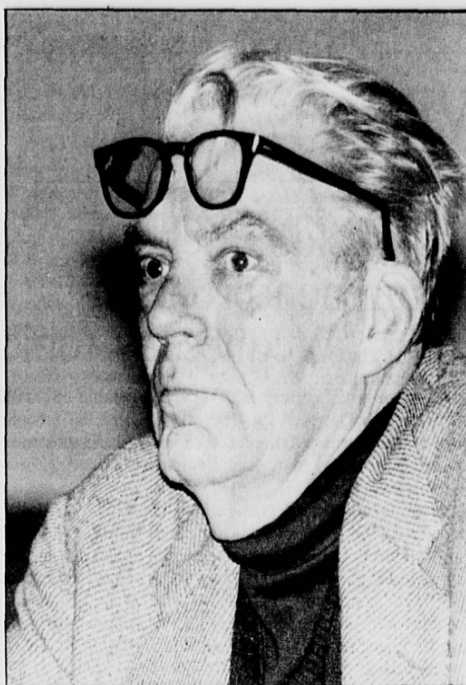




New president Paul Noonan



Prudential Committee Chairman
David Crawford



Barnstable Selectman John Klimm

'Feuding' Barnstable village comes together to re-create the Cotuit-Santuit Civic Association

By Russ Kendall

"This is a feuding town, a non-conforming town," Dave Crawford, chairman of the Cotuit Fire District Prudential Committee, said recently. "But we've come a long way towards making it a better town."

And making it a better town -- or more accurately, a better village in the Town of Barnstable -- was on the mind of each of the over 100 Cotuit residents who came together at Freedom Hall, Tuesday evening, Feb. 19 to re-create the Cotuit-Santuit Civic Association.

One reason the meeting was called and the group was formed, though indirectly, was the recent Cotuit Inn lawsuit. A group of Cotuit residents had gone to court seeking to halt conversion of the 140-year-old hotel and bar into 10 residential units. Though the group lost, "the Cotuit Inn lawsuit got some people interested in having an organization that can represent them," said Vernon Grabel, a Cotuit electronics and computer consultant.

Also contributing to the creation of the civic association, however, was an earlier conversation between the fire district's Dave Crawford and Barnstable Selectmen John Klimm. The town, as part of an upcoming land acquisition program, is presently soliciting recommendations from the various civic associations around town of which parcels to buy and in which order. The goal is both conservation and saving of village identities. Without an association, Klimm pointed out to Crawford, Cotuit risked "losing out" on getting land it considers valuable.

In response to Klimm's admonition the Prudential Committee, the overseers and financial managers of the Cotuit Fire District, and a group with obvious interest in certain lands, sought residents from Cotuit villages to be village representatives to a civic association formation committee. Then the Prudential Committee, through local media, word of mouth and through letters sent to each "representative," called for the February 19 meeting at Freedom Hall.

There was an earlier village group called the Cotuit-Santuit Association which became defunct in 1982. According to Nancy Settelmeyer, a past treasurer and president of the group, "the Association disappeared largely because there was no project that was disturbing people. Sometimes it takes a cause, especially in a small community, to get people active."

The Cotuit-Santuit Association, which was itself a revival of an even older Cotuit village group, was started, according to Settelmeyer, when the owners of the Harborview, a restaurant and inn, constructed a pier in front of the building without the necessary approval. In the end, the village group got the pier dismantled. She also said that the group was instrumental in getting one-acre zoning passed.

Before the three-hour-long Feb. 19 meeting was over, Klimm had spoken, the new association had been formed, its officers elected, several specific committees and chairmen appointed, and the next meeting date, Tuesday, March 5, set.

Who better than Cotuit residents?

"Who better," Klimm said during the meeting, "should decide the future of Cotuit than Cotuit residents? The whole issue here is what do you want to happen to the village?"

"The village of Cotuit has changed and will continue to change," he said. "We can begin to have a positive impact. If we choose not to, Cotuit will go the way of some other Barnstable villages."

"Could you give us some hope to believe," Ben Horan, a Cotuit resident, asked Klimm during the meeting, "that if we had a civic association it would have made one whit of difference when it came to decisions made about the Harborview and the Cotuit Inn? (Both are buildings in Cotuit that have changed use against the wishes of some community members.)"

"The role of a civic association," Klimm responded, "is to identify non-conforming uses of land and change them through civil means. Case after case can be made where civic associations made a difference in a community."

"I was a little surprised," Grabel said after the meeting. "I was pleased that you could call an ad-hoc meeting like this and have some semblance of order."

"I think we got a lot accomplished," agreed Jaci Barton, newly elected member of the bylaws committee.

Surprised, outspoken president

At least one resident, while approving of the formation of a village association, resented having the Prudential Committee hand pick and orchestrate its formation leadership.

"The idea of the Prudential Committee inviting people to be part of the committee just outraged me," Paul Noonan,

newly-elected president and chairman of the Cotuit-Santuit Civic Association, says. "I did not think that that was the way to revivify a dormant society"

Noonan, the former town clerk of Provincetown and 36-year summer resident of Cotuit, was perhaps more surprised than anyone at his nomination and election.

"I came to the meeting thinking that I'd say something bitchy and leave," Noonan said. "I didn't know I'd do this!"

"I had been interested in finding out what happened to the old society," he added. "Someone had said that it was defunct. When there is a moral need to be addressed, associations like this rise like the Phoenix, then they peter out again til the next moral evil has to be addressed."

"Civic associations in Cotuit have a long history. I remember one summer there was a terrible fight over some building or pier or some such thing. When the Cotuit Civic Association stormed the hearing at Hyannis Town Hall one woman there was Helen Robinson, a real estate agent. She was 93 or 94 and literally dragged herself out of her death bed for that hearing."

"When she got there, she was told that the meeting was going to be held on the second floor, where she couldn't attend because she couldn't climb the stairs. When she sat down in a large captain's chair, several men carried her, in the chair, right up the stairs into the meeting where she waxed loquaciously, though feebly at times, for the rest of the hearing."

"That," Noonan concluded, "has always symbolized Cotuit's spirit for me, its ability to rise to an occasion."

Other officers elected at the February 19 meeting were Ulrike Henderson, vice-president; Elizabeth Hill, treasurer; Kevin Mullaly, secretary; Nancy Settelmeyer, bylaws committee chairwoman; Robert Smith, membership committee chairman; Charlotte Ryder, publicity committee chairwoman; and Bruce Burlingame, business community representative.

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