



CAPE ELIZABETH POLICE DEPARTMENT

Paul W. Fenton
Chief of Police

Brent Sinclair
Captain

August 4, 2020

Town Planner Maureen O'Meara
Attn: Manager Sturgis
CC: Cape Elizabeth Conservation Committee

Re: Cliff House Beach Parking/Overcrowding Issues

Dear Maureen,

At your request, officers from this department covered (10) four hour blocks of focused patrols in the area of Cliff House Beach between July 16th. And July 26th. Officers enforced the current parking regulations, looked for social distancing violations and spoke with residents and visitors alike. At the conclusion of each shift, officers provided a written narrative of their enforcement efforts, observations and interactions. This is a summary of their reports sorted by topic:

Parking

Officers found that there was heavily increased traffic to the area on "nice weather days" and that traffic increased even more on the weekends. Officers did observe many out of state plates that included New York, Florida, Vermont and Pennsylvania. It is unknown if these were tourists, rental cars or individuals visiting people in the neighborhood. On "nice weather days" vehicles were parked in every available spot and some were out on Shore Road. Officers also noted that there were numerous construction vehicles in the area everyday due to the house being under construction at the top of Sea View Ave. All officers expressed concerns that limiting parking would not deter beachgoers and would simply push the parking to other residential areas or Shore Road. The department recently learned this lesson with the limiting of parking at Ft. Williams. We have found that parking is like water in that if you try to block it in one area then it will just end up somewhere else.

It should also be noted that although it appears to be more severe in this area, many local areas are experiencing similar increased parking and numbers of people trying to access beaches. These areas include Casino Beach, Trundy Point, Two Lights, Broad Cove and many others.

Social Distancing

Officers reported that visitors to the beach were making great efforts to socially distance on the stairs and on the beach. The beach population was highest on the warm weather weekends with approximately 85 people on the beach, but on warm weather beach days during the week numbers were limited to about 20-30. On cloudy or poor weather days the crowds were minimal. Residents and Officers both felt the recent signage was helping with people adhering to social distancing rules. It was also reported that approximately 50% of visitors wore masks when accessing the beach area.

Cause of Increase in Number of Visitors

It is clear that diagnosing the cause of the increased activity is key to remedying it. Officers were unable to determine exactly why there was such congestion in the area. Some felt that COVID-19 has limited the number of leisure activities available to both residents and tourists, thus many are choosing to go to the beach due to limited options. Many adults and teenagers are out of work and simply have more leisure time to enjoy the beach. Some residents felt social media and blogs have listed Cliff House as one of the best "secret beaches" in the state and that the secret is now out. Brief conversations with visitors revealed that some were local residents and others stated that they heard about the beach on social media.

Residents' Suggestions

Officers had many positive interactions with local residents, but opinions on how to handle the issue varied greatly. Some felt the access and parking should be limited to local residents only, but others felt this was directly opposed to the current town climate of "inclusiveness". Many stated that members of the community should be sharing our great resources with others and be focus on "breaking down walls and not building them".

Almost all residents appreciated the temporary No Parking signs that were placed on one side of Glen Avenue in response to residents' concerns ambulances or fire trucks could not traverse the roadway. (note: I had CEFD emergency vehicles respond to the area to ensure that they could fit their apparatus through Glen Ave and Sea View Ave. The emergency vehicles were able to make it through, although it was tight). Many residents wanted to make one side of Glen Ave no parking for the summer months, although at least one resident at the other end of Glen expressed concerns the parking would move to his area and that he would no longer be able to park in front of his own home.

Some officers, neighbors and visitors felt bike racks would encourage locals to ride their bikes to the beach rather than drive. At any time, there can be 10-20 bikes laying on the grassy area. Others wanted to make two spots by the beach "Drop off Only" spots, but others feared that would cause even more vehicles to turn around at the end of Sea View Road.

Another suggestion was to make a few angled spots for motorcycles and mopeds that often take up spaces that could be used for larger vehicles.

The officers' observations provide details of the symptoms of the increased volume of visitors at Cliff House Beach, but if we want to solve them I believe we need to find the cause of the increase. It remains unclear if the influx of vehicle and foot traffic is due to the pandemic, the simple fact the area has become more popular or both. I fear if we do not properly identify the cause, we could be creating "permanent solutions to temporary problems".

I also personally spent over 10 hours of time in the area both during the week and on the weekends. If you or any members of the Conservation Committee would like me to share my observations or impressions from numerous conversations with local residents, I will make myself available at any time.

Respectfully submitted,



Paul W. Fenton
Chief of Police





