

Jack's April report

At the November ANCID business meeting, the ANC did the following:

- Considered, then tabled for later review, a request for a traffic safety study of 17th Street, from Park Road to Piney Branch Parkway;
- Advised the Mayor's Agent to approve a proposal for the removal of some of the decorative balconies on the Kenesaw/Renaissance building, at 3060 16th Street;
- Requested a traffic safety study for the intersection of Lanier Place and Harvard Street.

At the December business meeting, the ANC

- Requested DDOT to provide "Safety and accessibility improvements to 17th Street";
- Advised DDOT "to permit left turns from northbound 16th Street NW to westbound Park Road, prohibiting that turn only when the bus-only lane on 16th Street is in effect".

At the January meeting, the ANC:

- Elected officers for 2022: Matthew as Chair, Robin as Treasurer and Vice Chair, Jack as Secretary;
- Set the calendar of monthly meetings – usually, the Tuesday preceding the fourth Thursday.

At the February meeting, the ANC:

- Advised the BZA to approve an application for a variance and special exceptions at 1656 Hobart Street.

At the March meeting, the ANC:

- Advised ABRA to approve the renewal of the Class C Restaurant liquor license for the Don Juan Restaurant.

As is evident from the above, I've been **neglecting these monthly newsletters**. My principal purpose with these newsletters has been to tell Mount Pleasant residents (those within my single-member district, anyway) what their ANC was doing. Lately, that hasn't been a lot, as the report above shows. And there was the Covid-19 pandemic, and, beginning in November, the cold weather, coaxing me to refrain from the door-to-door delivery that I've been doing now for 20 years. (Yes, I deliver these newsletters myself, all but a handful of the 720 copies.)

But people did miss the newsletters, and now it's spring, so it's time for me to resume this service. The weather is decent, and I can use the exercise. (As of this month, I'm an octogenarian.)

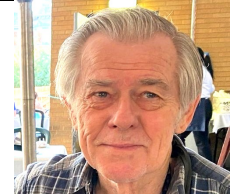
In December the ANC (my resolution) called for DDOT to **resume permitting left turns directly off northbound 16th Street onto Park Road**. The bus-only lanes had caused DDOT to prohibit that turn, at all hours and all days, even though the bus-only lane on northbound 16th will be in effect only during the evening rush hour, and only on weekdays.

That was months ago, and DDOT lately contacted me to assure me that they were working on a response. I reminded DDOT that not only was the Mount Pleasant ANC calling for a renewal of permission for the left turn, but the Columbia Heights ANC had objected to the new policy of directing left-turn traffic to Pine Street, in front of the Shrine of the Sacred Heart. That was the roundabout left turn that used to be the

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only allowed means of making the left turn, and which we had managed to terminate in 2010, a dozen years ago. Several traffic studies had concluded that that was an awful way to make the left turn, because that portion of Park Road was already heavily congested, and the Park Road/16th Street intersection was already rated severely deficient. Forcing the left-turn traffic into that stream made no sense from a traffic flow point of view, and it's preferable to have that area in front of the church available for safe pedestrian activity, such as the weekend sidewalk mercado there, and the many schoolchildren walking to the playground adjacent to the church.

So, what is DDOT going to do? I understand that they worry about pedestrians crossing Park Road while cars are permitted the left turn off 16th. That's what must be weighed against the numerous liabilities of directing that traffic to the plaza in front of the church.

At the November meeting, this ANC called for the Historic Preservation Office to **approve the removal of some of the decorative balconies on the Kenesaw/Renaissance Building** at 3060 16th Street. The Historic Preservation Review Board (HPRB) rejected that application, despite our advice, as we had expected. (Governed by the District's strict historic preservation law, the HPRB had no choice.) So the request went to the Mayor's Agent, which held a hearing on the topic in February. ANCID Commissioner Chelsea Allinger testified eloquently on the importance of affordable, immigrant-friendly housing in Mount Pleasant, certainly more important to us than some purely decorative balconies mounted in out-of-sight locations. Which is more important, architectural decorations or diversity of Mount Pleasant residents?

As of early April, we await a decision from the Mayor's Agent. I am not optimistic.

The **Harvard Street gate to the National Zoo** has been closed to traffic since early in the covid pandemic. This is an inconvenience to Mount Pleasant residents accustomed to using that gate for access to Beach Drive. (The Zoo does not much like being a through traffic route.) I asked Delegate Eleanor Holmes Norton to investigate this situation and find out if that gate can be opened to traffic.

The reply, from the National Zoo, February 8: ". . . *it is the Zoo's gate, as the roads and access points on the Zoo's grounds are operated and maintained independently by the Zoo. The closure is related to parking management procedures implemented since reopening. It has made a marked improvement in park operations and the resulting*

congestion in the neighborhoods bordering the zoo. Currently, there is not a plan to change the parking operations and gate controls”.

Well, I don't know about the gate closure reducing “congestion in the neighborhoods bordering the Zoo”, but the sense of this reply is that the National Zoo doesn't give a hang about resident access to Beach Drive through the Zoo. The gate will stay closed to through traffic, while drivers going to Beach Drive will instead have to get there via Adams Mill and Klingle Road, or Adams Mill Road to Calvert Street. Yes, this is permanent.

