

EDITORIAL

"Signs" of the times: conformity to reduce confusion?

Whispers have reached our ears hinting at the possibility the Town of Barnstable may develop new sign codes. According to a recent article in a local weekly, concern centers around commercial and directional signs described as "visual noise."

While commercial and directional signing along our highways may be helpful to those unfamiliar with traffic patterns and locations of principal commercial sites in Hyannis, haphazard and profuse erection of signs is more confusing to strangers than too few.

Motorists approaching commercial areas in the Town of Barnstable are overwhelmed with signs. No uniformity exists. Signs are on roofs, on posts, above doorways, against building walls, near roadsides and far from curbsides. Some are large; others, small. Wherever a motorist glances, his attention is distracted by dozens of signs.

For a better understanding, bring to mind your own personal experiences driving into an unfamiliar community where signs are placed randomly. Then recall, if possible, visiting an area where signs are restrained. Not only is the latter scene pleasanter, but finding one's way is easier.

While sign-code discussants are exploring the subject, it is hoped highway signs will also be considered. On Route 28,

eastbound, between Barnstable High School and Bearse's Way, a motorist must see, interpret and regulate driving behavior according to 40 highway signs, some of which do not even face on-coming traffic; the person behind the wheel never knows their purpose.

While it is recognized that the bicycle path running parallel to Route 28 along this stretch is a major reason for many of these signs, could not the dozen or more red and white stop signs, which occur wherever a road crosses the bike path and enters the main highway, be stencil-painted on the macadam? This would eliminate visual pollution and the inevitable confusion to which the tourist-motorist, unfamiliar with this particular length of road, is subjected.

Not only would path-surface, painted, stop signs be readily visible to bicyclers and, at the same time, be practically invisible to the motoring public, but the expense of erecting and replacing damaged signs could be saved.

Hyannis... indeed every commercial area of our town... would be more attractive if signs were reduced in size and number. And, if conformity in placement as well as restriction of size were strictly observed, strangers to our lovely land could find signs they are looking for and more easily reach destinations they seek.

Doorway signs, hanging signs on posts, bulletin board signs: all can be tasteful and informative and well-designed. The problem here is as much one of a bewildering muddle as one of lack of discrimination and good taste.

While Carmel, California, is assuredly one of the nation's prettier places, we need not travel or telephone so far for good examples of signing. Visit Essex, Connecticut, where even the Arco station sign was specially designed to conform to the spirit of that village's Early American character.