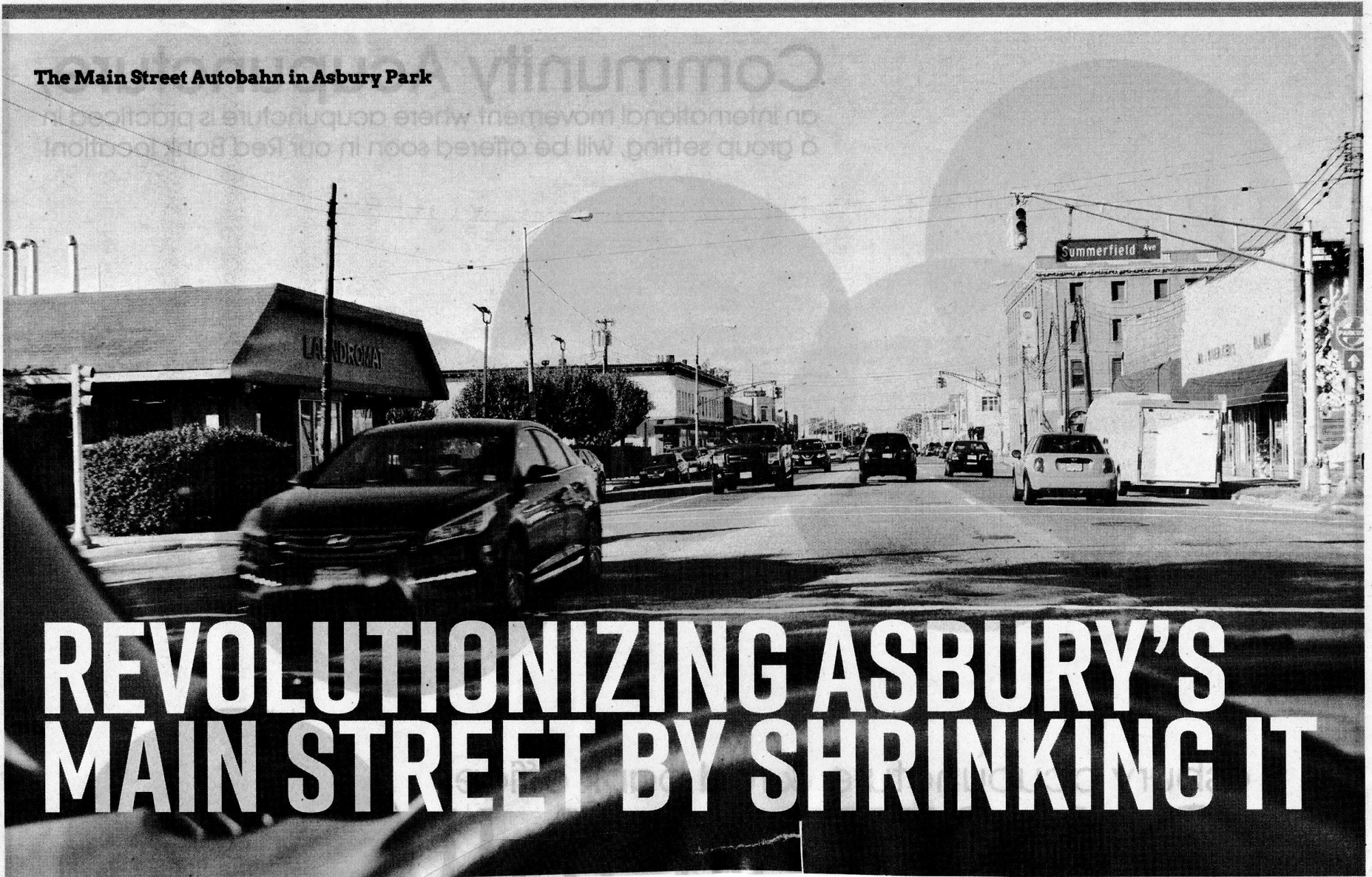


The Main Street Autobahn in Asbury Park

REVOLUTIONIZING ASBURY'S MAIN STREET BY SHRINKING IT



AN ARTERY THAT SHOULD BE A VIBRANT COMMUNITY CROSSROADS

BY DAN JACOBSON
PUBLISHER

ASBURY PARK — Got to admit, when I first heard about it a few years ago I thought it a crazy idea: reducing Main Street in Asbury Park from two lanes in each direction down to one, with a turning lane in the center.

