

Menemsha Master Plan

Parking & Traffic Summary

Chilmark Planning Board Subcommittee

3/27/2017

The Chilmark Planning Board has embarked upon an updating of the Town's Master Plan. After a series of discussions with the Board of Selectmen this past spring, the Planning Board's initial focus for the current Master Planning efforts is Menemsha, with subsequent efforts focusing on the town center and remaining portions of the Town. To this end, the Chilmark Planning Board has conducted a series of meetings over the last six months with Menemsha stakeholder groups – residents, business owners and members of town boards and committees which have a role in Menemsha – in order to gather data on concerns and suggestions for a vision for Menemsha. Much of the discussion has focused on the busy summer months.

This document addresses topics relative to public safety – parking, traffic flow and pedestrian issues. It attempts to organize the many inputs which the Planning Board has received into logical groupings of ideas, while providing background on how Menemsha “operates” today. It then provides guidelines and suggests considerations that might be taken into account when trying to plan for the future. While the intended audience for this document is traffic planners who might be able to help with the Menemsha planning process, it also provides a summary of our findings to date in the area of public safety.

In the context of preserving the character of the village of Menemsha, we have identified a set of goals as we plan for the future:

- Ensure pedestrian and vehicular safety
- Ease congestion, while improving traffic flow
- Respect the needs and concerns of Menemsha residents
- Not cause undue interruption to businesses
- Encourage access to Menemsha Beach
- Work within the framework of the Wetlands Protection Act

MENEMSHA BEACH PARKING LOT

Background: At present, there are 83 public parking spots in the “main” area of Menemsha. This includes Basin Road out to Dutcher Dock (spots on the right hand side) and the parking area adjacent to the Menemsha Beach. See Figure 1 below. All vehicular traffic flows through the Menemsha Beach parking lot (although occasionally smaller vehicles will turn around the gas pumps at the Menemsha Texaco, rather than go through the parking lot).

Generally, signage for parking in the “main” area of Menemsha is labeled for parking up to five hours, with no overnight parking. At present, there are ten (10) parking spots located opposite the fish markets to enable pick-up of food items. Four (4) of the ten (10) spots do not have posted time limits of 30 minutes.

Opposite the fish markets and adjacent to the Comfort Station is a small sandy lot that has been generally used by the business owners and their employees as well as the commercial fishermen. There are approximately 5 spaces in this permit only lot. The signage states “Permit Parking Only”. Despite the

signage, the spots seem to be used by beach goers sometimes. For the sake of this study, these spots should be considered as private and not within the scope of this parking analysis.

Finally, the small sandy parking area located between Menemsha Texaco and Larsen’s Fish Market is a sort of multi-use area. The Menemsha Fish House, a group which buys seafood locally and distributes it, has equipment and a structure in this area. Additionally, there is occasionally a seafood shack which does business there. And there is room for several vehicles to park; these spots are allocated to the Harbormaster and Shellfish department employees, commercial fishermen and Menemsha Texaco employees. For the sake of this study, these spots should be considered as private and not within the scope of this parking analysis.



Figure 1 Basin Road and Menemsha Beach Parking Lot

The Vineyard Transit Authority runs two bus lines that traverse through Menemsha. The # 4 services West Tisbury and Menemsha via North Road. It operates hourly in July and August. It diverts up Tabor House to pick up passengers at the satellite lot early in the morning (between 6 AM and 9 AM); the intent is to allow employees of Menemsha businesses to park at the satellite lot and not use parking spaces in Menemsha. Also in July and August, the #4 diverts up Tabor House Road to the satellite lot on request after 6PM. (See Figure 2)



Figure 2 Vineyard Transit Authority (VTA) Bus Route #4

The second bus line that services Menemsha is the # 12. Between 10 AM and 5 PM, the # 12 bus connects with the # 5 (which travels a route between West Tisbury and Aquinnah) allowing riders from Aquinnah and West Tisbury to travel to Menemsha. The #12 transports passengers between the Chilmark Community Center and Menemsha as well as to and from the satellite parking lot. After 5PM, the #12 runs only between the satellite parking lot and Menemsha. The # 12 bus generally runs through Menemsha three times per hour; this increases to four times per hour on Fridays and Saturdays. (see Figure 3)



Figure 3 Vineyard Transit Authority (VTA) Bus Route #12

Within Menemsha, both the # 4 and # 12 buses drive down North Road, turn right onto Basin Road, and travel along Basin Road to the comfort station. The bus stop is in front of the comfort station. For many years, it was on the opposite side of the road. The relocation seems to have created some confusion, as people will often wait on both sides of the road for the bus.

