

Menemsha Traffic Doctrine

A summary and analysis of traffic and parking issues during the 2017 season

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Attn: The Town of Chilmark Board of Selectmen and the Menemsha Master Plan Committee

I. Introduction

Summer 2017 was a notably busy, yet manageable summer season for Chilmark and Menemsha. The weather was such that there were not many overcrowded beach days nor excessively long sunset nights. The latest traffic officers were posted in Menemsha during the 2017 season averaged around 9pm in July. This is notably different from summers past, a testament to the installation and utilization of the Tabor House Road town lot. This memoranda is being written in the early part of August, but the summer in its greatest volume is, in effect, over. This memoranda will show that parking regulations were stricter, thus creating better turnover for Menemsha businesses, traffic patterns were expedited to minimize gridlock, and signage made for a more clear understanding for visitors and locals alike.

This memoranda will also provide suggestions for the Town to consider regarding parking regulations, traffic patterns, and signage. All suggestions should be mulled by the respective committees and boards and should not be considered to be the formal suggestion by the Chilmark Police Department. These suggestions are purely the perspective of the author, informed by my capacity and experience as a Traffic Officer for the Chilmark Police Department.

II. Parking Regulations

30-minute parking in Menemsha

The installation of 30-minute parking spots in front of the two fish markets was a valuable addition to Menemsha. While this addition required increased policing of timed spots, which can be cumbersome during busy days and nights, the traffic officers were able to compensate. The time limits were obeyed in general, with few exceptions including commercial fishermen using the spots as if they were not marked with a time limit, visitors who parked overtime (on average 1 hour was given to these 30-minute spots so to not enforce a limit so strict that visitors were dissuaded from returning to Menemsha), and sightseeing tour vans and buses who likewise parked overtime during their tours.

In the future, the 30-minute spots should remain. It should be noted that commercial fisherman do not have an exclusive, signed parking lot to park their trucks while they conduct their business in Menemsha and on the water. The dirt lots (one adjacent to the public restrooms, and one adjacent to the Harbormaster shack) should be formally signed so to consolidate the commercial fisherman in their own lot. Permits or stickers should be issued by the Town in order to validate each vehicle and ensure its own parking place.

Visitors parking overtime in 30-minute spots will continue to be dissuaded to park longer than they're allowed by issuing overtime parking violations. Allotting almost double the allowed time (1 hour) is sufficient warning and cushion for visitors to use the 30-minute spots judiciously, frequent the businesses they intended, and leave or find another parking spot.

Tour vans and buses, as will be discussed later in this memoranda, constantly misuse the Menemsha parking lot. They (the vans/buses and their operators) should be able to locate a 5-hour or 2-hour parking spot in either the Menemsha beach lot (adjacent to the beach) or on the Homeport/Galley side of Menemsha. It should be noted that this issue was reasonably resolved in the latter part of July 2017, after numerous complaints lodged with the Police Department and the Board of Selectmen. That being said, come time for the 2018 season and renewal of permits for these tour vans/buses, all operators should be told to not use these 30-minute spots if they intend to stay longer.

1-hour parking in Menemsha

The 1-hour parking spots on the Galley side of Menemsha have been more difficult to police. Given the time frame of the spots being long, their proximity to the Homeport Restaurant which regularly overbooks its own private parking lot, and the issue of foot traffic in the area of the Galley and Boathouse Road, significant changes must occur in order to consolidate the issues that surround this parking area.

Policing 1-hour parking spots, when traffic officers are already tasked with the aforementioned 30-minute spots on the other side of the harbor, is difficult. Seeing as the turnover of vehicles would primarily affect the Galley and the Menemsha Market, the parking should be limited to 30-minutes. This would allow for traffic officers to conduct surveillance of all strictly-timed parking spots (the aforementioned spots parallel to the fish markets) and to issue violations to all cars overstaying their allowed time. Limiting these spots to 30 minutes would impact customers of the Galley who may want to enjoy a meal on the back porch longer than 30 minutes. If that is the case, then Galley-only parking spots could be allotted. However, in so doing, one would have to determine which car is for the Galley and which one is not. Making the entire parking area 30-minutes would cut out this possibility of confusion.

