



Newsletter of the Old Village Association of Chatham, Massachusetts

Volume VIII

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Winter, 2008

From the President

Thank you!

We in the Old Village are so very fortunate in having many folks in our association who raise their hands to help. What would we do without Bob Walsh who maintains our membership roster and creates all the mailing labels for our winter and summer mailings. George Olmsted took on the task of identifying all the households in the Old Village and updating the owners' names as properties change hands. George is also our Bridge Building Leader. And this year we have two new folks on our Board of Directors: Wendy Johnson and Ken Miller. Wendy and her husband Bob bought their 1880's Water Street house in 1983 and moved here permanently in 1997. Wendy is an interior decorator. Ken and his wife Linda had two vacation homes in Chatham over the last 20 years. In 1997 they purchased their present (and final, says Ken) vacation home on Water Street. Ken uses his marketing and communication skills as he works with Not for Profit organizations. And of course we all owe a huge vote of thanks to Carol Pacun who does such a wonderful job of getting these newsletters together for our reading pleasure. There are many more who deserve our thanks, but this is just Chapter One!

Nancy H. Koerner, President

Top Priority for 2009: Clarifying National Register District Rules for Newcomers

At its September meeting, the Old Village Association Board of Directors voted, as one of its primary goals for 2009, to put together materials for prospective homeowners and realtors that will clarify the review of National Register District historic homes under the Cape Cod Commission Act as well as reconfirm the commitment of present homeowners to protect the historic integrity of their neighborhood. This initiative is the result of the Board's concern about the seeming lack of complete information available to new and prospective owners about the mechanics of the review process, the lines of the district and the standards used to judge applications. Some recent contentious Chatham Historical Commission hearings have highlighted the need for materials to help people fully understand the regulations and think carefully how their plans may be impacted when they purchase an historic home in an historic district.

When the Old Village was placed on the National Register of Historic Places, the Association worked hard to explain the process and presented materials to the realtors, who were most cooperative. That was over six years ago. The Board recognizes that an update is clearly overdue and wants to do everything it can to encourage newcomers to become partners in the efforts to preserve the neighborhood. Complete explanations and full disclosure about the district will certainly make the review process more transparent and easier to manage.



Historic View of Old Village from Holway Street

EDITORIAL

Show Me the Money

"Whoever has the most toys when he dies wins the game."



wealth, leading to requests for massive additions, multiple bathrooms, fashionable add-ons which made no architectural sense. In short, over the

past decades, big money has changed the appearance of Chatham as well as its demographics. In the Old Village National Register District, the review process has largely curtailed excesses seen in other areas and protected historic homes from demolition or inappropriate renovations. However, the pressures of the continuing applications for renovations on the Historical Commission continue, and there does not seem to be an end in sight.

Of course, we have had other downturns (although this might be the mother of them all) and Chatham has been only modestly affected. Wealthy towns with a large proportion of second homes, many of which are without mortgages, may be insulated in difficult economic times. The majority of people does not have to sell – or buy. Will this economic crisis change Chatham or the Old Village in any significant way? An almost impossible question to answer. We can only look at the impact of the past years of economic growth and make some guesses about the future.

The most obvious result of the recent boom has been the spurt in Chatham's housing market. From the 1980's on, Chatham real estate prices soared to almost obscene heights, attracting a wealthy clientele, but making it almost impossible for middle class families to purchase a house in the town – and in the Old Village. Any buyer who could afford to put down millions of dollars on a second home, could also afford a massive renovation project. Old houses, with charm but little space, lost their appeal, demolitions became epidemic, landscaping took on a new sophistication – local plants and "Cape Cod grass" were replaced with stone walls, patios, and exotic plantings. "Flipping" became a source of instant wealth for some – buy today and resell tomorrow at a higher price. When renovating for resale, flippers needed to meet the standards of the new

This time around, will America's economic problems filter down to Chatham and reverse the trend toward more development, or will Chatham's bubble float along on its merry way, unaffected by national events? Will multi-millionaires pull back or continue to buy here at top price? Will tourism proceed at a breakneck pace? The answer is not clear. Real-estate agents and developers note some market changes, but the cost of houses does not seem to have gone down, foreclosures are almost unheard of, and, as far as we know, building projects and renovations are still going strong. We can expect some reduction in state funding, which may affect our wastewater program and other expenditures and perhaps increase our taxes. Unfortunately, for the first time

What They Said

"As the luxury real-estate market slows... trophy homes... are quietly gaining a new title 'white elephants'"
– *Wall Street Journal*, 10/31/ 2008

