

Cross Town Traffic

The argument has gone on for so many decades that it's entered into history. The question of whether Main Street traffic in downtown Hyannis should be one-way or two-way still makes people cross.

At the annual meeting of the Greater Hyannis Civic Association last month, town officials offered an update on the latest plan, which would restore a two-way flow. A request for proposals has just gone out, and it will be about two years before the new plan is implemented fully (read all about it at <https://barnstable.gov/Departments/planninganddevelopment/Projects/Great-Streets-Downtown-Hyannis.asp>).

Back in 1999, David Pratt of *The Barnstable Patriot* asked more than a few local luminaries for their preferences. Tim Way of the late, lamented Way's Center News must have had his tongue somewhere near his cheek when he said, "I've been going back and forth on the issue for the past 10 years" before allowing that he was "about 85 percent 'yes'" on changing to a two-way flow. Felis Barreiro of Alberto's Ristorante was for it, and Bobby Gold of Penguins Seagrill across the street was opposed. Town Engineer Bob Burgmann didn't see "any great advantage" to bidirectional travel. Main Street banker Hank Farnham recalled an earlier seasonal conversion to two-way traffic, which he said slowed things down.

In 1957, the top headline in the *Patriot* announced "Selectmen Approve One-Way Traffic For Hyannis Similar to System Used in '47." The dates were June 1 to Sept. 18. Unlike today's flow, traffic would flow from west to east. The story noted that "a mandate voted at annual town meeting in 1947" prompted the selectmen to employ a one-way system. The following March, voters changed their minds and two-way traffic was restored. By 1954, that system was prompting complaints: "The congestion on Main Street is becoming more acute each day," a *Patriot* editorial grouched. "With cars parked on both sides and two lines of heavy traffic passing each other in the lane thus formed, with cars parking and backing out in the lines of traffic, it is practically impossible to find parking spaces or stop the whole length of Main Street during several hours of the day."

By 1968, one-way traffic was a summer-season phenomenon. The town had delayed the return of two-way traffic to Nov. 4 "because of the extraordinarily beautiful autumn weather that has attracted a record number of visitors."

Regardless of their positions on traffic flow, speakers at June's civic association meeting stressed the importance of getting involved with town government to have a say in such matters. Hyannis Historical Society President John Richmond said he'd found mention of such debates as far back as 1914. He stressed that, as much as the physical heritage of the village has disappeared over the decades, much still survives that is worthy of preservation through community involvement. The society's website (hyannishistoricalsociety.org) hosts a virtual walking tour of the remaining homes and home sites of many of the village's sea captains.

As for the great debate itself, the final word goes to the much-missed *Barnstable Parody*, the *Patriot's* annual April Fools' Day edition. In 2000, it reported that, "Unable to agree on which course would better suit the Hyannis business community, a downtown planning commission has settled the lengthy dispute between advocates of one-way and two-way traffic on Main Street. The solution: get rid of

Main Street altogether. The work began this week. Highway department crews tackled the task of ripping up all pavement on or abutting Main Street from Ocean Street on the east to the rotary near the Melody Tent.”