After dropping off and picking up passengers in front of the comfort station, the buses continue down Basin Road and travel through the main Menemsha Beach parking lot and then back out on Basin Road to North Road, where they turn left and travel up North Road. Although there is a defined bus stop, the VTA buses will usually stop and pick up pedestrians anywhere if they hail the bus.

It should be noted that, as part of the Menemsha planning process, the Planning Board has gathered many ideas on improving the satellite parking lot and “getting the word out” so that more people will use it, hopefully resulting in a reduction in traffic in Menemsha. Some of these ideas were recently funded through several articles on a Special Town Meeting warrant in December 2016. Those ideas will not be addressed in this document.

Challenges:

It can be a tight squeeze driving through the parking lot, especially for the VTA buses or emergency vehicles. Quite often, there are vehicles parked in the Menemsha Beach lot which have bike racks, coolers and other things on the front or back of their vehicles, making them extend that much further into the road.

One area of particular concern is the lane of the parking lot closest to the swordfish harpooner sculpture. Because the sand blows off the dune regularly, these spots seem to shrink, making passage by vehicles difficult. That, coupled with the size of the parked vehicles and the size of the vehicles passing through, make this a particularly tight spot. While it has been suggested that we move these spots eastward towards the sand dune, it would require permission from the Chilmark Conservation Commission.

Because of the limited number of parking spots, there are quite often vehicles queued up, waiting for parking spots to open up. This results in traffic back-up, starting at the entrance to the parking lot and backing up along Basin Road.

The present Menemsha Beach parking lot has a “funky” area in the center, containing twenty (20) parking spots which are not organized as uniformly as the parking spots along the edges of the parking lot. Presumably, this was done to squeeze in the maximum number of vehicles. These spots can be difficult and dangerous to pull into or back out of.

Because there are time limits imposed on only a few parking spots, visitors quite often park in Menemsha for hours at a time. The community has been vocal in stating that they would like to keep Menemsha welcoming, as it is the only up island beach which does not require a parking sticker. This must be balanced against the needs of the businesses, particularly in the evening hours, when people are picking up take-out or seafood from the fish markets and need to park for short periods.

On busy days and evenings, there are vehicles parking in front of the fish markets. There are no marked spots there; drivers tend to pull over and park. This adds to the congestion and slows traffic flow, as there is not enough room for vehicles, especially VTA buses, to pass without crossing the painted line on Basin Road. Also, there is a great deal of foot traffic here; vehicles parked here force pedestrians to step out into traffic to get by.

Suggestions and Considerations:

Parking Lot Re-design: When designing the “main” parking lot at Menemsha Beach, which includes the spots on the right hand side of Basin Road on the way to Dutcher Dock and the parking area adjacent to Menemsha Beach, we would like to maintain approximately the same number of parking spots as currently exist. That said, we acknowledge that we may need to sacrifice parking spots in order to meet other goals of this traffic flow analysis.

We also would like any suggestions with regard to the middle area of the Menemsha Beach parking lot, comprised of the twenty (20) spots in the middle of the lot. Possibly this might be an area for limiting parking spots to compact cars only (see discussion below) or maybe there is a different way to define the spots in this area.

The allocation of non-public parking spots in other areas in Menemsha – the spots in the sandy lot opposite the Menemsha Fish Market and the small sandy parking area located between Menemsha Texaco and Larsen’s Fish Market – is adjudicated by the selectmen. These areas are assigned to business owners, employees of businesses, commercial and charter fishermen, harbor master personnel, etc . That said, we have discussed a number of concepts for how those spots might be managed, including transferable parking placards which could be placed in a vehicle windshield and parking stickers. We would appreciate any insights you might have to offer on various approaches to parking lot management.

