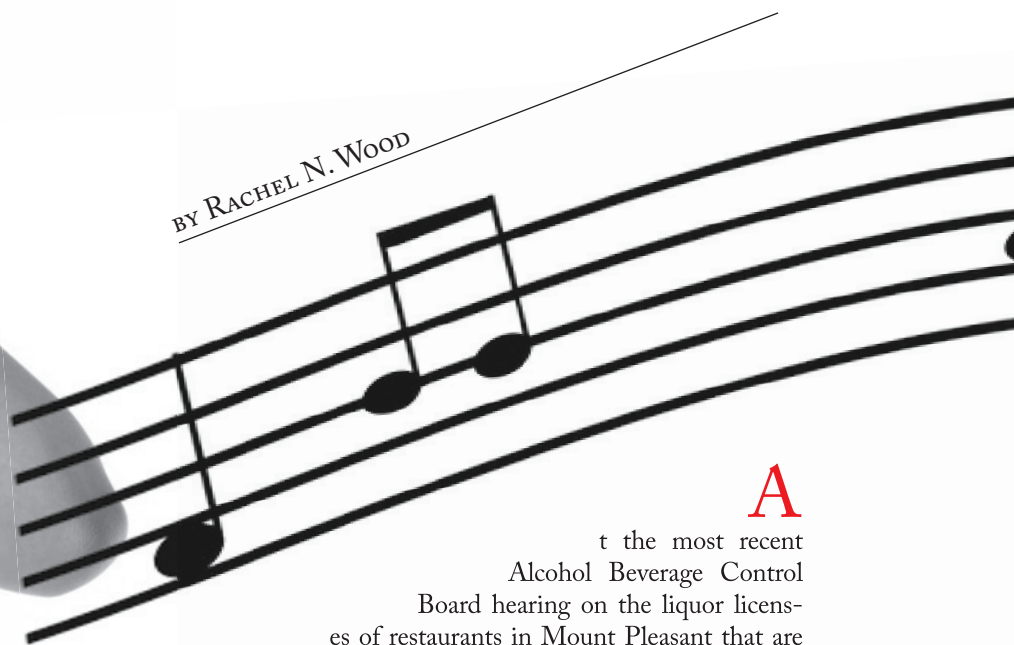


Who **Speaks** for Mount Pleasant?

Two neighborhood groups
grapple over the
live music ban

BY RACHEL N. WOOD



At the most recent Alcohol Beverage Control Board hearing on the liquor licenses of restaurants in Mount Pleasant that are applying for entertainment endorsements, the question of who has a mandate to speak for the community was debated as much as the issue of live music. Hear Mount Pleasant, a relatively new organization, questioned the legitimacy of the Mount Pleasant Neighborhood Alliance, a neighborhood association that drafted agreements banning live music in restaurants and bars years ago.

MPNA has been a major figure of local governance since it was created after the 1991 riot between Hispanic residents and the police. MPNA President Laurie Collins credits the MPNA with transforming the once problem-plagued neighborhood into a peaceful, positive place to live. Collins said the MPNA has a membership of 806 households.

HMP is the group contesting the agreements and the MPNA's authority. They stepped onto the scene last year with petitions and a rally for live music, attended by about 250 people. Instead of negotiating with the MPNA,

they are trying to overturn the voluntary agreements between the MPNA and three local restaurants and replace them with “cooperative agreements” that they have drafted. HMP leader Claudia Schlosberg said her group is more transparent than the MPNA, because they do things such as post their documents online in Spanish and English. Natalie Avery, another HMP leader, said she always meets the same few people representing the MPNA and questions how many other people are really involved.

“It’s not simply about whether there is music or not. It’s the whole approach of how we work together as a community. This regime has got to end,” Schlosberg said, referring to the MPNA.

MPNA’s Collins said that HMP is mainly supported by outsiders who want to change the nightlife of the neighborhood over the protests of the residents. “As far as I’m concerned, Hear Mount Pleasant is seven people, half which don’t even live in our neighborhood,” Collins said.

A history of the conflict

In 1991, a fierce, two-day riot rocked the small Mt. Pleasant community, which had seen an influx of Salvadorans and other Latino immigrants, many fleeing their countries’ civil wars. The riot was sparked by an incident on Cinco de Mayo when a police woman shot a drunken Hispanic reveler while trying to arrest him for disorderly conduct. At that time, crime, drugs, poverty, and public drunkenness were major problems in the neighborhood. At the same time, the neighborhood had a rich cultural life, and mariachi bands would roam the streets and play in restaurants.

Collins describes the race riots as a turning point. The MPNA formed to take on issues of local governance, as well as coordinating community activities. Social welfare organizations such as Neighbors Consejo formed to help locals out of addiction, homelessness, and poverty.