This has always been National Zoo policy: their “customers” are people from across the country visiting the Zoo, not us nearby residents, and so we count for little. And, because this is a Federal Government operation, the Zoo is free to ignore DC Councilmembers, and, of course, this ANC.

Redistricting, to adjust for the population changes noted in the 2020 census, has come to the ANC. Does this matter to residents of Mount Pleasant? I think it does.

Recall what it is that an ANC does. The ANC's function is essentially reactive: when a DC agency intends to take an action affecting a neighborhood, it is required to notify that neighborhood's ANC, and give that ANC 30 days in which to respond to the proposed action. The ANC can say yes, go ahead; or it can say yes, but with some changes; or it can say no, please don't do that.

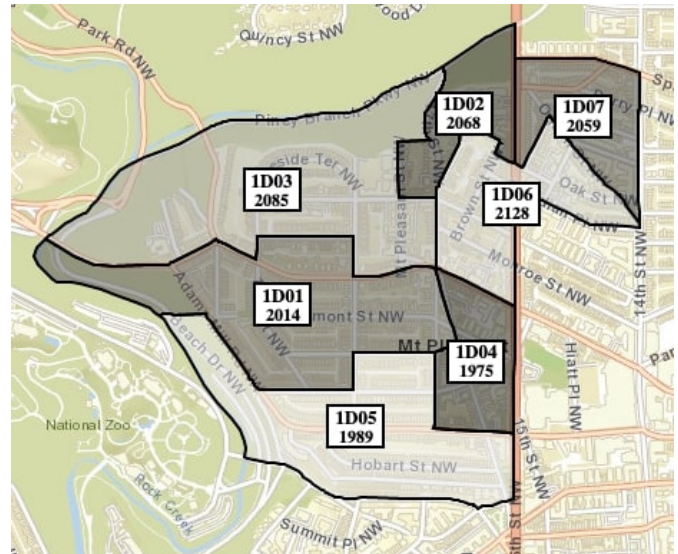
An example is the BZA filing for 1656 Hobart, where the homeowner wants to put a deck over the back-yard parking pad, abutting the alley. This seemed quite reasonable to the ANC, which advised approval of the lot coverage variance and zoning special exceptions required. Indeed, on March 16 the BZA approved the request, as the ANC had advised.

Had we thought that the request was not reasonable, and unduly affected the neighbors, we could have advised rejection of the request, and the BZA would have very likely followed our advice. The ANC's ability to block things exceeds its ability to permit them. That's why it matters who sits on the ANC making these judgments.

This is what I have seen as a principal benefit to the public of the ANC: assisting residents in getting permits to do what they need to have done at their homes. This means that the ANC tends to spend a lot of time on row-house homeowner issues. But it pertains also to larger buildings, such as the current Kenesaw/Renaissance balcony request. Again, with ANC support, permit approval is still far from assured. But an ANC disapproval is commonly fatal to such requests.

Now, about redistricting – the Ward One Redistricting Task Force, under the guidance of Councilmember Brienne Nadeau, has delivered its report to the District Council, recommending substantial changes to the Ward One ANC boundaries, including that of 1D, Mount Pleasant.

For the 40 years that our ANCs have been in existence, the Mount Pleasant ANC has had borders matching the traditional perception of the neighborhood: 16th Street to the east, Harvard Street to the south, Rock Creek Park to the west and the north. But on April 4 this Task Force recommended a



substantial change to this ANC's borders, adding a “wing” (1D07 on the map) extending this ANC into Columbia Heights, to 14th Street.

I have to ask – is this what the residents of that part of Columbia Heights want? Are they unhappy with being a part of the Columbia Heights ANC? Do they want residents of Mount Pleasant, who will predominate on the Mount Pleasant ANC, to be making decisions affecting their neighborhood?

I'm skeptical. I think this is motivated by the Councilmember, who argues that 16th Street is not, today, the hard barrier between the two neighborhoods that it once was. Yes, but have the two neighborhoods blended into one? Will ANC decisions made by and for Mount Pleasant proper be best for this segment of Columbia Heights?

This deep extension into Columbia Heights, all the way to 14th Street, will be very troublesome for the Mount Pleasant ANC. It's remote from most of Mount Pleasant, and only a couple of the 1D commissioners will be at all familiar with that portion of 14th Street. Yet we'll be judging matters, such as liquor licenses, in that area.

What is wrong with this area of Columbia Heights having its ANC commissioner on the Columbia Heights ANC? The background of this is the theory held by Councilmember Nadeau that ANCs should have at least seven commissioners. So this redistricting of a portion of Columbia Heights into Mount Pleasant is mainly to add one more member to the six-commissioner Mount Pleasant ANC.

In my opinion, this excision of a portion of Columbia Heights, and its grafting onto Mount Pleasant, will serve no one well – not the residents of Mount Pleasant, nor the residents of that Columbia Heights “wing” forced to have their ANC vote on the Mount Pleasant ANC.

The April meeting of the ANC will take place at 7 pm, April 26. Due to the pandemic, it will have to be a “virtual” meeting, accessible only via the internet, using Zoom software. See the ANC1D website, anc1d.org, for details.