Traffic Flow through Parking Lot: As presently configured, the fact that all vehicle traffic flows through the Menemsha Beach parking lots creates many challenges. Given the limited amount of space available for the lot, it may not be feasible to greatly alter the flow of traffic through it but it might be an interesting thing to consider. For example, consider the incorporation of some sort of turn-around at the entrance to the Menemsha Beach parking lot to make it possible for someone filling up at the Menemsha Texaco to be able to come and go without having to drive through the Menemsha Beach parking lot or to allow a vehicle driver to visually scan the Menemsha Beach parking lot, see that there are no available parking spots and turn around.

Time Limits on Parking Spots: We would also appreciate any insights with regards to the locations in Menemsha at which you’d suggest we incorporate parking spots with time limits, the amount of time for those limits, and the administration of time limits on parking spots.

Pedestrian Path: It should be noted that we are trying to develop a clearly marked pedestrian pathway throughout Menemsha. We acknowledge that not everyone will use it. But it might need to be thought about while designing the parking lot and parking spaces. See separate discussion below.

Designated Handicapped Parking: we would also like guidance on number and placement of handicapped parking spaces.

Designated Compact Car Parking Spaces: not a hard requirement; it has been suggested that limiting certain parking areas to smaller vehicles might be one way of improving traffic flow. One example could be to designate some spots in the area of the parking lot close to the swordfish harpooner sculpture, as discussed above. Or possibly designate some of the twenty (20) parking spots in the center of the lot as compact car parking spaces.

Designated Drop-off Spots: because of the scarcity of spots, vehicle drivers will circle for periods of time, looking for parking spots. Out of frustration, they will then stop and drop people off anywhere. Suggested that a drop-off spot be incorporated to give people a clear, safe spot to drop people and their belongings, while allowing traffic to flow past them.

Designated Parking for Motorcycles, Mopeds. This does not seem to be a huge problem but it might be helpful to have a designated area. Such an area might also include a bike rack.

Designated Area for Fuel Deliveries: The Menemsha Texaco receives fuel deliveries on a regular basis. The delivery trucks need to be able to access the fuel tanks. These are located underground on the comfort station side of the parking lot. Right now, there’s a small area cross-hatched with lines to keep beach goers from parking in the area used by the fuel delivery trucks.

Traffic Attendant in Lot: Chilmark currently employs parking lot attendants at Lucy Vincent Beach and at Squibnocket Beach. Their role is to check for valid beach stickers on cars and to let vehicle drivers know if there are available spots or not. This concept has been suggested for Menemsha. The responsibilities of such an attendant would likely be to let vehicle drivers know whether there are any parking spots (we don't foresee issuing beach stickers for Menemsha, so checking for those would not be part of the attendant's responsibilities) and also helping with traffic flow. The question is how valuable an attendant would be, as, with the present parking lot configuration, all the attendant could do would be to tell the vehicle driver to keep going, which they already are doing today, on their own. But possibly, with a different parking lot configuration, an attendant might make sense to help maintain traffic flow.

Better Visibility for Drivers Backing out of Parking Spots: Particular problem on right hand side of the lot as you face the beach (the row next to the swordfish harpooner sculpture). It has been suggested that a sharper angle be implemented in marking the parking spots, as there is no visibility for drivers trying to back out.

Dedicated Parking spot for Emergency Vehicles: This concept arose in discussions with the Fire Chief and the EMS Chief. The Fire Chief indicated that, in the event of a fire in Menemsha, they would need to bring multiple fire vehicles down so a parking spot to accommodate a single fire truck might not be that valuable. However, the EMS chief felt that a marked spot to accommodate an ambulance would be useful, as the EMS is called to Menemsha on a fairly regular basis in the summer. A suggested location is next to the Menemsha Texaco or at least on that side of the parking lot, to allow access to the harbor and boats, as well as to the beach.

On a related note, it has been suggested that a ramp be added to the Menemsha Beach parking area to allow the transfer of injured from boats in the harbor or along the pier. While this would be addressed separately by the selectmen, we would ask the MVC to keep this in mind as a possibility while considering the design of the parking lot.

Bus Turnaround: It has been suggested that the VTA buses turn through the permit parking area just before the comfort station. Preliminary conversation with the Vineyard Transit Authority (VTA) has indicated that this might work. Please evaluate this option.

North Road Parking Spots:

Background: There are twenty-one (21) public parking spots located in this area of Menemsha in total. See Figure 4 below.

There is a parallel parking area along the stretch of North Road from the corner of Basin Road down to Harbor Road. These parking spots are not marked, but about 5 vehicles can be accommodated on this stretch of road, depending on the size of the vehicles.

