



PUBLIC SAFETY

## Montclair Council Looks to Reduce Speed Limit on County Roads, School Zones

by Sherry Fernandes  
November 17, 2023



Montclair's town council took a step toward making streets safer Monday by voting unanimously to introduce a proposed ordinance that would establish speed limits of 20 miles per hour in school zones on Essex County roadways as well as a resolution to lower overall speed limits in town to 25 miles per hour. This would mean reducing speeds on county roads within Montclair where the speed limit is as high as 35 miles per hour.

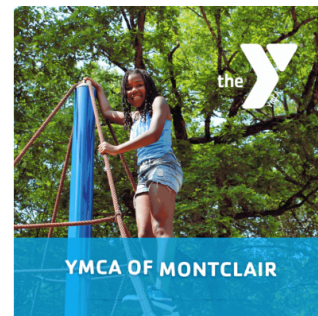
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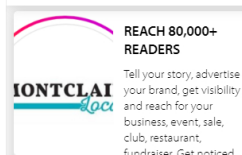
Parts of Upper Mountain Avenue have a 35 mile per hour speed limit.

"On county roads and county roadways the Township does not have the right to dictate what the speeds are. However, in conversations with the county around schools and lowering the speeds, they said they would be amenable to that," said Mayor Sean Spiller of Essex County.

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The discussion among the councilors about speed limits in town raised additional issues to consider. The original ordinance only mentioned four school zones and was not uniform; there was an ask of a change to 20 mph on Elm Street and 25 mph at school zones along Grove Street and Valley Road.

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Councilor Robert Russo and Deputy Mayor Bill Hurlock both called for the ordinance to be amended to 20 mph in all school zones. Hurlock also raised the issue of assessing other possible school zones, mentioning Lacordaire Academy as one example, to make sure all were at 20 miles per hour if they weren't already.

"We need to go out and look around to see where daycare centers are located and potentially include them as well," Councilor David Cummings added.

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Spiller said he was confident that Essex County would act on the council's recommendation, stating they had asked for the request to be put in resolution form.



The speed limit on Upper Mountain Avenue drops to 30 mph at Watchung Avenue.

"There are no street signs," said Councilor Robin Schlager of the absence of posted speed limit signs on Valley Road between Bellaire Drive and Brunswick Road and the need for signage to remind people to slow down.

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Deputy Mayor Bill Hurlock also spoke to the need for enforcement. "There are some great ordinances in the books in this town but they're just not enforced," he added.

Almost all the township roads have been reduced to 25 mph, said Spiller, but he also spoke of the higher speed limits on county roads.

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Sudden changes in the speed limit along the same road may contribute to speeding in Montclair. For instance, Upper Mountain Avenue, cited by a resident as a speedway for commuters, is 35 miles per hour from Claremont Avenue until you reach Watchung Avenue, heading uptown. At Watchung Avenue, the speed limit then drops down to 30 mph.

"It will begin to make a difference when we start slowing people down," said Councilor Lori Price Abrams.

After the council voted to pass the first reading of the amended school zone speed limit ordinance, a resolution introduced by Councilor Robert Russo sought to address the higher speed limits on Upper Mountain and other county roads. The resolution, also passed unanimously, requests that all county roads in the town, not including those that are already 25 mph or below, are changed to 25 mph.

In 2018, Essex County approved a speed limit change on Grove Street, reducing it to 30 miles per hour.

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#### SHERRY FERNANDES

Sherry Fernandes is a reporter for Montclair Local covering stories focused on municipal government and education. She earned her Master of Science in Journalism from the Columbia University – Graduate... [More by Sherry Fernandes](#)

## 6 replies on "Montclair Council Looks to Reduce Speed Limit on County Roads, School Zones"



#### patrickcrosetto

November 18, 2023 at 9:06 pm

Montclair has no ordinance establishing 25mph on local roads. The section of Upper Mountain Avenue referenced is NOT a county road. The town code specifically allows the 35mph/30mph speed limit. The map of county roads is here (<https://www.nj.gov/transportation/refdata/gis/maps/essex.pdf>) – Upper Mountain is not a county road, until Jerome at the north end of town.

Upper Mountain speed limits are set by Montclair Code 327.11. It can be changed by the town council and many council members have known this since March. Montclair Local should do the research and hold the town accountable. And also hold the Police Department for not monitoring the speed anywhere in town.



#### montclairgirl

November 19, 2023 at 7:32 am

The new Montclair is not the old Montclair. Ordinance smodinance. If they tie the hands of the officers on



the road and forbid them from pulling over ANYONE because they do not want to appear to be biased, than we will have a huge traffic debacle on all levels. I think the rumor going around is "do whatever you want" because the white shirts are standing down. How about a little statistical research from 2020 (covid) to present and compare to years before that time period. Unless you are using your vehicle in a crime, you will not be pulled over or ticketed. Just a warning (even if it's for the 10th time!) Sad but true...



**Frank Rubacky**

November 19, 2023 at 12:04 pm

I understand why Vision Zero is set-up as a tactical initiative, not strategic.

