

# EDITORIAL

## *When is a bargain a bargain?*

Situated less than a mile west of Osterville's center, the Centerville-Osterville Water District Office stands at the edge of one of the department's wellfields. Abutting the wellfield, and acting as a recharge area, lie a couple of acres of undeveloped land. This property came to our public attention recently because a developer planned to construct multi-family housing there.

Because use of that land for that purpose threatened pollution of the wellfield, the developer's proposed plans were set aside. He graciously consented not to take the matter to court, although there was a fair chance he might have won his case. More recently, a decision was reached by the department not to purchase this land even to protect the wellfield. The property is on the market for \$200,000.

While the asking price seems a tad high, we may well regret the decision not to acquire this parcel. Clean, potable water, like clean, breathable air, is a basic necessity for sustaining life.

Some use of the land, unless we add it to our publicly-owned properties and protect it from future use which may

well contaminate our water supply, is unquestionably going to be made by someone. Even at an inflated asking price, acquisition now will be less expensive than replacing the wellfield or attempting to purify fouled water at some future date.

Over the years, again and again, Cape Codders en masse, and those in Osterville in particular, have passed up opportunities to acquire acreage at what seemed, at the time, an exorbitant price, only to recognize, a decade or so later, the asking price was indeed a bargain.

Within memory of present residents of the village, ocean-front at Wianno sold at \$100 a front foot; i.e., a parcel with 100 feet of beach, and stretching back to Seaview Avenue, was selling for \$10,000. Don't you wish you'd bought some?

Wooded acre lots in residential areas, as late as the '60s, sold for \$2,000 to \$3,000. Similar plots (if you can find them) are now being appraised (at full market value; according to United Appraisers) for more than \$40,000.

Twenty years or so ago, before the condominiums on Tower Hill were built, and before the property behind the House and Garden was developed, a suggestion was made to acquire

that land for future business development, and to permit the construction of another street, paralleling Main Street, to relieve traffic in Osterville's business district. The cost of land acquisition was judged too high.

Many will recall when the corner of West Bay Road and Wianno Avenue was entirely residential. The Shields property is the one remaining holdout on that corner today.

A beautiful green hillside once lent grace to the present locale of Piccadilly Deli; then a gas station was built there.

Only within the last year or two, condominiums have sprung up along Main Street where residences stood previously; more are coming, although only a limited amount of this construction will be permitted. Once those already holding permits have built, no more will be allowed.

Land values rise because, as that homely philosopher, Will Rogers, once observed, "They're not making any more."

Is there a chance Centerville-Osterville Water District will reconsider the decision not to purchase the acreage?