As neighborhood restaurants’ liquor licenses came up for renewal, the MPNA approached them, saying they would protest the renewal of the liquor

licenses if the restaurants did not sign Voluntary Agreements with them. The agreements banned live music, draft beers, cover charges, and drink specials with all of the local restaurants serving alcohol.

Voluntary agreements are common throughout the city. Collins said the agreements banned live music because the restaurants had not applied for entertainment endorsements. “Nobody wanted live music,” she said. She described the process of signing the agreements as ordinary and un-controversial.

But restaurant owners Jaime Carrillo, Haydee Vanegas, and Alberto Ferrufino said they remember it differently. Carrillo, the owner of Don Jaime’s, said he signed the voluntary agreements only because he was afraid of losing his liquor license. “Laurie Collins said she represented the community and I was in no position to fight back,” Carrillo said in an affidavit presented at the hearing. “It was not voluntary,” he said.

Vanegas, who owns Haydee’s, said that when she declined to sign a voluntary agreement, MPNA members complained about her restaurant constantly to the ABC Board. She said that because the enforcement system is complaint driven, inspectors came to follow up on complaints, which left her feeling harassed. She said that after spending a year and \$35,000 in legal fees fighting it, she eventually signed the voluntary agreement, but always wanted live music.

Long-time resident Natalie Avery said she noticed that the mariachi bands eventually stopped playing in neighborhood restaurants, but it was only after she tried to organize cultural events at these restaurants that she found out that live music was banned.

She and other HMP members said that they were furious to learn that an organization acting on the community’s behalf had signed agreements banning live music. She and long-time resident David Bosserman said they do not remember the MPNA ever informing the community that they would be deciding on this issue.

In an affidavit posted on the HMP website, Advisory



Members of Hear Mt. Pleasant gather on Mt. Pleasant Main Street. From left, Eugene Stevanus, Ken Goldstein, Louise Meyer, Dora Johnson, Claudia Schlosberg, Wayne Kahn, Bobbie Stewart, John Stewart. Photos by Rachel N. Wood



The MPNA's most recent meeting, which took place over dinner at Don Jaime's. From bottom right, not including the children, Edwin Langrall, MPNA President Laurie Collins, Treasurer Nick Mattered, ANC Commissioner Dave Bosserman, Board Member Bill Wooge, Board Member Richard McKenney, and MPNA Vice President Marika Tokov.



Neighborhood Commissioner David Bosserman describes joining the MPNA in 2005 with the goal of discussing or changing the VAs, but being frustrated by a lack of communication from the MPNA about when and where meetings were held, and a lack of discussion or votes at meetings. In another affidavit, Elinor Hart said that despite being an MPNA member since 1995, she was never informed of the MPNA's role in forming the VAs, nor does she recall votes or public discussions about the agreements.

Collins said that like other civic associations, members of the MPNA vote on representatives, not issues. She said that MPNA sometimes advertises their meetings in the Northwest Current, and sometimes by flyers.

Schlosberg said that since HMP formed last year, the MPNA has been more transparent and has done a better job of advertising meetings.

The Issue of Live Music

"No one is against live music," Collins said.

She said that instead of bringing the issue before the ABC board, Vanegas, Carrillo, and Ferrufino could have negotiated with the MPNA. Last year, Tonic and Marx café approached the MPNA requesting live music, and the MPNA revised their voluntary agreements to allow live music on limited, pre-approved dates.

She said she visited the restaurants to ask what they wanted to change, but Don Jaime's and Haydee's would not tell her what they wanted, and instead surprised her and the rest of the MPNA by announcing they wanted to termi-

nate their agreement.

But in 1996 Don Juan Cafe, owned by Ferrufino, installed a karaoke machine, and was protested by the MPNA, which argued that it was live music.

Avery and Schlosberg said the restrictions are not equally enforced. Schlosberg said that Don Jaime's, Haydee's, and Don Juan's are watched closely for any infraction and their agreements are enforced more stringently than other restaurants, such as Tonic or Marx. She said she remembers Collins promoting an event at Tonic which gave away wine, despite it being against the agreement.

Don Juan owner Alberto Ferrufino said he feels racially discriminated against. He motioned to a salt and pepper shaker side by side on the tablecloth of his restaurant. "Why can this guy have live music?" he asked, pointing to the salt shaker, "and this guy can't?"

pointing to the pepper shaker.

"They have only used the race card to get attention. We have never had the racial discriminatory tension in our neighborhood. Their tactics have divided our community," Collins said.