"Make it plain what Cape Cod really is, show a little of what it used to be, but, in addition, make plain the fact that it is still a beautifully, quaintly picturesque, and individually appealing bit of Old New England, and particularly emphasize the determination of those who love it, that it shall remain so. IT HAS NOT BEEN SPOILED AND IT SHOULD NOT BE." – *Joseph Lincoln*, 1936

"As much as we worry about our funding and our neighbors' financial health, sometimes these valleys in the economy can actually save the livability of a neighborhood." – *Seri Worden, Exec Director, Friends of the Upper East Side Historic Districts, New Yorker*, 10/06/ 2008

"If you want to know what God thinks of money, just look at the people He gave it to." – *Dorothy Parker*, 1920's

in many years, the voters may be asked to approve a proposition 2½ override to cover town expenses.

We certainly hope that Chatham remains economically healthy. But, if there was ever a time to rethink our addiction to money and what it buys, it is now. Perhaps recent events have helped us understand that a society where everything or everybody is for sale has its priorities wrong: that

people with "all the toys" are not the winners. In what may be difficult times ahead, let's keep in mind that the joy of being a part of our historic neighborhood, our cherished history, our friendships, and our spectacular views do not carry a price tag. They are our timeless assets and worth preserving.

– *Carol Pacun, editor*



Building in Chatham – Will it Continue?

Around Town

The next pages are devoted to issues which will impact everyone in Chatham – summer residents and full-time homeowners from each and every neighborhood. This is not a complete list: we are waiting with some interest about decisions concerning problematic areas closest to us, Lighthouse Beach and Bridge Street (which should be forthcoming in the near future). However, of equal concern are zoning bylaw changes, the review of Chatham’s Charter and the Wastewater Management plan. These are difficult, often confusing, matters which require serious thought (and some willingness to plow through dense explanations). We are very fortunate to have three knowledgeable people to give us this information.

Wastewater Update

How Much Will the Sewer Cost Me?

Everywhere I go in Chatham I’m asked the question, “how much will the sewer cost me?” No one, least of all yours truly, can answer that question. The total cost will be in the hundreds of millions of dollars, but individual costs are anybody’s guess. The Citizens’ Advisory Committee (CAC), of which I am a member, was charged with providing citizen input into the formulation of a comprehensive long range plan to address Chatham’s wastewater needs. Matters of cost and in particular financing of the costs is the business of the town manager and selectmen, not the CAC. With the town facing a proposition 2½ override, the selectmen have put off discussion of financing wastewater management infrastructure improvement until the spring. Our citizens’ group will not be reviewing cost estimates or financing plans. The CAC has provided citizen input into the development of the comprehensive plan with the result that the plan is the best remedy that money can buy.

Against the backdrop of a presidential election without an incumbent, a world economy in free-fall, and the final draft of the plan seemingly lost in a bureaucratic maze in Boston, we can all be excused for placing thoughts of Chatham’s wastewater planning on the back burner. **But as early as May Town Meeting 2009 residents will be asked to appropriate huge sums of money to begin the daunting task of sewerage a large portion or perhaps all of the town.**

How Will We be Paying for the Wastewater Infrastructure?

What can be said with surety of costs at this time is that the typical Chatham resident/property owner will be paying for this infrastructure in many different ways, not all obvious from the start.

These are:

1. Property tax levies.

Prior to the world financial meltdown and ensuing credit market freeze the town manager hinted at having a plan

for financing treatment plant expansion and a good portion of the collection system infrastructure from property tax revenues with no overrides. With tax revenues likely to fall, likely inflation of costs (both for construction and general town operations), state budget cuts and credit markets seizing up for the indefinite future, the town manager’s plans are now surely in need of rethinking. *Pressure will mount for property taxes to go up, and for new sources of revenue for the town.* Remember proposition 2½ overrides are not one time

assessments, but remain as part of the tax base. Still, not all is doom and gloom. As of early September, Chatham was in line to receive a 30 year 0% interest loan from the state that would go a long way toward helping to pay for the first years of construction.

2. Betterments.

The cost of laying sewer lines up and down the town’s streets and roads will be financed in part by betterments accessed to property owners served. The

proportion of these costs paid through betterments has not been announced, nor has the formula by which betterments will be assessed. In the headier days of easy money a couple years ago, I heard expressed the hope that betterments might be quite low with much of the cost of laying collection lines being paid for out of general revenues. Obviously this hope has been dashed for the foreseeable future by recent events. Betterment assessments would be payable over a 20 or 30 year period similar to a mortgage and appear as a new item on tax bills. The problem with betterments is that they can be regressive in that they are calculated by factors that have nothing to do with a property owner’s ability to pay. Some have argued to put the entire cost of betterments in the property tax since property taxes are a deductible expense. But who’s to say this will have any benefit after a new administration in Washington has their day with the tax code.

