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Residents, cyclists feud over Barrington Hills roads

Barrington Hills one village not so eager to formally mix bikes with cars



Barrington residents say cyclists hog the roads, curse drivers and even urinate in yards. Cyclists using the village's scenic roads say they've been confronted and even run off the road.

George LeClaire | Staff Photographer



Doug T. Graham

Across the suburbs, communities are becoming more friendly to bicyclists by establishing designated bike routes, promoting bicycling safety and adding bike lanes to busy streets.

Then there's Barrington Hills, where residents and cyclists are in a nasty battle over access to the town's scenic, tree-lined roads.

Residents say their roads are being clogged by unlawful, unsafe riders of the "professional biking community, clad in spandex." Bicyclists, they say, flout the rules of the road, block vehicles from passing and, in some cases, have been caught urinating in yards.

Cyclists say Barrington Hills residents have driven them off the road, harassed them and even pelted them with objects as they ride by.

The long-simmering feud came to a head this summer amid talk of adding bike lanes along a village thoroughfare, a proposal quickly shot down by town leaders and upset homeowners.

If there is one thing the two sides have in common, it is an appreciation for the scenery of Barrington Hills. The affluent community of about 4,200 residents features thousands of acres of open space filled with forest preserves, horse farms, riding trails and rolling hills. Homes are built on lots no smaller than 5 acres, and village leaders have fiercely defended the town's borders against encroachment by development that doesn't meet their standards.

"Barrington Hills has character and has always been a place of great enjoyment," said Robert Abboud, the former village president. "It doesn't matter if you're walking, biking, driving your car or riding your horse. It is one of the most beautiful and pristine places certainly in Illinois, and arguably all the Midwest."

Abboud acknowledges that to outsiders it may seem odd that bicycling has become such a big deal. But if residents don't speak out the issue could have a larger impact on the character of the community, he said.

Abboud referred to the character of the village as a fabric made up of many threads. A tear in one thread could unravel them all.

"Biking is an issue because it's a tear in one of those threads," he said.

Bill Gotfryd, a former Barrington Hills resident and the manager of the [Barrington Bicycle Club](http://www.barringtonbikeclub.org/) (<http://www.barringtonbikeclub.org/>), said the underlying problem is that drivers and bicyclists have to get used to sharing the road. While some blame must be put on bicyclists who don't follow the rules of the road, Barrington Hills residents are particularly bad at adapting to the growing number of bicyclists in their community, he said.

As a club leader he hears all the reports from members when they get yelled at, are run off the road or have things thrown at them.

"(Barrington Hills residents) have difficulty coming to grips with that they are no longer a community that exists just in farmland," said Gotfryd, who now lives in Lake Barrington.

"They want to be treated like a gated community without putting any gates up."

Quiet feud gets loud

On July 6, a group called [Don't Change Barrington Hills](http://dontchangebarringtonhills.com/) (<http://dontchangebarringtonhills.com/>) started a website and began offering residents yard signs saying NO BIKE LANES IN BARRINGTON HILLS.

The group was started by Mary Naumann, a resident who declined to be interviewed for this story.

But the group's position on cyclists is laid out on its website, which is hosted on a server owned by Abboud. He said he supports the group's message but is not involved with the website's content.

"We have no obligation to a professional biking community, clad in spandex, who are regularly abusive to our residents and drivers, and urinate on our property," the website reads. "We have no obligation to out-of-town traffic speeding through our community. It is time we stood up and said NO MORE TRAFFIC!"

Although there have been confrontations between residents and cyclists for the past several years, the catalyst for Don't Change Barrington Hills' formation was a public hearing about renovations to Haeger's Bend Road, a two-lane through road on the northwest side of the village, near its border with Algonquin.

Village Administrator Bob Kosin said a recent traffic study found that between 2,500 and 5,000 vehicles travel on the road daily, which he said is a level at which the Illinois Department of Transportation says to start separating traffic by type, such as vehicle, bicycle and pedestrian.

Kosin said the village called the public meeting so officials could hear residents' input and act appropriately.

Numerous residents shared their experiences with cyclists, saying they often rode en masse, blocked roadways and cursed at drivers as they tried to pass in their vehicles. One resident said it had gotten to the point where she dreads sunny weekend days because it

means there would be more groups of cyclists on the roads.

Residents brainstorming ways to enforce the rules of the road on large groups of cyclists suggested -- mostly tongue-in-cheek -- stopping them on the road with a police barricade, herding them into a waiting truck, catching them with a giant net or funneling them into a big, deep hole.

"You are talking about people's backyards and personal spaces," Kosin said. "You are not going to get clinical, unemotional answers from them."

As a result of the input, the village chose not to pursue outside money to renovate Haeger's Bend or add bike lanes.

Only getting worse?

The decision, however, has done little to end the bad feelings between residents and cyclists. Don't Change Barrington Hills urged residents to keep their yard signs up, and cyclists say they still encounter hostility when riding through the village.

Michael McGehee said he rides in Barrington Hills often and has noticed more encounters between residents and bicyclists since the signs went up in July. The Palatine man thinks the signs, which feature a crossed-out bicycle, may be emboldening residents to become more confrontational.

"The next thing you know people begin to think that it's all right to harass or confront bikers because their neighbors are doing it," he said.

Steve Roberts, a Barrington resident who said he rides his bike in Barrington Hills about once a week, said he was confronted recently when he rode up behind two vehicles stopped in the middle of the road, blocking his way.

"The driver asked me if I lived there," Roberts said. "I said 'Yes, I do live in Barrington.' He said, 'Well, I own four houses here and I pay a lot of taxes.' I replied that I didn't (care) how much he paid in taxes, it didn't give him the right to block the road."

McGehee said he has been run off the road while cycling in Barrington Hills three times and confronted by residents on several other occasions.

Among the more memorable was when he and some cycling companions were forced to make an emergency stop when a resident behind the wheel of a golf cart suddenly sped out in front of them and blocked their path.

"The thing is, I don't know why he did it because if I wouldn't have been able to stop in

time, I would have crashed right into him," McGehee said.

"It's getting worse, and I think it's going to continue to get worse until something gets resolved."