It should also be noted that the Homeport Restaurant has been known to overbook its restaurant parking lot. In some cases, patrons of the Homeport would park in the 1-hour parking lot and obviously overstay their time. This is unfair to both the Galley and Market as their businesses are allotted the 1-hour spots and the Homeport has its own parking lot.

2-hour parking in Menemsha

The 2-hour parallel parking spots on the Homeport side of Menemsha should be changed to 5-hour parallel parking spots. Including these spots in the general time limit of Menemsha (5 hours) would alleviate traffic officers from policing another non-uniform time limit spot. This will allow those visitors who did not find parking in the beach lot an additional area to park and not be fined, if they planned on staying in Menemsha from beach time to sunset time. It will also allow the Homeport to direct any overflow parking from their lot to this area, close in proximity, and not encroach on the Galley/Market parking lot which will have a stricter, shorter time limit.

5-hour parking in Menemsha

The 5-hour parking time limit in Menemsha is the epitome of a general deterrent. It is there to not invite people to park overnight, without warning, and essentially abandon their vehicles as if it were a park & ride lot. It should be noted that there is rarely, if ever, an overtime violation issued for the Menemsha Beach (and hopefully, eventually the parallel spots on the Homeport side) lot. Visitors are regularly and pleasantly surprised that the time limit is so long, and are immediately comforted in their ability to stay a while in Menemsha. In my own memory, I can recall staying in Menemsha from peak beach time until long after sunset. Inversely, I cannot recall ever receiving an overtime ticket for doing so. Menemsha is a unique place on the Vineyard, and part of that uniqueness is the absence of time people who visit feel except once the sun goes down. That absence of time, and by extension stress, is what makes Menemsha an attractive and relaxing destination for visitors, and locals alike, and to continue that aura should be the primary goal of all those who work and monitor Menemsha.

The Town should also consider installing additional Handicap parking spots for all of Menemsha (at least 2 more on the beach side, 1 more on the Galley/Homeport side). On many occasions, traffic officers had to “create” spots to accommodate handicap visitors. This is an unnecessary, yet manageable, burden but can be solved with the addition of more handicap-dedicated parking.

III. Traffic patterns

Tabor House Road Lot

Only during exceptional sunny days and clear sunset nights was traffic a significant issue in Menemsha. The night of “Meet the Fleet,” was markedly busy, but by having external parking at Tabor House and Capt. Flander’s, traffic was significantly alleviated. The one-way in, one-way out design of Menemsha is a double-edged sword. On one hand, it consolidates traffic in a manner that is manageable in case of emergency in Menemsha proper or Chilmark moreover (emergency vehicles can travel in one lane unfettered while traffic is stopped in the other). On

the other, it can restrict incoming traffic from bringing visitors and others into Menemsha as vehicles would simultaneously search for a parking spot, causing gridlock.

Marketing the Tabor House lot to Menemsha visitors is tough. It's understandable to not want to park your car 2 miles from where you're seated at a beach or restaurant. However, if there are no available parking spots in all of Menemsha, including the gray-area spots in front of local businesses and other non-signed areas, the only option is Tabor House. By installing permanent, visible signs on North, Middle, and South Road, the Town can alleviate traffic backup in Menemsha by pointing incoming visitors directly to Tabor House. People will still, of course, travel to Menemsha to drop off and pick up, but by increasing signage toward Tabor House it should force some, possibly newcomers, to park at Tabor House initially and ride the shuttle in and out.

Homeport parking

The use of valet-style attendants at the Homeport restaurant has definitely helped with its parking situation, but has also caused some traffic concerns on that side of Menemsha. By overbooking its lot, Homeport puts upon the other businesses and their parking in Menemsha, when it should be marketing the Tabor House lot to its customers. The attendants also conduct intake of customers and their vehicles in the entrance to the parking lot, causing some backup onto the extension of North Road. A suggestion would be for a legally-able valet driver to take the overflow vehicles to the Tabor House lot for the customers and return the vehicle when the customers are finished at Homeport. Obviously, that would impose on Homeport to task an attendant with that job. An agreement between the Homeport, the Town, and the Police Department as to how to best manage Homeport's parking is necessary.

