

Summer Residents Advisory Committee
Position Paper - Fish Pier Parking

In addressing the parking problem at the Fish Pier and adjacent areas, members of the Committee met with the following: Jill Goldsmith, Town Manager; Stuart Smith, Harbor Master; the Wharfinger; Ted Keon, Director of Coastal Resources Costal Areas; and Mark Pawlina, Chief of Police. Everyone with whom we met was most cooperative and helpful in giving us their time.

The parking problem at the fish pier arises out of the fact that there are many different functions performed there: (1) The primary function of the fish pier site is to serve Chatham's commercial fishing fleet. In addition, because of the seals and other interests, the fish pier balcony is a big draw for tourists coming to Chatham. (2) The pier is also a town landing for which 100 permits are available. These include not only commercial fishing, but seal tours, boats to North beach and charter fishing. (3) There is a Coast Guard operation at fish pier but it is off to one side and largely self-contained. (4) There is a seafood store at the fish pier, the Chatham Pier Fish Market, which also sells takeout meals, many of which are consumed at picnic tables in the area. The market has six parking spots on its own property.

Parking for the fish pier is in two areas. The lower area spaces are largely allocated by permit to captains of fishing vessels and others. The upper lot is used by crew members on the fishing vessels and all other visitors. A substantial portion of the lower lot (at least 15 spaces) is on land owned by the Chatham Bars Inn ("CBI") and leased to the Town of Chatham. It has never been used by CBI for parking but in recent negotiations, the lease required the Town to allocate eight designated parking spots in the upper lot to CBI. Presently the jurisdiction to issue tickets for any parking violations at the pier has been granted to the Wharfinger. The Wharfinger also administers the Barcliff Avenue Extension which is a public street.

The substantial increase in visitors to the fish pier has overwhelmed the limited parking area and spilled out onto the streets, with a constant flow of pedestrians through a busy area creating a dangerous traffic problem. At the present time, the overflow from the fish pier results in cars parked along Shore Road at the fish pier and north of the fish pier, and along Barcliff on the north side of the street. In both instances, this parking narrows the street and, particularly on Shore Road, creates a dangerous situation with cars making k-turns, people spilling out of cars and cars parked three quarters of the way up to the yellow line. On Barcliff, the parking originally made the street impassable and the discontinuance of parking on the south side of the street (although occasionally violated) has improved that situation, but has not eliminated the problem. The parking on Shore Road and Barcliff also creates a dangerous intersection where Barcliff crosses Shore Road for cars, bicyclists and pedestrians.

We propose the following steps to address the fish pier parking problem:

Acquire the Lower Parking Lot

1. It is an untenable situation to have the town's management of this important site subject to the demands of CBI. There have been discussions about a land swap or perhaps even condemnation. In any case, we think one of the initial things to be done in resolving the fish pier problem is to put the Town in possession of the entire upper and lower lot. The addition of just the few feet beyond the present chain link fence would add a good number of additional parking spots.

Ascertain the Parking Requirements of Each Business

2. A major problem in the fish pier area has been the long term parking that arises from trips to the North Beach, seal cruises and private charters. We understand that there are only 100 permits allowed for use of the fish pier landing and that this year they have all been taken. We also understand that permittees are not presently required to outline how they will deal with the parking necessary for their customers, as would be required at other town landings. We think the Fish Pier should require such information. Parenthetically, we would note that we have observed small boats picking up and dropping off people at the beach in the Claflin landing area and that the number of parked cars in that area has increased and is snaking up Chatham Bars Avenue and Shore Road. This should be monitored in the future.

Provide Space for Fisherman

3. In the end, the only solution to the fish pier parking is off-site parking or carpooling so that the limited spaces there are not over burdened. Adequate space for the fishermen, would be easier to provide if carpooling were employed. In such case, specific spaces could be allocated to fishermen for high occupancy vehicles. If a solution was reached with CBI, the former CBI spaces could be used.

Provide Short-term Parking for All Visitors

4. To accommodate the large number of visitors who visit the fish pier for a short period with their families, in what has become an important tourist attraction in Chatham, we recommend that parking in the balance of the upper lot be limited to 1 hour in the summer season. That would provide a substantial number of spaces where visitors, particularly with children, could avoid Shore Road and have safe access to the fish pier down the stairs and across the marked pathway, and plenty of time to observe the operation of the pier and the seals and maybe even pickup something for lunch before they left. Chatham Pier Fish Market has six parking spots that should be adequate for take-out service. The permit for that business should require those spaces be used for customers only.

Eliminate Parking on Shore Road and Barcliff

5. Provision of limited parking for the operation of the fish pier will never work as long as people can simply park on the street and walk across. Parking congestion and traffic problems will only get worse unless parking is banned entirely on Shore Road including the area immediately in front of the fish pier, and on Barcliff.

Shuttle for Long-Term Parking

6. The charter and tour operators at the fish pier have a number of options for the use of off-site parking, including creating their own shuttle service by hiring a car and a driver. Since we are primarily talking about July and August, the school parking lots may provide adequate off site parking. There is also a taxi service at Light House Taxi Service in town which we understand will provide a round trip ride to the fish pier for \$10, but pick-up time must be arranged in advance. While a public shuttle is another possibility, at the present time the Monomy Wildlife Preserve van does not have funding for operation of its proposed shuttle. The Town should ascertain in the permitting process the number of people that utilize the fish pier for more lengthy periods, so that the business operators can prepare for next season.

Extend the Shore Road Sidewalks

7. As part of our study in the area, we did observe that pedestrians made good use of the sidewalk on the seaward side of Shore Road in front of portions of CBI. We recommend that sidewalk be extended at least to Chatham Bars Avenue. The best result for pedestrians would be a sidewalk that ran all the way from the light at Old Harbor Road down to Main Street and then connected up to go to the lighthouse and into town.

We recognize that the fish pier is a puzzle with many interlocking pieces. There is a summer parking problem throughout the town and the loss of paved town landing parking over the years has only exacerbated the problem. We think it is a problem that can be solved and we have proposed a solution. We hope this information will prove useful to the Selectmen.

Respectfully submitted,
Summer Residents Advisory Committee
August 30, 2012