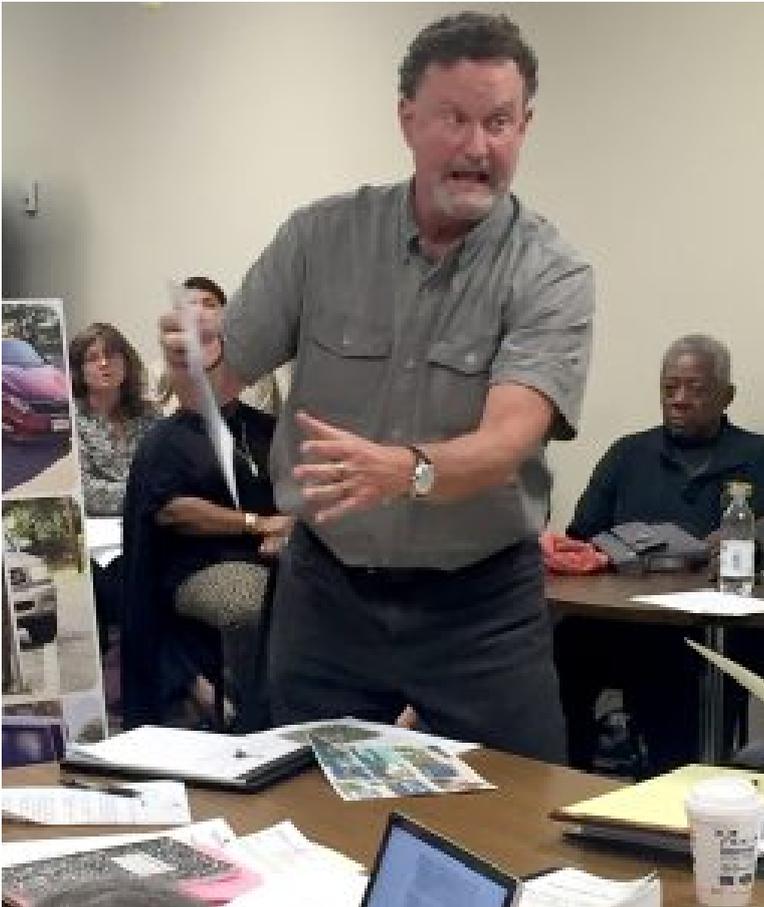


Accident victims, residents plead for 30 mph limit on Grove Street



In harrowing detail, David Peebler described how he was hit by a landscaping vehicle while crossing Grove Street at its intersection with Oxford Street. He was one of many resident who came to the Township Council conference meeting Tuesday night to speak up in favor of lowering the speed limit on Grove. LINDA MOSS/STAFF

By LINDA MOSS

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One man described how he was thrown up in the air and slammed down on the ground. A woman told how her husband's femur bone shot up into his hip, requiring surgery and resulting in his subsequent unemployment and endless medical bills. And a professor recalled how her neighbor and fellow worker at Montclair State University was struck and killed this summer.

Those were just some of the harrowing stories that residents related about pedestrian accidents on Grove Street at Tuesday night's Township Council conference meeting, which lasted almost four hours. A packed audience, more than 50 people and standing room only in a small second-floor conference room, came to offer their input on a proposal to reduce Grove Street's speed limit to 30 mph from 35 mph.

The majority of the roughly two dozen residents who addressed the council wanted the limit lowered. They also offered suggestions such as more lighting along the county thoroughfare, a police crackdown on speeders, installation of flashing-lights at every intersection along Grove, and posting of no-passing signs along the roadway to stop vehicles that dart around cars that have stopped at crosswalks for pedestrians.

Mayor Robert Jackson and council members agreed that a "holistic" approach is needed to address pedestrian-safety issues on Grove Street, that there is not just one solution, and they will be considering a resolution to reduce the speed limit.

"It's all great stuff that came out tonight," Jackson said. "Personally I would support lowering the speed limit on Grove."

The mayor added that that additional police officers are going to be hired and assigned to the traffic bureau.

The parade of residents described their fears – three used the word "terrifying" – about Grove Street, relating how they had

either been struck by vehicles there or had close calls when they or their children were almost hit by cars. The intersection of Grove and Oxford streets was cited as one of the most dangerous along the stretch of road, and it is where two people at the meeting sustained severe injuries in accidents.