Between Harbor Road and The Galley Restaurant there are sixteen public parking spaces. These include public parking spots on the Menemsha Market side of the road where there are five (5) parking spots in front of the Menemsha Market with time limits of fifteen (15) minutes in season and 4 public parking spots that are marked one hour spaces from 9AM to 9PM and seven (7) public parking spaces opposite the Galley Restaurant and also marked one hour spaces from 9AM to 9PM.

It should be noted that the parking lot adjacent to the Home Port Restaurant belongs to the restaurant and is not generally available for public parking.



Figure 4 North Road Parking Spots

During the summer of 2016, several spots in front of the Menemsha Market were designated as fifteen minute parking. The owner of Menemsha Market felt that this was successful and that people honored the constraint, for the most part.

Challenges:

Besides serving as a parking area for customers of the Menemsha Galley, the Home Port and Menemsha Market, the North Road parking area is also a road which allows access to the channel. Vehicles flow through this area for a variety of purposes: Coast Guard personnel need to go to and from the Coast Guard boat house, commercial fishermen and pleasure boaters need to access their boats in the slips on the floating dock, and charter boat fishermen and their customers need to access charter boats on the channel.

The Coast Guard Station is located on Edy's Island Road (the road that is just visible on the map in Figure 2 which runs alongside the Home Port Restaurant and intersects North Road opposite the Menemsha Market). Any traffic coming from the Coast Guard Station must travel down Edy's Island Road and make the left turn onto North Road and then travel out to the Coast Guard boathouse.

Vehicle drivers in the North Road parking area must back out of their parking spots; visibility can be poor. There are also great numbers of pedestrians in the road, depending on the time of day.

After backing out, most vehicles are headed towards the channel. Drivers generally execute a three point turn on the corner near the Galley in order to get their vehicles headed up North Road. Turning a vehicle in this area presents safety issues, due to the large number of pedestrians and poor visibility.

Suggestions and Considerations:

Parking Lot Re-design: Consider a re-design of the North Road parking spots so that vehicle drivers do not have to back out.

Also, a cul-de-sac or some other means of allowing vehicles to turn around at the bottom of North Road would be a goal.

Designated Handicapped Parking: we would also like guidance on number and placement of handicapped parking spaces in this area.

PEDESTRIAN SAFETY

Background: There is a great deal of pedestrian traffic in Menemsha. We probably could not design a walkway of adequate width to accommodate the vast numbers of people that walk down there, particularly at sunset.

Our goal is to develop clearly marked pedestrian walkways and crosswalks to the extent that there is town-owned property or the Town is able to acquire easements. We acknowledge that not everyone will use them, as there is clearly a “vacation mentality” in the summer, and people tend to just walk everywhere. But our hope is to provide more safe pathways for those who will use them.

A general goal would be a clearly marked pedestrian walkway from the Menemsha Galley along North Road, onto Basin Road and to Menemsha Beach. People need to be able to access the comfort station, the restaurants, the fish markets and other businesses and, of course, the beach. With the exception of a few limited areas, there is not presently a clearly defined pedestrian pathway or crosswalks.

Over the last several summers, the Town experimented with a roll-out seasonal slatted walkway which was laid down from the comfort station to Menemsha Beach. It is located behind the cars on the sand (on the side towards the swordfish harpooner sculpture). The walkway has been viewed as largely successful, and the Town widened it this past summer. This walkway appears to have met its goal of allowing a safe path for beach-goers to and from the comfort station.

It has also been suggested that we might continue this walkway behind the comfort station down to the bridge. The benefits of this might be limited, as it would not really afford pedestrians direct access to any other destinations; although, if they were headed towards a business on that side of Basin Road (Harbor Craft Shop or the Bite), it would allow them to walk a little further off-road before having to walk in the road.

The Town may be able to acquire an easement on the curve on a piece of property opposite the Bite and the Harbor Craft Shop. This is referred to as the DiMaura property (see Figure 1). There is also a possibility that the property owners will allow the Town to trim shrubbery on that corner to improve visibility.

The Town recently voted to look into the possibility of installing a two or three way stop sign at the intersection of North Road and Basin Road. At present, only vehicles approaching North Road from Basin Road have a stop sign.

