

## NEWPORT

### Bad safety record earns city \$10K grant

'Safe Streets for All' grants go to Newport and Providence because of their high incidences of accidents involving 'vulnerable users.'

**By Sean Flynn**

Staff writer

Newport and Providence have the highest number of crashes between vehicles and pedestrians, bicyclists, wheelchair users, mopeds or other "vulnerable users," according to data presented to the city's Bicycle and Pedestrian Advisory Commission on Tuesday night.

Because of that unenviable status, the city qualified for a \$10,000 federal grant called "Safe Streets for All," administered by the state Department of Health.

The federal grant money is awarded to the two cities in each state that have the worst records when it comes to "vulnerable users" on the roads. Newport had 179 such crashes from 2009 to mid-2014, and four such deaths since 2012, said Bari Freeman, executive director of Bike Newport. The data comes from the state Department of Transportation's "Vulnerable User Crash Data."

"To lose four lives on our roads is a terrifying wake-up call," Freeman said. "Two of these deaths were pedestrians that took place in crosswalks in daylight in clear weather. We must act immediately and dramatically to improve safety for all road users."

Part of the grant will be used to study local ordinances and state laws specifically in connection with pedestrians, bicyclists, pedestrians/motorists and bicyclists/ pedestrians, and the effectiveness of enforcement. Motorists seem to face limited repercussions for violations in some instances, a point that came during discussion among commission members of a recent incident on Ocean Drive involving a motorist and bicyclist that did not result in injury.

The City Council unanimously passed a resolution in February calling on city officials to review pedestrian safety measures, regulations and laws after two pedestrians were killed in crosswalks in the city within one week in January.

**SAFETY A7 'We must act immediately and dramatically to improve safety for all road users.'** BARI FREEMAN

executive director of Bike Newport

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### Safety

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The deaths of Robert E. Silvia, 57, of Newport, who was struck on Jan. 17 while crossing Memorial Boulevard in his wheelchair, and Sharon L. Gerlach, 59, of Middletown, who was struck on Jan. 23 while crossing Bellevue Avenue in front of the International Tennis Hall of Fame, prompted the council action.

Silvia was hit by Matthew McColgan, 32, of Middletown. Gerlach was hit by Craig Madison, 64, of Exeter.

“In both instances, the Newport Police Department decided no criminal charges were warranted,” said Amy Kempe, public information officer for state Attorney General Peter F. Kilmartin. “The cases were referred to our office for a courtesy review and we agreed with their conclusions.”

“The cases went to the attorney general’s office; no criminal offenses were present,” said Newport Police Chief Gary Silva. He said traffic violations against both drivers were brought before the Rhode Island Traffic Tribunal.

McColgan was charged with operating a vehicle without insurance and lost his license for three months and paid a \$500 fine, Silva said. The tribunal dismissed a charge against him of failing to yield to someone in a crosswalk.

Madison pleaded no contest to a charge of failing to yield to a person in a crosswalk and paid a fine of \$85, Silva said.

A local man, Ernest G. Jones, 62, was killed in a hit-and-run accident on Admiral Kalbfus Road on Aug. 2, about 9:30 p.m. after he reportedly stumbled off the sidewalk while walking on it. Jessica Gosdoski, 33, of Oceanside, N.Y., has been charged with leaving the scene of an accident, death resulting.

Elliot Kaminitz, 65, a retired dentist from Middletown, died when a car hit his bicycle on Memorial Boulevard on June 19, 2012. Sara Martineau, 38, of New Bedford, Mass., was driving west on the boulevard when she hit Kaminitz, who was riding on the shoulder of the road, also heading west. She faced no criminal charges. In addition to the advisory commission and Bike Newport, the Newport Police Department is the third partner organization that will cooperate in implementing the grant.

“Our goal with this grant is that everyone entering Newport, and everyone in Newport, will know that we are a city committed inherently and uncompromisingly to safe streets,” Freeman wrote in her grant presentation. “The three partnering organizations are dedicated to doing whatever it takes to improve the safety of our streets for vulnerable road users.”

The most crashes between vehicles and pedestrians and bicyclists in Newport are on seven major roads: Broadway, Thames Street, Memorial Boulevard, Bellevue Avenue, Spring Street, Admiral Kalbfus Road and America’s Cup Avenue.

The planned grant program will foster community discussion, increase awareness of road rules and train police officers on rules and enforcement for all road users. The final overall program still is being developed.

The Police Department is planning to fund a pedestrian flag program at the crosswalk in front of the Tennis Hall of Fame, according to the grant proposal. Pedestrians can carry flags in holders as they cross the road. The outlay for flags, holders and signage would be \$500, and part of the city’s 10 percent match for the grant. Bike Newport would provide the other \$500 through in-kind services, the proposal says.

The Bicycle and Pedestrian Advisory Commission formed a subcommittee Tuesday night to begin reviewing local ordinances and state laws. The commission, made up of volunteers appointed by the City Council, will not receive grant funding.

Part of the commission’s mission is “to review state and local laws and practices and compare them with best practices elsewhere, and to identify and consider the best in safety practices and safety-related materials, such as high-visibility crosswalk paints.”

[Flynn@NewportRI.com](mailto:Flynn@NewportRI.com)

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