3. Connection costs.

Connection costs are the sole responsibility of the property owner as they represent capital improvements to the property. They are inescapable. They include the costs of both exterior and interior (if necessary) construction and materials

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Wastewater – continued from page 3

necessary to connect the property to the town's collection system. Once again, these costs can be quite regressive. Some properties may require extensive modifications, some may require sewage pumps, and some may require nothing more than a line direct from a house to the street. Detailed regulations committing property owners to connection specifics were voted by Town Meeting in May of 2008. Connection will be mandatory. Property owners will have up to one year from the time the sewer line is laid in their street to complete the construction necessary to connect their property to the sewer. In August legislation was passed making available some state moneys for low interest loans that might be offered to property owners, but now with no end in sight to the raging financial turmoil even this little help may have evaporated.

4. Usage fees.

As is already the case for properties on the sewer, properties connected in the future will pay a fee for sewer use based upon their quarterly water consumption. Therefore, this fee will vary from property to property. Current rates and manner of computation are published on the back of each water bill.

The CAC is soon to be disbanded, its work finished with the completion and acceptance by regulatory agencies of Chatham's wastewater plan. Citizen input into matters of its implementation will be the business of the Water and Sewer Advisory Committee. Before the sun sets on the CAC two more brochures will come to the public. One will discuss fiscal issues, hopefully providing more detail than I'm able to provide now. In addition, public hearings will be held this winter on the final State approved plan. Residents are urged to study these brochures when they come and participate actively in the hearings. Financing will surely be at center stage.

So “How much will the sewer cost me?” It will be the sum total of these 4 costs. In the coming months and years as the selectmen and the town manager develop and refine a finance plan be alert to costs from all four. It would be a serious mistake, for instance, to assume that the cost to property owners of sewers would be paid entirely from property tax revenues.

– David MacAdam
Old Village Rep., Citizens' Advisory Committee

Update on the Planning Board's Zoning ByLaw Review ...

Following the narrow defeat of a single omnibus affordable housing Article at the May Town Meeting, the Planning Board (PB) is continuing to methodically slog its way through a series of possible revisions. With continued pressure from the selectmen to come up with “something” that will both increase the town's affordable housing stock of countable units and be understandable/palatable to the voters, the PB has decided to break the omnibus article up into separate sections, as follows:

- *Revising the section on Affordable Apartments Incidental to a Single-Family Dwelling, so as to allow up to 12 such apartments a year by Special Permit to be rented or sold as condos.* However, the latest hang-up is a ruling from the State Dept. of Housing & Comm. Development which rejected a draft as being discriminatory because it allows a “preference” to people with “ties to the community.” The PB is understandably sensitive about asking the voters to approve such a provision if the result is tenants who are from “out-of-town,” so there may be no easy solution here.
- *Creating separate sections which would continue to allow apartments as of right in the Industrial District (Commerce Park & Enterprise Drive), and by Spec. Permit in the General Business Districts.* Both of these draft sections contain controversial provisions: (1) additional affordable units could be built in the Ind. Dist. without any review or special permit from the ZBA as to the suitability of the site for families, and (2) the present requirement that residential units in a GB Dist. not exceed 49% of the floor area of the commercial structure would be dropped – so that the entire building could be used for multi-family residential units.
- *Possibly adding a separate article to allow conversion of commercial buildings to multi-family housing in the Small Business District, mostly along Rt. 28, but again without a Special Permit review.* Without the review, they would not count toward our 10% goal.
- *Tabling for the time being the controversial article that would give a property owner local amnesty for presently renting out an illegal apartment, in exchange for bringing it up to code to meet all of the legal requirements for rental as an affordable unit.*

If all of these were to be approved by the PB and endorsed by the selectmen and came back to the voters next May, it could have a very major long range effect on the density and intensity of use in Chatham...if you want to follow this closer, you can come to the PB sessions on Tuesday nights or watch at home on Ch. 18...either way, remember it's your Town and your future!

– Norm Pacun

Charter Review Committee in Action

Chatham's Home Rule Charter for Chatham, which specifically sets forth the governing rules by which the town operates, was originally adopted in 1995. There is a provision in the Charter that it be evaluated by a committee every seven years. The last review took place in 2001. A year ago, a new committee was appointed by the Board of Selectmen, including Bob Walsh and myself from the Old Village.

