

village view

by Andrea Leonard

Early in June, Town of Barnstable voters learned of the Selectmen's appointment of three new members to the Conservation Commission.

Weekly and daily papers editorialized, many of them deploring the appointments of Messrs. Wilber and Glover, and faintly praising that of Mr. Cash. The non-reappointment of long-time conservationist Lee Davis was questioned since his efforts on behalf of the Barnstable Conservation Commission are well-known and much appreciated.

Davis' dedication to conservation needs no further airing; all who know Lee are familiar with his views and his lifestyle of environmental concern. Of Mr. Cash, we know relatively little. We shall await further developments.

Of Mr. Glover, we know comparatively little more. Apparently, however, his presence on the Commission may put in jeopardy its many years of work because it appears his self-interest cannot fail to influence decisions which may have far-reaching consequences for conservation in Barnstabletown.

Of Mr. Wilber, we know much. Let it be said he's a competent builder of houses, a successful developer of real estate and for many years has been an active politician. As a conservationist, he's fallen far short of the mark; his record shows total lack of sympathy for protecting the Cape's natural environment. He speaks of ecology in scornful tones.

Following close on the heels of the announcement of the new appointments, it was revealed that Selectman Montagna had nominated two other persons for consideration, and that her nominations were not seconded, even though at least one of those persons possesses excellent qualifications to serve

admirably in the capacity of Conservation Commissioner.

It seemed only hours later that telephones began ringing throughout the town. A meeting of ecologically concerned people was held Friday evening, June 10. When the hour arrived, despite wind, rain and dark of night, so did dozens of Barnstable voters.

From every village they came; one or two merely curious, a few somewhat conciliatory, but most were irate, distressed, fearful, even angry. Discussion followed comment, and after nearly two hours of talk, it was agreed action was in order. The proposal to attend the Selectmen's Press Conference Tuesday, June 14, met with unanimous consent.

A name for the group was chosen: Barnstable Citizens for Open Government. The people in attendance that night were outspoken in their concern, not only for the appointments to the Conservation Commission, but also to other boards where there are vacancies still to be filled.

Among these are the Board of Health, the Finance Committee, and, foremost in the minds of all, the Commissioners to the new Department of Public Works which was authorized by Barnstable voters at the last election.

It was the consensus that if these appointments were to be made on the basis of political influence, the Town of Barnstable will find itself in serious difficulties in coming years; it was, clearly, a matter of deep concern; it was, without a single dissenting voice, vital to each person present that our Selectmen be made aware of the ground-swell of public interest in the welfare and the future of Barnstable.

It was agreed, then, that all who could would be present at the Selectmen's June 14th press conference.

The response was gratifying. Not everyone who had attended Friday night's meeting showed up at Town Hall on Tuesday morning. Not everyone who showed up at Town Hall on Tuesday morning had attended the Friday night meeting.

Upwards of ninety voters did come to Tuesday's meeting; nearly all spoke of their concerns regarding the appointments to the Conservation Commission, their concerns regarding the non-appointments, their concerns regarding future appointments to the vacancies on boards and commissions -- all of which are in the hands of the Selectmen of the Town of Barnstable.

Selectmen Brown and Taylor were asked to explain their choices. Their responses parried the questions neatly; they asked for the faith of the citizens; they suggested citizens might participate more actively in appointments before they were made.

It was pointed out that unless the public were informed who the applicants might be (and this has not been the practice in the past), there's no way the public can participate.

It was pointed out that just as members of Park and Recreation are concerned with those activities, members of the Conservation Commission should be concerned with the environment.

It was pointed out that voters are accused of apathy -- yet are asked to have faith in their elected officials, the Selectmen; but when the voters have faith, don't make waves, and don't rock the boat -- the Selectmen evidently are insensitive to the wishes of the citizens, and believe us to be apathetic.

Barnstable Citizens for Open Government are far from apathetic. When elected officials misuse the public trust, they betray the faith of their constituency, and asking us to have faith in them is blatant contempt for our intelligence.

Whether the Conservation Commission has been weakened by these recent appointments is still to be actively demonstrated; whether the Selectmen are sensitive to the wishes of the voters has already been seen.

What the Selectmen do next, what appointments they make, is going to attract attention throughout Cotuit, West Barnstable, Centerville, Marstons Mills, Osterville, Hyannis, and Barnstable Village. They've been put on notice: we are concerned, we do care, and we are not apathetic.

Furthermore, we -- unlike some citizens in some larger political subdivisions -- have long memories... long enough to last until the next election, and the election after that, and even the election following that one.

Politicians count on voters being apathetic; politicians believe voters have short memories; politicians think the masses are asses. Maybe that's true in some places.

It's not true, thank goodness, in the Town of Barnstable.