

EDITORIAL

Scenic Roads Ordinance: far-reaching possibilities

A suggestion of Barnstable's Growth Policy Cabinet to introduce a town scenic road ordinance may stir up hornets' nests from Sandwich and Mashpee town lines to the Yarmouth town line and from the shores of Cape Cod Bay to the beaches of Vineyard Sound.

Once the subcommittee receives from the villages a list of streets to be designated as scenic roads, dozens of property owners on each included street will besiege their representatives to reject the proposal when it comes before town meeting next November. "I don't want the Planning Board controlling what I do with trees, fences or stone walls on my own property," will be the cry. "If I want to cut down a tree or move a stone that belongs to me, I want to be free to do so."

By extension, property owners are certain to feel, "If they can tell me what I can't do, like cutting down a tree, next they'll be telling me what I **must** do, like removing trees or shrubs that interfere with 'scenic views!'" And they will have a point.

In spite of that, the scenic roads ordinance has much to be said for it.

There remain, in the Town of Barnstable, numerous roads and streets that offer scenic beauty. Cotuit's Main Street and Ocean View Avenue are good examples; so also are River Road and Main Street in Marstons Mills; South County Road and Main Street in Osterville; Main Streets of Centerville and Barnstable village, Ocean Avenue in Hyannis, and Main Street and Meetinghouse Way in West Barnstable.

These come quickly to mind; others follow about which strong feelings may be expressed. How about Sea View Avenue or East Bay and Eel River Roads in Osterville? Prince Avenue and Cedar Tree Neck Road in the Mills? Mill Way and Commerce Road in Barnstable village? Oak, Willow and Maple Streets in West Barnstable? Old Post Road in Cotuit? Harbor Bluff and Bay Shore Roads in Hyannis? These, too, are scenic. Are we to tell property owners there that the Planning Board decides what trees they can or cannot cut? Or which they must? Are we to tell them whether they may disturb a stone wall or build a fence?

For the public good, implementation of the ordinance would serve well. It would enhance our town were all beauties

visible to everyone. If scenic views now hidden behind hedges, privacy fences and shrubbery were revealed, we could all benefit. Passing motorists could see sparkling ocean when driving on Sea View Avenue, enjoy spotting cool waters of little ponds nestled in woodlands, watch waving grasses on broad marshes stretching to the horizon, appreciate architectural treasures now blocked from sight by landscape plantings designed specifically to hide their charms.

Venerable oaks that cast deep shade where a homeowner wants to locate a vegetable garden could live out their lives instead of falling to the whining power saw. A stand of white pines, towering like walls of a cathedral, could be preserved to throw hushed shadows through peaceful forest glades until nature brought those stately trees to their ultimate end.

Ancient stone walls, constructed in laborious struggle during a long-gone century when a man's only mechanical tool for moving boulders was lever and fulcrum, could continue to snake their raised paths over unmown pastureland.

Beauties such as these need preserving and protecting if they are not all to be destroyed. Views of them should be available to the public. Symbols of the past such as these, of glories too soon forgotten, are disappearing rapidly. Once gone, they will never be found here again. In many ways, Cape Cod is an open museum; open to the wise and the unwise. Its museumlike characteristics are deserving of our care.

Although the Barnstable Growth Policy Cabinet concedes that passage of the proposed ordinance would add greatly to the Planning Board's chores, other questions than enormity of responsibility arise.

Is everyone to be treated the same? What of the fence that Jacky built in Hyannis Port? Does it come down? If not, how can any other be brought down? What of a property owner who is allergic to pine pollen or oak leaves? Must his tree stand? Who decides?

And, finally, will such an ordinance create new opportunity and temptation for favoritism, bribe, or graft among public official and private citizen?

Before we pass ordinances with such far-reaching and unforeseen possibilities, these questions must be faced.