



community development partnership

Creating opportunities for people to live, work, and thrive on the Lower Cape

Supporter Spotlight: Manny and Liz Smith on working for real systemic change

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Manny Smith

Wellfleet Resident and CDP Advisory Council Member

Wellfleet residents Manny and Liz Smith want to make change – sustainable systemic change that provides support to people with low to moderate incomes, whether through rental assistance, property tax relief, food security or childcare. Committed to the communities where they have lived, the Smiths have involved themselves with local non-profits as well as municipal government.



For years, Manny and Liz lived in the suburbs of Washington D.C. where they worked for the federal government. An economist by training, Manny first taught at Penn State but after two years went to work for the Department of Health Education and Welfare (which became the Department of Health and Human Services) where he focused on research, evaluation and policy development. Liz started out in the Navy then went to work for the Department of Labor. When she left to start a human resources and organizational development consulting business, the National Education Association became her client. After 10 years, the NEA hired her to manage their political efforts. In 2004, after a combined 50+ years in government Liz said, “we had had enough of politics,” and they both retired.

Liz and Manny fell in love with Wellfleet in 1975 when they spent their first summer vacation there with their young children. For the next twenty years they returned to Wellfleet for summer vacations and knew it was where they would retire. In 1997 they bought property, built the house where they now live year-round.

Prior to retirement, they had become actively engaged in the Wellfleet community serving on several local town committees. Manny and Liz has also joined the board of the WHAT Theater where they met fellow Board member Jay Coburn, who a few years later was hired to lead the CDP

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When Jay became the CEO of the CDP in 2012 the Smiths became involved with the CDP as well and Manny joined the CDP's Advisory Council soon after. As strong advocates for housing and economic development their core interests aligned with the work of the CDP. They have been regular supporters of the CDP for years, and in 2015, when the Community Investment Tax Program was approved by the MA legislature, they increased their support through the program.

"My sense has always been to develop a holistic approach to all of life in order to address the key issues that surround young people with low to moderate incomes," says Liz. "If people are missing something, like daycare, we need to find ways to provide that. If things like housing, food and education are not meeting the needs of the community we need to address this. It is all possible, but there needs to be a group of people committed to making it happen."

Liz and Manny enjoy looking at how organizations do their work and seeing if there are ways to improve. Working with the Wellfleet Housing Authority they focused on building awareness in the community and raising funds for affordable housing developments. They also advocated to expand the eligibility requirements for the homesteading provision, which helps elderly and disabled low-income individuals with payment of taxes but excludes people under 55 years old. They were also instrumental in getting the residential property tax exemption adopted in Wellfleet.

Liz says "The CDP is really focused on the Lower and Outer Cape community and working on all the issues surrounding housing and economic development which is so important." Manny is most impressed with the CDP's micro-loan and technical assistance programs which help entrepreneurs start a new venture. "These businesses whom the CDP helps, like Karoo Restaurant, Mac's Seafood, and Neighborhood Auto ultimately give back to our community," Says Manny.

Supporting an organization that works to galvanize the community and create systemic change, like the CDP, is what drives Manny and Liz's involvement. "The CDP helps to meet the immediate needs of residents and small business owners through their various programs which is important at the micro level" says Liz, "but they are also looking to change the system over time. That takes patience as change is slow."

They both acknowledge that the future is very uncertain and it is likely that we will see, as Manny puts it, "a shaking out" in which people will need to sell their homes or shutter their businesses. But Manny is more optimistic than he was in April or May as the crowds have not stayed away and there is business on the Lower and Outer Cape. An analyst at heart, Manny feels there is an opportunity to identify what we will need to watch for moving forward and engage in pro-active planning so we are poised to respond.

We are grateful for the support and involvement of people in our community like Liz and Manny and look forward to creating meaningful impacts on housing and business development with them in the year ahead.