

Jack's April report

Due to the Covid-19 state of emergency, there was no meeting of ANC1D in March.

The **state of emergency declaration**, issued on March 11 and renewed through May 15, has, as everyone well knows, made a total mess of our lives. Schools are closed, most businesses are closed, and we residents are required to “stay at home” except to “engage in essential activities”. As I write this, it's been six weeks for this shutdown, and there's no end in sight.

The first state of emergency declaration came just as I was about to print and distribute my March 16 newsletter. Under the circumstances, I decided against my normal practice of hand-delivering my newsletter to residents – 720 copies, lots of walking – and instead published it as an internet-only newsletter.

I haven't done that before, because I know an internet-only publication will be missed by many residents. You can hardly miss a single-sheet newsletter left at your door. But many residents, busy with their daily lives, won't think to go to my website and download the newsletter. And some residents – not so many, these days – don't have ready internet access.

But in this “stay at home” situation, that newsletter, and this one, will have to be internet-only. I can't claim that delivering my newsletter is an “essential” activity. Furthermore, being well over 70, I mustn't risk contracting the infection myself. I shake off ordinary colds and things without much difficulty, but this Corvid-19 virus is not to be taken so lightly.

So this April newsletter will be available only on the internet, posted on my personal website (not the ANC website), and linked to from NextDoor.com. That's likely to continue to be the system, as long as we're afflicted by this plague.

There will be an **April ANC meeting**, on the evening of the 28th. This will not be the normal in-person meeting at the Library, but will be “virtual”, held via Zoom technology, with each of us commissioners calling in from home. The meeting must be public, of course, and arrangements will be made for residents to access the meeting via Zoom.

The internet, once a playground for techies, has become an indispensable utility for everybody. Some residents, I know, don't have internet access at home. I hope this will be the only ANC1D meeting that has to be done this way, but I'm not optimistic about that.

Directions for observation and participation in this Zoom-based meeting will be found on [the ANC1D website](#). No purchase of software is needed.

How long will this coronavirus emergency go on? Everyone wants to know, but it's not yet possible to say. The DC state of emergency continues to May 15, and I expect it to be renewed at that time. The IHME model for the progress of the Covid-19 virus currently yields June 4 as an estimated date on which the most stringent “social distancing” measures might safely be lifted. But that hinges on the effectiveness of those measures currently in force.

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The Federal Government has published a recommended series of steps for exiting the emergency. The first criterion for the lockdown exiting procedure is that there be a “Downward trajectory of documented cases within a 14-day period”. I have been carefully plotting the daily numbers for DC (see below), hoping to see such a decline. As of this writing, it's just not there.

Even if we achieve that result, the Phase I step of the proposed Federal procedure is far from a complete lifting of the social distancing restrictions. Schools would remain closed, and members of especially vulnerable populations, such as senior citizens, would have to remain in isolation. But some people could return to work, and perhaps the end of this nightmare would finally be in sight.

Right now, DC can't even meet that first criterion.

Of course, other things are going along, though much more slowly than before this pandemic hit. There's **the little park at 19th and Lamont**, and the current plans to upgrade it to something better than the current barren clay. The most immediate need for the lot is control of erosion, which has become truly terrible, deep ruts cut into the clay by runoff.

Progress on the improvements of the lot has been extremely slow. A contract has been let, to Jordan Honeyman, a DC landscape architecture firm, for design development and construction drawings. Actually implementing the developed design, whatever that might turn out to be, is a separate matter.

Daily CV-positive count, DC
3-day averages, through April 26



This is a 3-day running average of the daily count of positive coronavirus infection tests. There must be a sustained decrease in these numbers for the lockdown of the District to be relaxed.

Lately there have been surveyors on the lot, determining its precise boundaries, and locating underground utility lines. There is to be a “community meeting”, perhaps at the end of May. It seems likely that this meeting will, like our ANC meeting, have to be “virtual”, held via the internet.

The fundamental problem of the park is its steep slope (the reason that Lamont Street stops at that point). This leads to dreadful erosion, and complicates any effort to provide handicapped access and a safe play area.

It seems to me that there's a basic conflict between nice landscaping and running dogs. The lot is a favorite place for dog exercise, which is fun to watch, but murder on any vegetation planted on that slope.