Commuter David Peebler, an Oxford Street resident, said that last December he was walking home from the Walnut Street train station and crossing Grove Street when he was hit by a man driving a landscaping truck – despite the fact that the blinking light at the intersection was on.

“I went up in the air and I slammed down to the ground and I snapped my wrist. I ripped ... the entire muscle here just opened up like a book,” Peebler said, pointing to his leg. “And I was in bed for 40 days and 40 nights, proverbially so. Forty-three days before I went to work. So I’m here from experience.”



Erin Krupa, a Montclair State University professor who was a neighbor of a woman struck and killed this summer on Grove Street, was among two dozen people to address the Township Council Tuesday. LINDA MOSS/STAFF

Peebler, and others, told the council that the Oxford-Grove intersection needs a stoplight. He also had a series of photos showing a variety of vehicles, including a UPS truck, parked on Grove near its intersection with Oxford, and blocking the view for drivers.

Amy Revell of Glen Ridge spoke on behalf of her husband Robert Revell, who also attended the meeting and was using a cane. He was also hit at the Grove and Oxford intersection and was sent to St. Joseph's Medical Center.

"He was in traction because he had been hit on his left side,

landed on his right side," Revell told the council. "His femur had gone up and shot up into his hip and pelvic area and shattered the whole hip-pelvic area."

Surgeons took eight hours to reconstruct his hip, Revell said, adding that he was in the hospital for a week and then at a rehab facility. The accident happened five months ago, but Robert Revell is still going to physical therapy and three times a week and has not been able to work.

"We have no income whatsoever," Amy Revell said. "We're living off his 401K at the moment, for the last five months ... The hospital bills are in the hundreds of thousands."

Erin Krupa, an MSU professor, told the council in a slightly choked voice that she had been a neighbor of Mary DeFilippis, who also worked at the college and sustained fatal injuries June 7 while crossing Grove Street at its intersection with Chester Road.

"I'm also a new mom," Krupa said, adding that she was almost struck when she went for a walk with her newborn and they crossed Grove Street.

"Six days of new life flashed before my eyes," she said.

Debra Caplan was among those who said that the township police department isn't enforcing the 35 mph limit on Grove, and added that she was in favor of lowering that limit to 30 mph.

"I think what we're talking about fundamentally is saving lives, and I think that has to be the central thing that we consider here," Caplan said. "And we know that even a 1-mile-per-hour reduction in speed when there's a crash has a really huge impact on how likely the person is to survive. So the difference between 35 and 30 could actually be the difference between someone living or dying in a crash situation."



Alex Kent, chairman of the Montclair Pedestrian Safety Committee, speaks at Tuesday's Council Meeting. LINDA MOSS/STAFF

Alex Kent, the chair of the Montclair Pedestrian Safety Committee, also addressed the council and urged it to pass a resolution reducing Grove's speed limit. She pointed to a study that found that in the first half of the year 21 pedestrians were involved in vehicular accidents in Montclair when they were struck and had to go to the hospital, and that four of them took place on Grove Street, including the DeFilippis fatality.

Some dissenters at the meeting argued that lowering the speed limit on Grove Street was not the answer to making the street safer.

Pat Kenschaft, for example, said that 35 mph is "a very reasonable speed" to travel on Grove. And her husband, Fred

Chichester, said it will be "a struggle" to convince Essex County to sign off on lowering the limit to 30 mph. He said adequate lighting is needed on Grove, as well as education for drivers and commuters, who shouldn't risk crossing in front of a bus at night or cross in the middle of the street rather than use a crosswalk.

Councilman-at-Large Rich McMahon raised questions about whether the proposed resolution solved the issues on Grove. He said that about a dozen of the residents who spoke at the meeting were citing problems when vehicles passed other cars stopped on Grove to let pedestrians cross, endangering those pedestrians.

"The speed limit is not the problem," McMahon said. "It's the people going around on the right of a pedestrian. So it's pedestrian-crossing issue, not a speed issue."

After the public comments on the issue, Jackson said, "I believe at our next meeting there will be a resolution to send to the county to lower the speed limit to 30 mph. The council people will vote as they see fit."