Challenges:

There is no defined pedestrian path from the Menemsha Galley Restaurant, along North Road to the intersection with Basin Road.

On Basin Road from the intersection with North Road to the Bite (i.e. inbound to Menemsha), there is no place for pedestrians to walk on the right-hand side of the road. So, pedestrians use the opposite side of the road. This can be dangerous, as there are a couple of residences and several businesses along this stretch of road, the parking for which requires vehicle drivers to either back in or back out onto Basin Road. Any marked pedestrian path in this stretch of road needs to be flush with the road surface to allow vehicles to roll over it (i.e. it would not be possible to have sidewalks and curbs).

Speed has been cited as a factor on the stretch of Basin Road between the Bite and the corner of Basin Road and North Road. There is a traffic machine sited on that stretch of road which displays the speed at which vehicles are passing. It is not clear if data is gathered and analyzed. Some community members believe that the presence of the machine in itself slows people down.

A particular trouble spot is the curve on Basin Road, where it passes the Bite and the Harbor Craft shop. Visibility is limited; pedestrian traffic is heavy enough that people tend to walk two and three abreast on both sides of the road. There is no clear path on which pedestrians can walk.

The topic of the curve came up in our discussions with the VTA. The buses have great difficulty making the turn, given oncoming vehicle traffic and heavy pedestrian traffic. It has been suggested that the white rocks on private property at the corner be removed to allow a little more space. The Town would need to approach the property owners and request this.

The area generally between Larsen's Fish Market and the Menemsha Texaco can be difficult for pedestrians. This is due to vehicles backing out of the small sandy parking area (referred to earlier as the multi-use area) which is allocated to the Harbormaster and Shellfish Department employees, commercial fishermen and Menemsha Texaco employees. Another concern is pedestrian safety near the heavy equipment operated in this same area ("unloading yellow zones"), related to the Menemsha Fish House operation.

Suggestions and Considerations:

Pedestrian Path from Menemsha Galley to Basin Road: Consider a marked pedestrian walkway from the Menemsha Galley to the intersection at the corner of Basin Road and North Road. It is not clear how we could accomplish this. The owners of the large residential property opposite the Homeport Restaurant have stated they might support such a plan, if adequate screening was provided on the edge of their property. But putting a path on that side of the road would eliminate the five parking spots that

currently exist. Possibly an agreement could be negotiated with the Homeport Restaurant owners but vehicles are backing out of the restaurant parking lot onto North Road, so this doesn't seem very safe either.

Crosswalk on North Road: we have talked about the utility of a crosswalk spanning North Road at the intersection with Basin Road. In other words, this would start at the upper end of the Home Port Restaurant parking lot and cross over to Menemsha Blues. As mentioned above, we are considering a two or three way stop at this intersection and are wondering about the utility of a related crosswalk to allow safer crossing for pedestrians.

Speed Bumps on Basin Road: We would appreciate ideas relative to speed bumps – pros and cons – in order to slow traffic down. One idea we've discussed is non-permanent speed bumps; we could then experiment with the best location and might conclude that they don't help at all. Another advantage would be the ability to remove them in the winter.

Double Line on Basin Road: do we need to have a double yellow line on the stretch of road from the intersection with North Road down to the curve? Would a single line suffice? Would the resultant small change in road width be of any real benefit?

Crosswalk on Basin Road: While it would be nice to have walkways on both sides of Basin Road, practically speaking this is unlikely. Given that the comfort station is located on one side of Basin Road, while most of the businesses are located on the other side of Basin Road, a safe means of crossing Basin Road, such as a clearly marked crosswalk, is very desirable.

It might be good to encourage pedestrians to walk on the side of Basin Road opposite the "yellow zones" (in other words, place the crosswalk such that pedestrians would be encouraged to walk on the comfort station side of Basin Road).

It may be desirable to clearly delineate a pedestrian path by the fish markets by installing a low barrier that does not impede access to the markets.

Surface for Present Slatted Walkway: There have been comments received that suggested a different surface for the present slatted walkway might allow easier use for wheelchairs and baby strollers. We would appreciate any suggestions for a different surface area the walkway from the comfort station to the beach. By putting it on the sand, it keeps people out of the parking lot. But because it is on the sand, the Town cannot make it permanent, like a poured walkway of some kind.