The District Government is facing a very large budget deficit, due to the coronavirus emergency. It will surely be necessary for the Mayor to look around for costs that could be cut to make up for the losses due to the emergency. This little project, budgeted at \$1.5 million, would be an inviting target.

The **primary election** in DC will be held on June 2. Because of the Covid-19 lockdown and “social distancing” requirements, the usual procedure of showing up at the polls to vote in person is not recommended.

No justification is needed to obtain an absentee ballot, and the Board of Elections is asking residents to do just that: *“In light of the spread of COVID-19, the Board encourages ALL residents to request an absentee (mail-in) ballot for the June Primary & Special Elections. Applications for absentee ballot requests can be obtained by calling (202) 741-5283, faxing, or emailing the Board, or they can be made online by proceeding to our main website.”* In short, “vote by mail” is becoming the rule.

There's a narrow spit of land defined by **the intersection of 17th Street and Oakwood Terrace**. It's a steep slope, and has never been built on, presumably because of the terrain, and the narrow width and peculiar shape of the lot.

A concept for building on that lot was brought up ten years ago. No zoning matters prevent development, but of course there's always historic preservation, and this was first scheduled for an HPRB (Historic Preservation Review Board) hearing in December, 2010. The ANC did not take a position on the project, as we were inclined, at that time, to leave such matters to Historic Mount Pleasant. The HPRB approved “the conceptual site plan, height and massing of the three rowhouses and retaining wall, with suggestions for minor revisions as the plan is further developed”.

Ordinarily that would end matters, and the developer would, after coming to some agreement with Historic Preservation Office staff, proceed to construction. That did not happen, and in 2013 the application reappeared, seeking a renewal of the 2010 approval. During these three years neighborhood opposition to the project had grown, many nearby neighbors complaining that they had not had an opportunity to be heard before that 2010 decision. Considerable effort was made to allow for public comment on the project, at the ANC, and at the HPRB.

In October, 2013, the HPRB again “approved the design development of the concept and delegated further review to the staff”, with a number of conditions. A year later, in November, 2014, the developer brought a revised concept to the HPRB for review. The HPRB “supported roughly the dimensions of the building, . . . requested further revision to establish proportions, rhythm, massing and materials of the building and proportions and rhythm of fenestration more compatible with the character of the historic district”.

Years passed, with nothing built. In May, 2019, a new concept appeared, now a pair of “flats” (a “flat”, in District terminology, is a two-dwelling-unit house, such as our row houses with basement apartments). I don't believe that concept ever went before the HPRB. This concept has been brought up again, and I expect that to be on the HPRB agenda in May. If it does, it will be on the ANC1D agenda for our May 26 meeting.

In March I noted that there's a revised proposal for **3215 Mount Pleasant Street**, building a three-story residential structure on top of what is now a laundromat. The developers had first proposed a modern design, counting on the notion that being plainly modern, and not attempting to replicate a century-old structure, would be acceptable. Evidently they thought better of that, and returned with something that looks like it could have been built in 1906, when the building housing the laundromat was built.

The HPO staff report “recommends that the Board support the concept”, with some revisions. I believe that project will receive HPRB approval.

I think this will be beneficial to the neighborhood, providing enhanced retail space and adding to the supply of residential housing, including two “affordable” apartments. It's not beautiful, but it is “compatible” with the historic standards of Mount Pleasant. And that's all that counts. The historic preservation law demands that alterations, and new structures, be “compatible with the character of the historic district”. That's all that is necessary for the design to receive HPRB and HPO approval. There is no place in the law for “it's compatible, but we want something better”. If it's compatible, then it must, by law, be approved.

Some residents have complained that this new building will hide, forever, the Heller's Bakery sign on the wall of that adjacent building. The HPO staff report declares the sign “of dubious integrity”, and hence not warranting preservation.

The Mount Pleasant Village organization, with some support from the ANC, has mustered a marvelous **Mount Pleasant Neighbors Helping Neighbors** effort, organizing volunteers to provide assistance to residents unable to leave their homes during this coronavirus emergency.

There was clearly a great need for this service. Bread for the City listed the ANC phone number as contact for this effort. The ANC phone number is my home phone, and I took about a million phone calls from residents seeking assistance.

The May meeting of the ANC will take place at 7 pm May 26. It will likely be, like the April meeting, a “virtual” meeting, accessible only via the internet.