"Their agenda is solely to get music to Mt. Pleasant. It's all driven by musicians and music promoters and the like," said MPNA Vice-President Marika Tokov, referring to Rick Massumi and Wayne Kahn, two community members involved in the push for live music. Massumi worked with the D.C. Nightlife Coalition and Kahn has a music label called "Right On Rhythm."

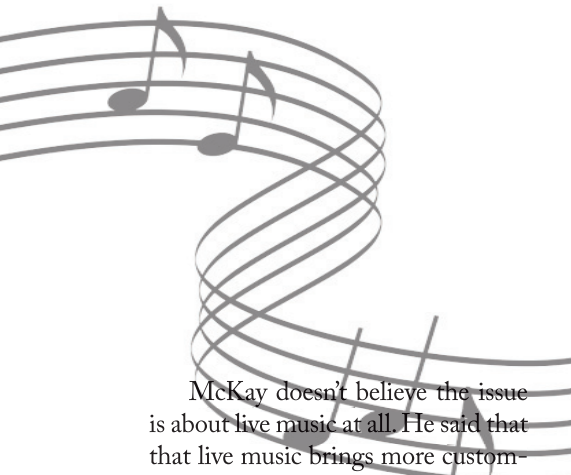
Kahn's wife Claudia Schlosberg said that charges of conflict of interest "border on the ridiculous". "Usually you end up losing money. He's done it out of a love of music and a sense that music needs to be preserved," she said of her husband's small music label, which has recorded a handful of musicians.

Jack McKay, an ANC 1D commissioner, has lived in Mt. Pleasant for 34 years. He said the conflict has developed because the neighborhood houses diverse demographics with distinct views of what Mt. Pleasant should be. "There are those who believe it should be a quiet 'bedroom suburb,' and there are those who want a vibrant inner city neighborhood."

He said that those who want the 'quiet bedroom suburb' are often homeowners, who want their neighborhood to be similar to Cleveland Park. He said that the other group is made up renters, many of them younger, who want to have the "full urban lifestyle on their doorstep."



Don Jaime's owner Jaime Carrillo in his restaurant on a Thursday morning. Carrillo wants to sign a new agreement with Hear Mt. Pleasant allowing live music, and terminate his earlier agreement with Mt. Pleasant Neighborhood Alliance.



McKay doesn't believe the issue is about live music at all. He said that that live music brings more customers to the restaurants, and that's what the MPNA is fighting against, because they want a quieter, more suburban neighborhood.

At the most recent hearing in front of the ABC Board, witnesses for the MPNA brought up concerns over loud customers leaving late at night, increased public drunkenness, increased traffic, and noise escaping from the restaurants. They questioned whether those protesting music restrictions had factored-in the parking issues and additional police presence that increased nightlife would require.

HMP members said concerns over large crowds were unfounded. "No one wants this neighborhood to turn into another Adam's Morgan," Avery said.

HMP drafted an alternative agreement that would allow live music until midnight on weeknights and 1:30 am on Friday and Saturday night. In response, the MPNA proposed a revision to the old agreement allowing live music until 10pm Tuesday through Thursday and midnight on Friday and Saturday.

Either way, there will be music. The specifics of when and where are in the hands of the ABC Board, which is expected to decide on Don Jaime's and Haydee's applications within the next month. The question is whether the ABC board will revise the old agreements, or terminate them in favor of the new, HMP-drafted agreements.

Their decision will either be a vote of confidence for the MPNA, or a subtle endorsement of HMP as the new voice of the neighborhood.

Whatever the board decides, the debate over who gets to say "we represent the community" will surely continue. ■

The Greater Washington Urban League presents its Third Annual City-Wide Housing Fair

co-sponsored by the Honorable Marion Barry

Sub-Prime Survival:

Home Ownership Through the Housing Crisis
Attend our Free One-Day Housing Fair



First-Time Homebuyers:

Learn why now is the perfect time to purchase a home.

We'll show you how to:

- Qualify for up to \$77,000 for your down payment and closing costs
- Find a home in the District you can afford
- Work with realtors and lenders! Many lenders and realtors will be on-site.

Existing Homeowners:

Discover strategies to keep your home during the sub-prime mortgage fallout.

You'll learn:

- What to do if you fall behind in your mortgage, and how to better understand your mortgage terms
- How to keep ahead of adjusting interest rates
- How to qualify for government programs to keep you out of foreclosure
- How to refinance wisely

Saturday
April 12, 2008
9:00am—2:00pm

THEARC

1901 Mississippi Ave., SE
Washington, DC 20020

For more information visit
www.gwul.org



Greater Washington
Urban League



Official Media Sponsor

The Home Purchase Assistance Program is funded by the D.C. Department of Housing and Community Development
Adrian M. Fenty, Mayor Leila F. Edmonds, Director