Its mandate is to make what we have safer. It will identify solutions to problems...and it will also find justifications for predetermined solutions. The latter I am certain of because of what all readily admit to: a lack of objective, rationalized data.

Its primary working assumption underlying its Zero goal is safety through roadway design. There are certainly myriad opportunities to improve in this regard. We have local control, and have partner-level influence where we share control. Infrastructure improvements are also tangible/measurable; often 'one & dones' off a tack list of fixes.

Conversely, we have very limited input on designing safer types of transport or elevating user proficiency. Drivers get their licenses in their teens and are never vetted again. In NJ, they take their tests as a single vehicle on on a closed course. We can educate users through signage and use the stick of enforcement to modify behavior, but not user capabilities.

All very much tactical tools in our tool box. But, we are not acknowledging how our choices and shifts in the broader society are driving the increasing dangers to pedestrians. And the issue is really about the other transportation modes – pedestrian and bicyclists.

Montclair chose a growth strategy in 2015 to increase the population from 37,000 to 42,000 by 2025 or so. We chose Redevelopment as a 'controlled' way to expedite growth & density. We bought the environmentally approved live/work/play density design. We also chose to pursue a regional center 'work & visitor' attraction strategy. We chose to be where the city meets the suburbs.

Did we think there was not a connection to a jump in all this economic activity, the upward spiral of home values and how it may negatively impact quality of life we were used to...like pedestrians safety? Actually, not totally. The 2015 Land Use & Circulation Element of the Master Plan (LUCE) that required years and years of discussion, was a reimagining of past LUCE by incorporating this Circulation component in its title and body. This was why NJDOT gave us all that money – because of the Circulation planning.

OK, the Circulation Element was a feeble effort with a fairly worthless deliverable. But, the objective was to be a strategic look at managing planned economic & land use growth. Planned being the operative word. We planned this situation. Obviously not well and obviously Vision Zero will not fix the underlying drivers of the increased pedestrian conflicts we perceive. The Safe Streets Plan was to, in part, rectify this planning deficiency. Its sole success to date was to open a dialog. It suffers from a lack of practicality and thoroughness.

Vision Zero's goal is clearly aspirational. Vision Zero makes sense as a multi-modal design framework. It makes sense as a government funding incubator. It may be a viable component as part of an integrated strategic growth plan. But, right now, it is totally disconnected from what Montclair's land use strategies to facilitate economic growth.

As to the tactical solutions:

It is as likely we would see an equal, if not greater benefit if the grant monies we are targeting for redesigning roadways were directed at a coherent, multi-modal enforcement strategy. It would also be implemented faster.

We are primarily focusing on reducing speeds by ticketing. This should be a secondary enforcement strategy. The effort should be to enforcing pedestrian protections. Ticketing those who do not stop for pedestrians in crosswalks. Ticketing those that do not yield for pedestrians at unmarked intersections. And, yes, ticketing bicyclists & pedestrians that flout their obligations to safety. This will reduce the overall speed of traffic and, because the police can continue to patrol and fulfill their other duties in highly congested areas. Putting a speed trap on North Park street doesn't move the safety needle. It might appease a group of constituents or a Ward Councilor.



**getitstraight**

November 19, 2023 at 9:07 pm

Patrick,

How do you know the PD is not enforcing the speed limits?

I watched the last council meeting when a gentleman stated NYC has a 25 mph limit. Great! Move back!

The same progressive NYC people that moved here crying about gentrification are the ones causing it! They are the ones paying the high rents. Yes off topic but very true! Ask any long time resident in any ward!

Montclairgirl,

You are correct! Old Montclair is dead and it's a shame!

Frank,

Yes one of the main culprits of the bicycles riding in the streets is the Bike Bus! Just check out the pic in the monclairlocal posts. And what about your article that you shared about Vision Zero? It does last long. No one can control how people drive!



**getitstraight**

November 19, 2023 at 9:08 pm

Frank,

My mistake riding bicycles in the middle of the street! I've witnessed many time bicyclists riding right through stop signs!



**Frank Rubacky**

November 20, 2023 at 8:53 am

getitstraight,

You do love that Bike Bus photo...and thanks for the example that highlights a very viable strategy: leverage

the design we have.

We are a township of mostly single lanes in each direction. It just one vehicle adheres to the current speed limits, the drivers following have little legal choice but adhere, too. So if this is so widely embraced, we should have no shortage of good citizens who will drive 25 to slow everyone else down.

Same thing for crosswalks. Use them to our advantage as speed control devices. A little healthy trepidation over a very painful potential ticket for failing to yield to pedestrians will work wonders on controlling behavior.

Lastly, leverage social media – and especially the distracted drivers. Maybe that the virtual world complain loudly about Montclair's new reputation for strict enforcement. That we are just doing it to make money off drivers and maybe people should stop patronizing the Montclair BID that seems to be in the lead on Vision Zero. What's is so bad about having a bad reputation for pursuing what everyone says they want? Right, compromise and concessions. Drive as I say, not as I do. The 'good' drivers are not the problem..and let's poll how many people classify themselves as bad drivers.

That vision?

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