

Water Champion – Steven Hoch

This is the first of what will become a series of brief articles about Water Champions, people who do the right thing and take leadership roles in fighting nutrient pollution on Cape Cod and the surrounding areas.

Steven Hoch has a summer home on West Bay in Osterville. In 2023 he installed an Enhanced Innovative/Alternative (EIA) septic system while upgrading his property in a way that would require a relocation of his existing septic system. As the ground was already scheduled to be opened, he invested in technology that anticipated the new Title 5 Regulations implemented by the Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection (MADEP) in July, 2024.

A little about Steven – A financial advisor, Steven is a Life Trustee of the Woods Hole Oceanographic Institute and Chair Emeritus of their Corporation. He is also the Board Chair of the Smithsonian Tropical Research Institute which studies biodiversity across Panama and in both the adjoining oceans. While not a technical person by training, conservation and science are significant parts of his consciousness.

He had observed the loss of eel grass and the emergence of algae along the beach in front of his house. While he wanted to show leadership and do the right thing for the environment and his community, he claimed self-interest, as well – the imperative to preserve our coastal environment for the benefit of future generations. And he emphasizes to any neighbor who will listen – we need to do this to protect the property values of our homes. He noted, “Who is going to buy a house where the beach is covered with green slime? We need to take responsibility for our output. If we do what is needed, with perhaps 150 households we can make a material impact.”

He also notes the creeping impact of nitrates on drinking water wells. “Everyone needs healthy drinking water.” He installed a whole house filter system with carbon filtration to bolster their town water.

Steven presented what he was doing to his neighbors in order to encourage others to join him in reducing nitrogen from their septic systems. His neighborhood is not part of Barnstable’s sewerage plan, so if they want to make an impact, they have to do it on their own. Many neighbors were just not yet aware of the problem and potential solutions. Others were in denial. This is an ongoing discussion and Steven is at the “bleeding edge”. We need to get the word out, and these articles are part of that effort.

Even in an affluent neighborhood, financial considerations are important. Steven believes in the town’s need to subsidize EIAs to encourage their installation.

So as we closed our interview, he reinforced that it was “the philosophy of Creating Shared Value – encompassing both the right thing to do and enlightened self-interest” that drove his decisions. Self-interest can work hand-in-hand with the best interests of the community. As a financial expert, he is ahead of the game, and we celebrate his leadership.

Bruce Walton

August, 2024