

She'll have the seaside restaurant with the ocean view

By Esther Baird

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BEVERLY, MASS. -

The thing our family likes best about living in Beverly is our proximity to the ocean. How can it not be the main selling point? We are one of the few towns in the world, relatively speaking, that actually sits directly next to the ocean. The Atlantic Ocean.

Seaside access is no small thing.

When it's not sub-arctic we walk down to Dane street Beach and Independence Park as often as we can. In these economically trying times, we all can be thankful that we have built-in beautiful scenery, ocean scented air, and waterfront parks.

And of course let's not forget dining. There is nothing our family enjoys more than going down to the waterfront restaurants and having a meal overlooking the water. We love watching the boats, sipping some wine (or lemonade for the under five set), listening to the sea birds and maybe even taking a little boat ride around the harbor when the weather is warmer.

Good food, good views, good times. Oh wait. Whoops, that's right. We don't have any waterfront restaurants. And, what's more, we're arguing about building one. We're an oceanfront, New England, town — a tourist jackpot — and what we offer in the way of waterside dining is the snack shack at Lynch Park. To be fair, it's a decent snack shack with juicy hot dogs and big ice cream cones. But what if you aren't a resident? Or, what if, just to go out on a limb here, you want to eat by the water in one of the eight months out of the year when the weather is possibly horrendous? Maybe some people like to nibble on frozen hot dogs sitting next to The Lynch Park Snow Landfill, but our family has bigger dining dreams.

Marblehead, Salem, Gloucester, Rockport, and Newburyport all offer waterfront restaurants despite challenging parking situations and working waterfronts. They attract people, including our family, including reservations for this Friday night, regularly.

It's not like my girls and I haven't tried to be optimistic about the existing pier down at the hotly contested former McDonald's site. I tried to claim the area as a viable family spot. I even dragged my husband down for some family fun.

"Hey, let's walk down on the pier with the girls today."

"Our town has a pier?" my husband replied.

"Oh yes, there's a picnic table and a tuft of grass. The girls can see some fishing boats, check out the lobster traps and look for trolls under the bridge. It will be great!"

Oh, I talked it up. I made our pier sound exciting, educational, and possibly even vibrant. Of course it was just a ruse.

We arrived at the pier, took one harrowing, splinter-inducing, bird-drop avoiding, walk out to the end of the pier with our two girls and realized that we'd not be picnicking on, or near it any time soon.

It feels abandoned and creepy down there.

Maybe that's it. Maybe we're worried that we don't have enough abandoned, creepy buildings in Beverly right now. I can see how that might be a concern for residents. Between the abandoned car dealership by the Pickled Onion, the boarded up Town and Paint, the old Lil' Peach on Essex, the block-sized conglomeration of vacant stores at Elliot and Rantoul and the series of empty, waiting-to-be-leased stores down on the river by Starbucks and Alexander's, it's possible we haven't hit our quota.

But I'm betting Beverly would actually be a better town if we developed one of our empty sites. Sure we're eventually getting a new snazzy drugstore at Elliot and Rantoul, but wouldn't it be great if we developed something that was unique to Beverly's position smack on the ocean? Something, oh say, on the waterfront and visible from our major roadway? Throw in the proposed boat rental store and you've got an actual must-visit site.

Speaking of roadways, I get that some of the concern is about parking. But I don't buy it. I lived one block away from Wrigley Field in Chicago for quite some time. Try that for parking problems. On game day, thousands and thousands of people, most less than sober, tried to park on my street. It required some thoughtful planning on my part and just a dash of, "We are all in this together."

But ultimately, parking problems mean people are actually coming to our town. It means we might be able to use the adjective "vibrant" when describing our waterfront. It means we'd have one less ugly, empty building and it means that year-round dining by the water wouldn't be reserved for other towns.

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