

EAST WATERTOWN BETTERMENT ASSOCIATION**THE E.W.B.A. CHRONICLE****PAST-PRESENT-FUTURE**

WHAT'S OLD, IS NEW
AGAIN, SHADOWS FROM
THE PAST.

The avarice and complete disregard for the damaging impact on neighborhoods that corporate giants sometimes exhibit when they choose to establish their enterprises caused area residents to mobilize into an opposition group in the late 1960's. When Jack-in-the-Box Restaurant Corp. planned to open a fast food/take-out on property at the corner of Mt. Auburn St. and Kimball Rd. in Coolidge Sq., the neighbors tried to engage in dialogue with the property development team. After many rebuffs, the aroused group of concerned citizens, led by Joseph J. DiVico, met and formed a committee to unite their concerns. The negative impact of added traffic and noise to an already congested area generated by a drive-through eating establishment would shatter the abutting neighborhood. After many meetings with town officials and company negotiators, a determination was made that the only concessions that could be enforced were a change in the nature of the proposal to eliminate the drive-in window and reduce the hours of operation. The group was advised by legal counsel not to pursue the matter in court because the location was zoned for business and the use was allowable. The group's efforts were not in vain. The Watertown Zoning Ordinance was subsequently revised with tighter restrictions on such uses.

The success of the committee brought about a sense of community and personal bonds that were fostered by one common goal, quality of life. These were the catalysts that in 1969 led to the formation of the EWBA. The original core group consisted of Rudolph "Rudy" D'Alanno, who served as president for 23 years, Ann Bonfiglio, Vin Byrne, Timmy Churchill, Joseph J. DiVico, Domenic Guzzetti, Clara Hyde, Anne Lazzaro, Diana Proctor and Joe Zaino. By-Laws were drawn-up and coordinators, with a mission, were appointed. The purpose of this newly formed organization was to actively pursue the securing of wise legislation and decisions from town bodies insofar as East Watertown was concerned and to keep elected town officials, town employees and residents of Watertown aware of issues considered to be of importance to East Watertown.

Since the inception of the organization, many dedicated coordinators and officers have remained loyal and devoted to its preamble. Leadership has been constant, including Alfred M. DeVito, Sr. who served as president for 8 years and John J. Bartley, secretary-treasurer for 12 years. The newest activist, Angeline B. Kounelis has served since 1996 and was elected president, 05/12/02.

In 1970, the EWBA's first major project and victory was the defeat of the "Western Connector". The project would have connected Route 2 to the Mass. Turnpike cutting along the Boston & Maine Railroad bed from Cambridge to Watertown proceeding south on Arlington St. through the Watertown Arsenal and connecting to the Mass Pike. This would have severed East Watertown with the loss of many homes and businesses. Through the efforts of the EWBA, 4004 signatures against the project were collected and submitted to the State Executive Office of Transportation. The rest is history.

For many years, residents of East Watertown believed fervently that the East End was often the "dumping ground" for uses and facilities the rest of the town did not want. Offensive odors from the Brighton Abattoir, the East End Dump on Grove St. and the Hood Rubber/B.F. Goodrich Co. often permeated the air. Blended in the mix was the aroma of baked goods from the Golden Cookie Bakery, Inc., also on Grove St. When increased anti-pollution regulations were adopted, the association and public officials joined to end noxious odors and noise from industrial and manufacturing firms.

From the late 1960's through the early 1980's, many of the heavy industrial and manufacturing firms in the East End, which employed many immigrant residents, closed their doors. The officers of the EWBA kept close watch on the reuse of the sites. In addition to zoning criteria, financial renumeration to the tax base, harmonious co-existence with residential abutters, traffic/parking impact and circulation, aesthetically pleasing developments and open space were all considerations to be reviewed. The developments that emerged have become integral parts of our community, often being taken for granted as we slowly lose sight of the previous uses.

All has not been rosy. The officers of the EWBA have tried their utmost to protect the area from overdevelopment and encroachment on abutting residential neighborhoods. In some instances, town boards have decided the developers were in compliance with the conditions set forth in the Watertown Zoning-By-Laws. All permits were issued. Parking, traffic, congestion and safety issues are now a fact of life for the community. Safeguards are still needed to protect our neighborhoods for generations to come. Vision for the future can be set forth by communication, interaction and a true understanding of our community needs.

The past three decades have brought intense change to East Watertown. Hundreds of housing units, open space at Filippello and Arsenal Parks, thousands of square feet for retail space at two malls, modern research and development facilities and so much more. The EWBA has contributed input to all the following major developments.

Newlyweds Foods on Grove St., Arsenal Mall Marketplace, Watertown Mall, United Parcel Service on Coolidge Ave. and Arlington St., Boston Edison on Nichols Ave., Coolidge Village Condominiums on Bigelow Ave., initial development of Filippello Park and subsequent rehabilitation with relocated tot lot, soccer fields and walking track, Coolidge Ave. condominiums developed by Charles Mosessian and Richard McBride, Western Electric/AT & T building by Mount Auburn Hospital and resale to Prospectus, Inc. which developed the property for Tufts Health Plan, AT & T Web Hosting Facility by Campanelli Companies, Alexandria Technology Center at the General Scanning site, Boston Biomedical Research Institute at the Golden Cookie site, development of the remaining Watertown Arsenal by the Watertown Arsenal Development Corporation, and helped to create a window of opportunity, which saved the Sacred Heart Parish from suppression along with East End neighborhood issues too numerous to mention

East Watertown has realized and will continue to experience considerable commercial growth and the associated development distresses. Watertown is entering a new era. Harvard University has purchased 30 acres of our town with long range plans for the parcel still pending. Also on the horizon is the reuse of the Coolidge School property; proposed traffic pattern changes to Greenough Blvd. that could impact our neighborhood streets; traffic calming and pedestrian safety improvements for the Coolidge Square area, enhancements to the Arlington St. at Nichols Ave. intersection and possible development of the Aggregate Industries property on Grove St.

The organization has been a driving force in the affairs of our town. Mutual respect has been established with the business community and earned from the citizens and town officials. For more than three decades, the EWBA has been the link for neighborhood cohesiveness. We offer a united voice in the issues that impact our community, because, united we can be heard. Only by participating can we create stronger bonds in our community.

Archiving Committee

Angeline B. Kounelis, Chairperson

Rudy D'Alanno, Joseph J. DiVico, Domenic Guzzetti, Anne Lazzaro
With special thanks to Bob Ford, former editor of the Watertown Press for his
"recollections"

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