We have held public meetings twice monthly to consider possible Charter changes. As such, we have interviewed all selectmen, Town Manager Bill Hinchey, the Finance Committee, the Water and Sewer Advisory Committee, along with Bill Redfield, the Water and Sewer Department director, and former town manager Tom Groux. We have welcomed comments and suggestions from the public, and all input is being taken into consideration as we work on formulating our recommendations. Once we have finalized our recommendations, we will bring them first to the Board of Selectmen, then to the town counsel for approval. Then they will be presented to Town Meeting for a vote, probably by May.

The issues that Chatham's Charter Review has focused on are:

1. Finances. Should the Finance Committee (FinCom) be involved earlier on in the budget process so that the selectmen can benefit from their input before making their decisions on the budget? (The Charter now mandates the FinCom to come into the process after the selectmen have accepted the town manager's proposed budget. FinCom then makes recommendations on the Warrant Articles at Town Meeting.)

2. Water and Sewer Commissioners. Should the Charter mandate that selectmen be the water and sewer commissioners, with a 3 member Water and Sewer Advisory Board (current practice) or should it be left to the selectmen to decide whether they want to be the commissioners with the right to set up an appointed commission if they so choose? Or, alternatively, should the commissioners be elected?

3. Personnel Committee. Should there be a personnel committee of 3 members, with one being a town employee, that advises the selectmen? (current practice). Or should the selectmen be allowed the option of disbanding this committee in that the town now has a human resources person who is responsible for personnel policy?

Currently under discussion:

1. Should there be an ethical standards section in the Charter? (There currently is none. A number of Mass towns have such a provision.)

2. Should a section be added that would state how the selectmen deal with town employees? With Boards and Commissions?

3. Should the Town Meeting have sole authority to dismiss a committee which has been formed by Town Meeting vote? (In the past Town Meeting created committees, such as the Municipal Building Needs Committee and the Long Range Planning Committee, have been disbanded by the selectmen.)

– Debbie Aikman

Chairman Charter Review Committee

For your information...

Chatham Board and Commission Meeting Schedules

Board of Health: Mondays, as posted, 7:00 p.m. at the Annex (George Ryder Road)

Board of Selectmen: Tuesdays, 4:00 p.m. at Town Hall (televised, channel 18)

Charter Review Committee: Mondays, as posted, 3:30 p.m. at Town Hall (next meetings 12/01 and 12/15)

Chatham Historical Commission: as posted. New 2009 schedule to be announced.

Conservation Commission: 1st and 3rd Wednesdays, 7:00 p.m. at the Annex (alternate Wednesdays, working sessions, 4:00 p.m.)

Planning Board: 2nd and 4th Tuesdays, 7:00 p.m. at Town Hall (televised, channel 18)

Zoning Board of Appeals: 2nd and 4th Thursdays, 1:00 p.m. at Town Hall (televised, channel 18)

Note: These times and dates are subject to change. Check the Chronicle each week for the latest information. You are always welcome to attend these meetings and to respond to specific hearings either in writing, or in person.



For your information (continued)...

The powerful cover of the 17 November issue of the *New Yorker* magazine is the work of the Old Village's own **Bob Staake**. An honor well deserved!

Of Widows' Walks and the Calico Cat

In times long gone, was there a widow's walk on top of the Calico Cat? That issue became the most interesting – and the most contentious – question asked during this summer's Cape Cod Commission hearing on the renovation of 193 Main Street, one of the Old Village's signature buildings. The Chatham Historical Commission's 1993 survey of Chatham buildings mentioned it, but no one in town remembered such a thing. People scoured their own attics to find old pictures, drawings and paintings, some back to the 1900's. No widow's walk. To further confuse the issue, in the attic of the building, there was a set of stairs leading up to the roof, with evidences of an earlier opening – an opening, most agreed, that was not large enough for a person to get through. No widow's walk, perhaps – but if not, what was that hole for?

Last month, Mary Ann Gray, while looking through her materials at the Atwood House, may have found the answer. The Old Village's own Clair Baisly in her book *Cape Cod Architecture* wrote about our ancestors: "Some of the earliest laws of our eastern cities were attempts to regulate architectural features in order to lessen fire hazards. Houses were required to have scuttles in the roof, with a ladder nearby and a bucket of water and a swab. [This was] in the hope that you might be able to douse a fire in your roof. [Present day] skylights are glazed version of the scuttles, also called hatches."

So, the mystery may well be solved. However, we always welcome people scuttling around their homes to look for an alternative explanation: that's the Old Village way.



