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## Montclair Council: Left Turns Into Lackawanna Plaza, 5G Antenna, Watchung School HVAC, Rent Forum

By **Steven Maginnis** - April 24, 2019

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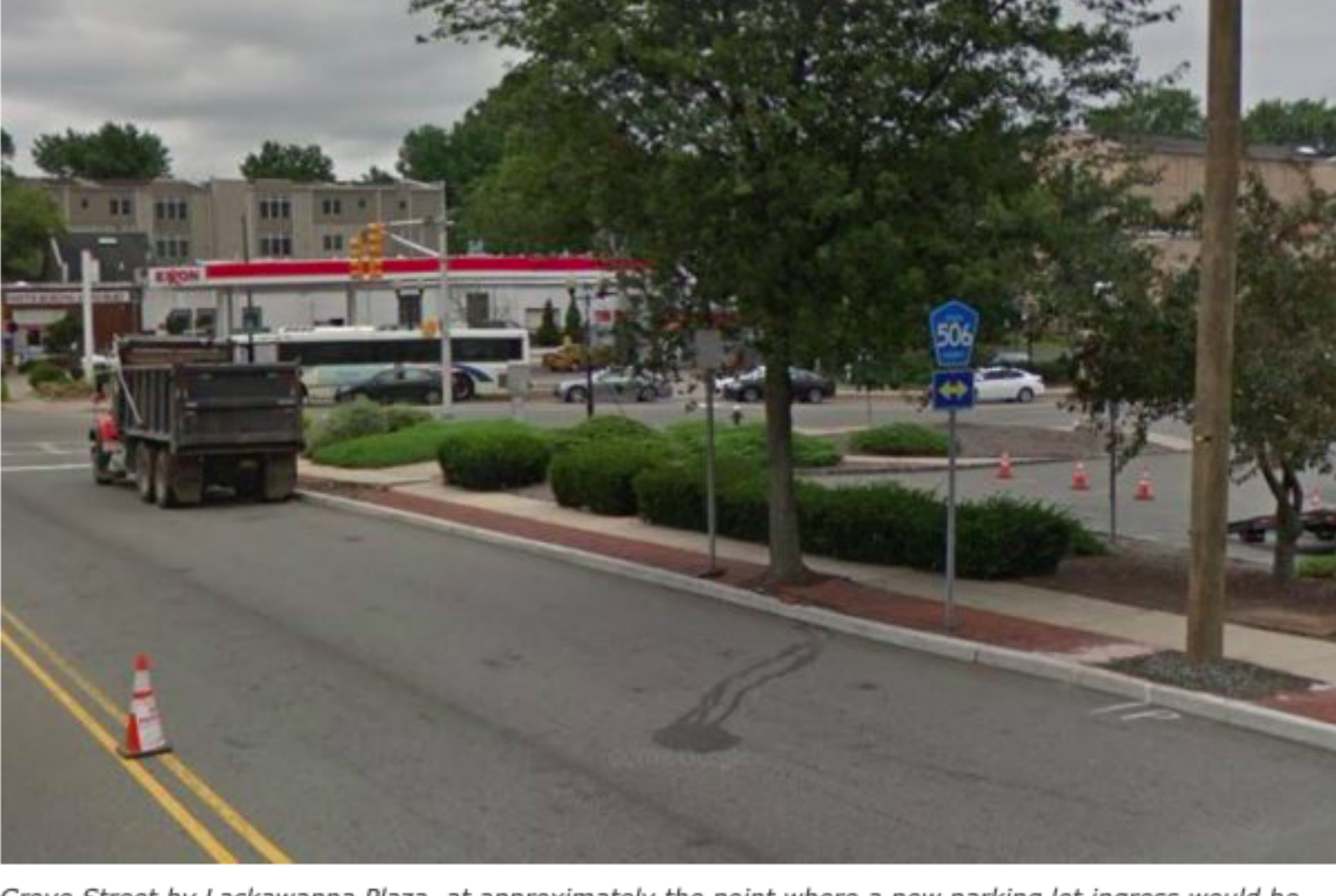
The Montclair Township Council meeting on April 23, run by Third Ward Councilor Sean Spiller in his capacity as deputy mayor, was the setting for an uncharacteristically contentious debate over a second-reading ordinance. Usually, such ordinances are passed unanimously with little comment, and the ordinance that proved the exception concerned regulating turns into the parking lot for the planned supermarket at Lackawanna Plaza, demonstrating the issue's refusal to be settled for good.



the Montclair Township Council, April 23, 2019, Deputy Mayor / Third Ward Councilor Sean Spiller presiding

The ordinance would prohibit left turns from Grove Street into the parking lots into the as-yet non-existent ingress point for the supermarket parking lot in the west parcel of the Lackawanna property. Resident Priscilla Eshelman, a critic of the project who alerted the council to a walking tour of the area at 10 A.M. on April 27 for people to get real-life sense of what the redevelopment plans entail, thanked the council for the action, saying such a prohibition should have been part of the plan long ago. Brian Stolar, whose Pinnacle company is one of the project's developers, spoke against the ordinance. He noted that the Lackawanna Plaza plan provides five access points for pedestrians – Bloomfield Avenue from the east, Bloomfield Avenue from the west, a connecting path between the Pig & Prince restaurant and the future supermarket, the restored staircase along Grove Street, and an access ramp complementing the staircase – that take safety into account. Furthermore, he argued, prohibiting left turns into the west-parcel supermarket parking lot from Grove Street would force traffic to go around the block in order to enter the lot from Grove Street with a right turn and cause too many left-turn attempts into the lot at the existing ingress point on Bloomfield Avenue. A painted median at that point means that left turns from Bloomfield Avenue in to the parking lot are not permitted; the painted median is to be moved to change that condition.

