

# Crocker and Darby: Political and personal ties

By David Still II

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Jim Crocker of Osterville has a personal and political history with the Darby property.

Personally, he is a user of the conservation area, which he enjoys with his family. Politically, it is the issue that got him elected in 2003, when he defeated incumbent Carl Riedell.

Crocker sought to protect the land from any development, while Riedell supported a town plan to construct an affordable housing development there, although he worked to reduce the number of units.

It was Town Manager John Klimm's ambitious 2001 affordable housing plan, ratified and supported by the council, that brought Darby to the forefront. Among the strategies in the housing plan was making town-owned land available for development, which would serve as a subsidy by lowering acquisition costs and add another layer of control regarding the type of development and percentage of affordable housing to be created.

For Darby, the initial plan was for 140 units of rental housing with about a 50-percent affordability rate. Through the work of then-councilor Riedell and the Osterville Village Association, a compromise plan for 87 units of total housing at Darby gained the support of the town council in November 2002. The village association sought additional protections on the remainder of the land, which were to be granted if additional affordable units were created in the village. The compromise plan sketched out how that could be achieved.

It was that compromise that served as the basis for the Crocker-led recall attempt on Riedell in March 2003. Twice, the necessary signatures were collected, the first petition deemed legally inadequate by Town Attorney Bob Smith. The recall was eventually pulled back on what amounted to a gentlemen's agreement between Crocker and Riedell.

The 2003 COMM annual meeting in May had to be continued to June because of a Darby-fueled overflow crowd. On the warrant was an article seeking to authorize the COMM Prudential Committee, on which Crocker served, to take a portion of the Darby property from the town by eminent domain.

That failed, but Crocker successfully amended an article seeking to explore potential new public well sources in the district to include testing on Darby. From that exploration, for which eight test wells were drilled, one area was identified a potential well site capable of more than one million gallons per day.

Last year, COMM voters approved an article seeking the easement now in question to protect that water source.