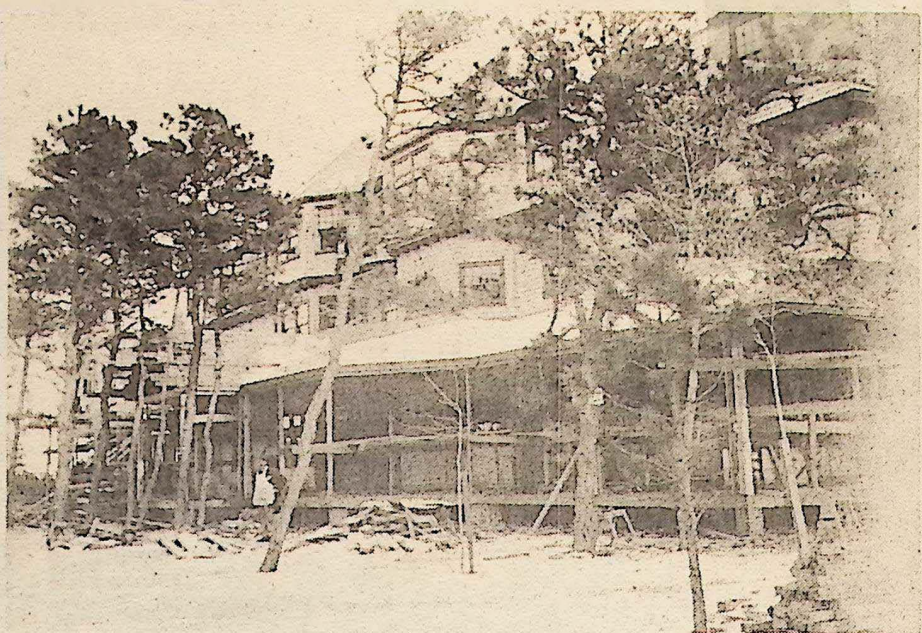
The same is true of other services Barnstable provides for tourists - tourists, upon which, let us not forget, more than 50% of the Cape's economic stability relies. However, many public beaches we make available to tourists, there'll never be enough space for all who will come. No matter how many boat landings we open for public use, each will be overcrowded every weekend from early spring to late fall.

Are we helpless to halt growth? We can't stop construction of shops at Main and Pond Streets nor prohibit Interstate Theatres putting offices in a building they own. If we pay the price and purchase the buildings, we can tear them down.

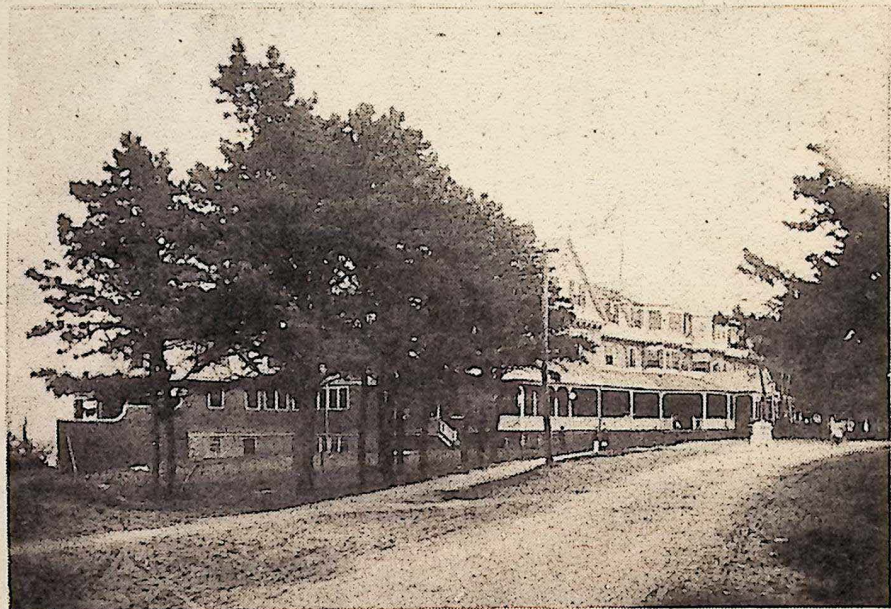
We can buy the property behind the bank and restore the pretty hillside that quite recently was ravaged for a gas station. We can buy undeveloped business-zoned property on the west end of Main Street.

If we care enough, we can do with the business area just what we've done with much of the residential areas: buy the land and the buildings and protect ourselves from further growth.

The decision is ours. The almighty dollar is all it takes. I'll hold the money.



Pictureed above is the Cotochesett House under construction in Osterville, January of 1888. The man in the photo is carpenter William Henry Bearse. The old Cotochesett House was destroyed by fire in the early 1880's.



This photo shows the finished Cotochesett House in 1898, with Seaview Avenue running in front. The building was later to become the Wianno Club.



This photo, taken from the beach, shows the damage sustained by trees, beach and the Wianno Club itself after the 1944 hurricane.



This photo, taken from the beach, shows the homes to the right of the Wianno Club, also victims of the hurricane. (Photos from the Chesbro Collection, courtesy of the Osterville Historical Society)