CALICO CAT – Mary Chadwick Chisholm

Clair Baisly: A Voice for Old Village Preservation

How appropriate that Clair Baisly's book, *Cape Cod Architecture* (published by Parnassus Imprints, Inc., in 1989) contains information about roof scuttles which might apply to the Calico Cat! Until her death in December 1988, Clair was a one-person Old Village Association – educating people about Cape Cod homes, leading Old Village walking tours, writing articles for the Chronicle on Chatham history, conducting oral histories of Old Village residents, distributing a newsletter and, at every opportunity, emphasizing the very special qualities of the Old Village. Richard Batchelder, himself a leading advocate for conservation and preservation, remembers Clair as an omnipresent force, with a long and steady commitment to Chatham's history and its historic streetscapes. She loved Chatham, and through the force of her personality tried to make sure that everyone would eventually look carefully at the town's historic assets and want to protect them. When she felt she needed a level of expertise to better accomplish this goal, she went back to school, earning a master's degree in art history from Tufts University.

Clair served on the Chatham Historical Commission for 15 years, from its inception, and was also involved in the formation of the Chatham Historic Business District Commission. However, her efforts were not always rewarded. She was deeply disappointed in 1965 when her hard work to create four historic districts in town was turned down by voters, and another later bylaw, to ban condominiums in the Old Village, was passed at Town Meeting but somehow never made it to the State House to be ratified. Indeed, the force of her personality, which allowed her to accomplish what she did and move on from her disappointments sometimes got her into prolonged "discussions" with fellow preservationists who challenged some of her suppositions.

These forays into Chatham historical minutia only added to her almost mythical reputation as a tough, persistent advocate. Those around her marveled at her energy, perseverance and creativity (she did the drawings and the photography for the book, and for many years designed copper and tin items for the Cooper Craft Shop on Water Street). David MacAdam remembers that, near the end of her life, Clair went into high gear to organize Historical Commission documents for future use and, worried about a successor as protector of the Old Village, she (with some relief) scooped up Norm Pacun to be chairman of the Commission.

We in the Old Village gained much of our dedication to our neighborhood from the role model Clair Baisly set before us. Even her defeats taught us that alternate ways of preservation are worth exploring. Her actions and words set the stage for our National Register District where the neighborhood, primed by Clair, was ready to take a stand for long-held goals, even if the cost might be great.

– Ye Ed

Footbridge Over Mill Creek – A Story of Neighborhood Support

Mill Creek is a tidal creek running from the salt marsh between Homestead Lane and Chase Street into Little Mill Pond near the Town Dock. Neighbors who have lived here longer than me say there has been a walkway or bridge over the creek for at least 50 years. The current structure was approved by the Chatham Conservation Commission in August, 1988, and it was installed later that year. It is now approaching the “beyond repair” stage. Plans for a new bridge are underway. Following is a report on our progress.

Town Issues

At Conservation Commission hearings in August of this year we appealed for permission to replace the current structure with a design developed by Cape Cod Docks, Inc. Several neighbors wrote letters of support, and all of them were read into the record. The commission chairman then remarked, “It’s clear that the neighbors really want to have a bridge.” Following unanimous approval, the commission provided an Order of Conditions dated September 3rd, telling us what we have to do to replace the footbridge.

State Requirements

One of the requirements from the Conservation Commission was obtaining a Chapter 91 License from the Mass DEP. Application for that license has been made. The DEP tells me that it usually takes several months to get through their review and then receive a license. Having the license will constitute official record of the footbridge in its planned location and facilitate any future maintenance or replacement. We are counting on state support.

Neighborhood Support

The most heartwarming support is coming from our neighborhood! As of early November, 87 households from the neighborhood have contributed funds for the planned replacement of the bridge. When the replacement is completed, shell fishermen, neighbors, visitors, etc. will be able to continue using the beach path around Little Mill Pond. We all know that it is a popular walking route. Even the Chatham Walkers made a contribution, since the footbridge is on one of their regular routes.

The New Bridge’s Design

Working with Cape Cod Docks, Inc. and the town and state authorities, we have developed an environmentally friendly replacement design. The main supports will be by the creek edges and will not impact the waterway, as is now the case. The vertical supports will be Greenheart material that does not leach preservatives into the environment. The dimensional lumber is ACQ (alkaline copper quaternary) which is arsenic free and safe for residential use. It is popular for outside structures. Also, using ACQ lumber aids in the fight against global warming by reduced emissions in the ACQ manufacturing process.

Truly, I appreciate the help the neighbors have provided. I’ll continue to work for the supporters to accomplish the replacement.

Stay tuned, George Olmsted

Note: Any further donations can be sent to George Olmsted, 60 Chase Street, Chatham 02633. Checks should be made out to Footbridge Over Mill Creek.

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In Memoriam

*Harry Forgeron
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