

Writer hopes dream comes true

After reading all the recent publicity concerning the unfortunate possibility that there may soon be 204 new houses built in Osterville, I woke the other morning with all the details of a just-completed dream sharply focussed in my mind. In my dream I was consulting with a shadowy figure whose identity and expertise was never clearly established, but it was a man I talked with, and he seemed knowledgeable and willing to help. The conversation went something like this.

"Is there anything we can do about it?"

"About what?"

"The subdivision and development of the Kennedy land, the Darby Trust property, the land around Joshua and Micah's Ponds in Osterville. Is there anything we can do to

prevent 204 houses being built there?"

"Certainly."

"What? What can we do?"

"Buy it."

"Buy? Who could afford to buy it?"

"Wianno and Oyster Harbors people could, but then you'd be back where you are now. Sooner or later any individual or small group that invests a lot of money in land wants to reap the profits. Better that a large group of people buy the land with the express understanding that, once acquired, it could be used only for recreation."

"Who would give money for that?"

"You'd be surprised. People who depend on the community's status for their livelihood are aware that anything that threatens the stability of the village, threatens their future income. People who come to these summer colonies recognize the unique quality of the area. They want to maintain and protect it for their own pleasure. Not many places like Osterville are left. Even those people of modest means who love Osterville because this is such a nice place to live, or those who have recently retired here, or those who have always lived here may volunteer to help buy the land. Everyone has his own reasons, of course, but everyone who owns property in Osterville now owns value that could depreciate if those 204 houses were to be constructed."

"You mean my own house could bring a lower price after those lots are built on? Be worth less than I could get now, even though a mile or more separates my land from any of those lots?"

"Yes, indeed. That subdivision will change the entire face of Osterville village. Of course, it might not be agreed to use it only for recreation. It might be decided to divide it into about 50 two-acre house lots. If that were to happen, an increase in the value of everyone's real estate might be realized."

"Are there other options?"

"Always. A Special District Meeting of the C-O Water District might vote to purchase the property to protect the recharge area of the wellfields. A Special Town Meeting might approve purchasing the land for conservation. A remote possibility still exists that the Kennedy family will respond to hopes they will make the town a tax-deductible gift of the land. If they had had any such plans, though, it's unlikely they would have filed the subdivision plan."

"What would it cost?"

"What would what cost?"

"To buy the land."

"Oh, upwards of a million, maybe. Maybe less. If the Kennedys sold before going to the expense of legal fees, putting in roads, installing drainage, having it all surveyed, it might be acquired for less than that."

"How might we go about raising a million dollars?"

"First you would have to find out the firm asking price. Then you'd hold a meeting and invite the entire community to come and be heard. That's how you'd get your finger on the pulse of the people. Summer residents, year-round homeowners, working men and women, retired couples; natives and newcomers; business leaders, town officials, teachers, real estate agents, cranberry growers. At that meeting you want a cross section, a broad spectrum of the community. All the options should be presented and considered. Conclusions might be reached then and there, but it's more likely a nucleus would form to investigate further and report back to the larger group at a later date. Then, if raising enough cash to buy the property seems feasible, and agreement can be reached about the purpose for acquiring the land, at that time an offer to purchase, contingent upon raising the required sum, might be made to the owners."

"You'd need firm commitments, wouldn't you? Promises?"

"You would."

"Do you believe Osterville could do it?"

"Sure."

And that's how my dream ended. That's when I woke up. Ever since, I've been thinking about that dream and wondering if it might not, somehow, come true.

Sincerely,
Andrea Leonard