

A Need For Tools

Only a couple of months ago, everybody in Osterville was up in arms about subdivision and possible development of land between Joshua's and Micah's Ponds. Sound and fury echoed through the village and beyond; there's even been some legal footwork; still, the issue remains unsolved.

A few weeks ago a somewhat comparable situation arose on Nantucket. Acreage the federal government had taken, years ago, became available at a price of \$750,000; a deal was made whereby the government would accept \$350,000 less, in effect making a gift to Nantucket of that amount, if islanders could come up with \$400,000. The land bank, established to purchase available property for conservation when opportunity presents and funded by a tax on land transfers, was ready to match \$200,000 if that amount were raised by public subscription. Once acquired, the land would be added to the more than 6,000 acres already under control of the Nantucket Conservation Foundation, Inc.

More than enough pledges to match the land bank's \$200,000 came in before the meeting to approve the transaction.

Nantucket's conservation foundation, organized in 1963, is a privately-administered, charitable corporation; its goals are to preserve and protect for the public, places of natural and historic significance on the island. Its financial support comes exclusively from annual memberships and other contributions.

Starting with the acquisition of a piece of land smaller than one acre, the foundation now has jurisdiction over approximately 18% of all the land on Nantucket. Beaches, marshes, plains, scrub, ponds, and moors... places we think about when we're a long way from home and places we appreciate when we're where we can enjoy them.

When winds ripple the surface of a marsh and make it look as though a wave is moving through the grass, we know a warm glow of satisfaction. The way a flat plain stretches to a distant rise of hills, the sight of a paisley tangle of wooded

scrub at peak of autumn color, the bright-eyed ponds mirroring overhead skies, and rolling moors teeming with life but empty of humanity, all these blend to give us contentment. And beaches, their surfs necklacing uplands their everchanging lights and tides, their thunderings, their murmurings... these things, all, we cherish because they are rare, special, and lovely.

And we cherish them the more because they grow more rare with each passing day.

But not everyone accepts conservation foundations with enthusiasm. There are merchants who view land conservation as limiting the number of customers who will have access to their stores; some people in the building trades see land conservation cutting into their potential future earnings many who cater to tourists line up against land conservation even though the very reason tourists are attracted to the area are precisely what conservationists are attempting to preserve and protect.

When Nantucket needed the tools to acquire the acreage those tools were at hand, ready to be used. Can the Town of Barnstable establish a land bank and a conservation foundation? Certainly. Can other Cape towns? Of course. Isn't it too late? As long as there is any undeveloped acreage left, as long as there are any woodlands undespoiled, as long as there are plains and moors unbuilt, as long as there is single pond not entirely surrounded by houses, and as long as there are any beaches left at all that are not hemmed by public parking lots, it is not too late.

But, before it is too late, let us acquire the tools.