It's called the Main Street Road Diet — a funny name for something revolutionary. It's a traffic-calming measure intended to make Asbury's Main Street into a real Main Street, rather than its current vibe of an expressway slicing through a city and dividing it, like you get in much larger urban areas.

Turns out the Road Diet has the potential to dramatically transform Asbury Park in a great way. And if it doesn't work, well, it's easily reversible. You just put the striping back as it was and resume the four lane highway.

Last week, the City Council unanimously approved a two-year testing period for the Main Street Road Diet. The Department of Transportation has done its studies, and the concerns of the governing body have been addressed. (The Council actually rejected it last year.) It will start after Labor Day.

Is there a risk of traffic tie ups? Of course. But these Road Diets are becoming increasingly popular to make major thoroughfares through

urban areas more pedestrian friendly — which means the traffic is slowed and people driving through will suddenly also sense a lot more of what's going on around them. They may even want to stop for interesting stuff. That's an important point for Main Street, a section of Asbury Park which is rapidly developing in great ways. There will also be a bike lane to increase that mode of transportation. And pedestrians will feel more at home there, which should increase all types of foot traffic.

And as Main Street continues to develop and get more friendly for pedestrians with a Road Diet, this corridor will get interesting and diverse economic development. Main Street is a street that should be bridging the east and west sides. Right now, it really is a barrier, just like one of those expressways built in the 1960s or 70s that split apart sections of large cities. Transformed, Main Street has the potential to become the most vibrant and diverse public place in our city, if not all of Monmouth County. The Road Diet, if it works, will make that happen.

The Road Diet two year test is also a victory for the city's Complete Streets Coalition, a group dedicated to increasing pedestrian and vehicle safety, promoting bike use and generally making our city more livable by improving and unifying our transportation network. Several of the coalition members are licensed planners and others are environmentalists and community activists. Sure, at one point they got a bit too fanatical in their impatience, but the Council proved they were indeed open-minded on the issue and the coalition won out in the

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end. They are an excellent and well-intentioned group, and these are the types of grass roots initiatives that makes ours such an interesting city.

Complete Streets Coalition member Pam Lamberton summed up the Road Diet as well as anyone I've heard in her comments to the City Council last week, as reported by the triCity-affiliated asburyparksun.com.

Lamberton told the council that she knows only a handful of people who don't want to try the idea.

"I get it, they want to get from Allenhurst to Ocean Grove as fast as they possibly can," Lamberton said. "They will love it in the end. We are going to slow traffic down."

Lamberton said the slower pace will give motorists and others the opportunity to discover what currently exists along one of the city's primary thoroughfares.

"People are going to enjoy what is there," she said. "There are businesses, there are restaurants, a coffee shop, [and] a chocolate shop. It's going to be wonderful for the city, it's going to be uniting. It's going to make the east side and the west side more connected. It's not all about the bike lanes as some people may think. It is about safety for everybody who uses that street."

Indeed. This Publisher loves to walk around Deal Lake and we can tell you that trying to cross Main Street near the bridge over the lake where it meets Deal Lake Drive, or at the crosswalk a block up where there's no traffic light, is often absurd. It's a sprint to get across and you better be able to properly time the cars speeding along our own little expressway.

So anyone who walks around any portion of Main Street, and tries to cross it, understands what this is about. And forget about riding your bike there right now. That's suicide. People should feel welcomed on this thoroughfare. Just consider what's going on in the Main Street corridor, especially up in North Asbury: Booskerdoo coffee, Frank's Deli, Medusa Pizza, Juice Basin, Asbury

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Roastery, the breweries, Wildcraft, Chocolate Sage and the new Shoppes at Sunset Point.

Add in beautiful Sunset Park and the quick trip on foot to The Asbury hotel and Main Street should be full of all types of people all the time, all interacting with each other — and all with a sense that this is a street with amenities, offerings and businesses for everyone. People on foot on Main Street should feel that's it's also about them, not just about fast vehicular traffic. It should be a community gathering place. Lots of benefits for the city will come with that.

Pam Lamberton said it best: Main Street should not be about just being able to drive as fast as possible between Allenhurst and Ocean Grove. Because for those of us who live here, in all sections of the city, it should be about so much more.

Hopefully, the Road Diet will make that happen. And, if not, it was well worth trying and you can then put the stripes back and resume the Allenhurst-Ocean Grove raceway.