Fourth Ward Councilor Renée Baskerville, however, was having none of Stolar's argument. She said the Pedestrian Safety Committee opposed permitting left turns because it would endanger pedestrians, and she added that if circumstances made it necessary to change the ordinance later, the council could revisit it. She added that an inconvenience to motorists would be "an awful reason" to oppose it. Councilor-at-Large Rich McMahon said the ordinance was premature, preferring a holistic approach, and he said that Lieutenant Stephanie Egnezzo of the Montclair police's traffic unit and Deputy Chief Tracy Frazzano wanted to study the issue further. However, Dr. Baskerville asserted that the police were opposed to left turns into the parking lot from Grove Street, and Acting Township Manager Tim Stafford read an e-mail from Deputy Chief Frazzano (written on behalf of Chief Todd Conforti) from March 23 for the benefit of the council and the audience stating that, while the department would like to see a traffic study for Grove Street, the police do in fact support this ordinance.



Grove Street by Lackawanna Plaza, at approximately the point where a new parking lot ingress would be built, where left turns into which would be prohibited. Image courtesy of Google.

Councilor McMahon attempted to clarify the issue, saying he'd talked to Deputy Chief Frazzano and Lieutenant Egnezzo and they thought they were talking about one entrance into the parking lot as opposed to two, and they re-iterated a traffic study before rendering a final opinion.

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"So my feeling is," said Councilor-at-Large Robert Russo, "it's better to do it and err on the side of safety, do it now, just give the signal, we want safety, and we can always change it if we have to." Deputy Mayor Spiller weighed in, saying that, even with the ordinance, the two resulting ingress points and an extended left turn lane on Bloomfield Avenue allowing access into the parking lot would provide more flexibility for motorists than what currently exists.

Resident Edward Goodell, reading a statement from the absent Cyndi Steiner, executive New Jersey Bike & Walk Coalition, said the group opposes the ordinance, saying that the re-engineering of the streetscape and new traffic-calming infrastructure should go hand in hand with any law that would need to be enforced, saying that an ordinance by itself would not work. The New Jersey Bike & Walk Coalition fears that some motorists would still make illegal left turns and that there would not be enough policing to prevent that and that pedestrians would have a false sense of security. Dr. Baskerville was unmoved by that argument, saying that educating the public against left turns from Grove Street could be just as effective, although she did agree with Councilor Russo that the ordinance could be revisited at a later date if need be.

Mayor Robert Jackson also said the ordinance could be revisited later and so could the New Jersey Bike & Walk Coalition's call for traffic-calming infrastructure for Lackawanna Plaza. Second Ward Councilor Robin Schlager said she wanted more information but would still vote for the ordinance. An attempt to table the ordinance was defeated, 4-3, with Councilor Schlager joining Councilors Hurlock and McMahon in voting for tabling it, and it passed 5-2 with Councilors Hurlock and McMahon in opposition.

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The other big issue talked about at length by the council was brought up in public comment. Residents of Gray Street, who had objected to Verizon placing a 5G cellular antenna on their street, reported that Verizon had tried to replace one pole for the antenna with a taller one and that they had been told Verizon needed an additional permit. Verizon denied that, but upon learning that it did need to go back to the town hall – Deputy Township Manager Brian Scantlebury clarified that Verizon in fact needed an amended permit – the company relented but vowed to move forward on the project. Township Attorney Ira Karasick and Deputy Mayor Spiller said that the township can mitigate the situation with regard to what say it has in the matter, but Karasick conceded that federal regulations give communication companies free reign in doing what they feel is best for their business. The 5G service Verizon is installing produces waves up to 500 to 1,000 feet, Karasick explained, so Verizon will have to have small-cell antennas on existing poles, relatively close to each other, as well as on the proposed Gray Street pole.

Gray Street residents are concerned of harmful 5G waves affecting themselves and their children. If the pole weren't put on Gray Street, Karasick said, it could just as easily be placed on the next street down, which would displease those residents. Councilor Russo urged the Gray Street residents to reach out to the office of U.S. Representative Mikie Sherrill to resolve what is a federal issue; Deputy Manager Scantlebury said that the Building Department will give Gray Street residents a "heads-up" on any future activity from Verizon.

Also, Frederick Street resident David Frey expressed frustration with the HVAC unit being installed at Watchung Elementary School, saying that the noise goes into the midnight hour and that the chain-link fence surrounding it is aesthetically displeasing. Frey said that one of his neighbors had attempted to address his grievance over the HVAC installation to the Board of Education but had not gotten far. Resident Audrey Hawley concurred with Frey that the noise generated by the construction is a quality-of-life violation that should be rectified. Mayor Jackson said he has been in contact with Schools Superintendent Kendra Johnson about the problem and promised to reach out to Board of Education President Laura Hertzog.



Deirdre Malloy of the Montclair Housing Commission

Meanwhile, residents William Scott and Deirdre Malloy, both of the Montclair Housing Commission, thanked Dr. Baskerville for moderating the rent-control forum held on April 11 and the forum's panelists for taking part, saying it was very helpful in addressing and airing concerns about rising rents, as well as providing and receiving information on the issue. The forum will be aired on TV34 on April 25 at 9 A.M., on April 28 at 3 P.M., and on April 29 at 8:30 P.M.

The video of the meeting is here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lijjKENTjyuk>

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