Edy's Island Way, Coast Guard Station Menemsha

Ensuring clear passage for the Coast Guard at Station Menemsha is a high priority. From the headquarters on Edy's Island Way to their boat launch on Boathouse Road, the Coast Guard has to navigate around parked vehicles and pedestrian traffic. In order to alleviate their passage, signage should be posted on Edy's Island Way restricting parking on either side. Edy's Island Way is a private, unmarked road that is routinely policed by traffic officers. There is a sign posted at the curve of Edy's Island Way stating No Parking, Tow Away Zone, but this sign is insufficient to stay vehicles from parking. The entirety of Edy's Island Way should be a restricted parking area due to its use by the Coast Guard. If cars were to park up to the No Parking sign, as they have during the 2017 summer and the Coast Guard was mobilized for a mission, the Coast Guard vehicles and service members would be put into a dangerous position by having to navigate around parked cars, potentially slowing their response, which is completely unacceptable.

Furthering the discussion of the Coast Guard's access to its boat launch, the Galley should post a reminder outside to customers queueing for ice cream to stay inside the white fog line. The lines for the Galley jut out into the North Road extension, causing a traffic hazard for both vehicles driving to the West Dock and Coast Guard emergency vehicles. Galley employees should also remind customers to stay out of the road, if the line exceeds the white fog line.

Boathouse Road

The dirt road leading up to the Coast Guard boat launch and the West Dock has been an ambiguous parking area in recent memory. While there are signs that do say no unauthorized vehicles permitted, there is no signage on Boathouse Road on any of the fishing shacks reiterating the same. It has been debated where the Aquinnah/Chilmark town line is demarcated; in recent years traffic officers have been under the impression that Boathouse Road was Aquinnah's property; this past year we learned that was not entirely the case. In order for Boathouse Road to be used properly, by those who are entitled to park there (i.e. Vanderhoops, Book-a-boat, etc.) signage must be put up. It is unfair to expect the police department to police an area that is not marked by signs, only allowing those who can park there to park there. It was brought up by Harbormaster Jason in a Selectman's meeting that cars would park along Boathouse Road making it impossible for cars to travel to the West Dock and park in their designated spots. To add signs stating no parking allowed, or permit parking only (with an actual permit system set forth by the Harbor Department), would be of great help to traffic officers. There is no real rhyme or reason to Boathouse Road, but due to the fact it is used by the Coast Guard, the Harbor Department, and the Police Department, signage is necessary to ensure its organization.

IV. Signage

Signs to be posted:

- No Parking either side, Tow away on Edy's Island Way.
- 5-hour Parking on North Road Extension, across from Homeport, for parallel spots.
- 30-minute Parking on North Road Extension, for Galley/Market angled spots.
- Menemsha Parking at Tabor House Road with Shuttle for North, Middle, and South Roads facing the incoming (towards Chilmark) lanes of each road.

- No Parking/Permit Parking Only, for Boathouse Road (Inner-Harbor side).

V. Conclusion

- Replace the 1-hour angled parking on the Galley/Market side with 30-minute angled parking.
- Replace the 2-hour parallel parking on the Homeport side with 5-hour parallel parking.
- Install 2 additional handicap parking spots in Menemsha beach lot and 1 handicap parking spot in Galley/Market parking area.
- Increase signage on North, Middle, and South Roads directing visitors to the Tabor House Road lot in order to park for Menemsha.
- Improve Homeport Restaurant's parking lot situation, by either including valet services to the Tabor House lot or additional satellite parking in a private, dedicated lot, and/or marketing the Tabor House lot to Homeport customers.
- Mark Edy's Island Way as a No Parking roadway with signs on both sides of the roadway.
- Mark Boathouse Road as a No Parking/Permit Parking Only roadway with signs on the inner-harbor side of the roadway.

VI. Synopsis

Menemsha is a section of Chilmark most notable for its charm and vista. Visitors flock to Menemsha because of these qualities and are increasingly doing so. In order to ensure that Menemsha and the Town of Chilmark are ready for the amount of visitors to increase, the Town must take action in these aforementioned areas. The aura of Menemsha should not be changed. It should continue to be a separate, specific entity of Martha's Vineyard that is not similar to any other town or village. That being said, the way in which the Town controls Menemsha should not be similar to the way any other town controls their busiest areas. These additions, corrections, and improvements should not be imposing to the Town or its citizens or visitors. They should simply improve the way the Town polices and monitors Menemsha.

Respectfully submitted,

Kevin Burchill