

To the Editor of the Coaster:

As the Neptune Township Committee prepares to consider permit parking in Ocean Grove, let's be clear on what's under discussion. The Township Committee will consider permit parking on a trial or pilot basis for one side of the street. Permit holders may park anywhere and those without permits would be restricted to one side of a street. For a small administrative fee, permits will be available to all residents, including renters.

Permits will not "fix" Ocean Grove's parking problem, but it will give residents a better chance to find parking near their homes. To critics of permit parking, yes, there will be fewer spaces available to those who visit Ocean Grove. On the other hand, currently during periods of peak parking congestion from Memorial Day to the end of September, there are few empty spaces anywhere in town. And, residents who daily see visitors parking in Ocean Grove and walking to Asbury Park or Bradley Beach should have a better chance of finding a parking spot.

The Ocean Grove Camp Meeting Association opposes parking permits because "the proposed pilot program clashes with our welcoming vision". The current situation, which forces residents and visitors alike to engage in inefficient, time consuming and often futile hunts for parking, is the opposite of "welcoming". Why does the Camp Meeting favors visitors over residents? Does the Camp Meeting have a better idea to improve the parking situation? This is our town and our problem. It is not Asbury Park's problem. It is not Bradley Beach's problem. The Camp Meeting, which controls the largest vacant parcels of land in Ocean Grove has been distinctly unwilling to consider opening even a portion of its land at the North End, and in the South End, adjacent to the tennis courts. Use of even a portion of this land could increase access to parking for residents and visitors alike, and, not incidentally, generate revenue to support the Camp Meeting's mission. When the Camp Meeting identified a need for handicap parking near the Great Auditorium, it did not hesitate to seek a variance to allow parking on a parcel that had been used as a park.

For those who worry that the Neptune police have more important work than enforcing parking regulations, consider that Neptune already hires special officers to address quality of life issues in Ocean Grove in the summer, including parking and security at the Camp Meeting-owned boardwalk and Great Auditorium. Enforcement of permit parking would be a minor addition to the existing workload, and would do much to reduce the increasing incivility generated by arguments over parking spaces, efforts to "reserve" spaces with traffic cones and lawn chairs, and, in a few extreme cases, nails driven into tires.

Neptune Township will present its pilot plan on Monday, November 27, at the workshop meeting at 6:00 p.m. Anyone with an interest in or opinion about parking may address the Township Committee during the comment period of the business meeting that follows the workshop session. The Township Committee meets in the second-floor meeting room of the Municipal Building. Let's give permits a chance. If they don't help ease the parking problems of Ocean Grove residents, we can try something else.

Joyce Klein
Chair, Ocean Grove Home Owners Association Parking Committee