Jack's April report

At the March 18 meeting, the ANC:

* Advised DDOT to choose Alternative 4 for the rehabilitation of Broad Branch Road;
* Advised the BZA to permit the variance requested for 1827 Park Road;
* Advised DDOT to reduce the brightness of the new street-lights on Adams Mill Road.

March is not usually a big snow month, the average monthly snowfall being a mere 1.3 inches. But this March, as every-one recalls, had plenty of snow: 3.8 inches on March 3, 7.2 inches on March 16-17, and a final 1.7-inch insult on March 25. The total for the month, 12.7 inches, is 10 times the monthly average. That wasn't a March record, which is 19 inches, exactly one century ago, 1914, but it's **more snow seen here in the month of March since 1960.**

The total for the winter, 32 inches, was about twice DC's usual amount. Yes, it was a bad winter, but not a record, which was set in 2009-2010 with 56 inches of snow.

It took me four tries to get my **Broad Branch rehabilitation** resolution through this ANC. Alternative 4 would provide a dedicated bike lane in the uphill direction, for bicyclists heading up towards Chevy Chase and Bethesda. This is in addition to the paved pedestrian-bicycle path included in Alternative 3, which would serve for the downhill bicyclist direction.

The downhill pedestrian-bicycle path would require the removal of about 460 trees. That's unfortunate, but the alternative is to have this portion of the park, Broad Branch Road being narrow and winding, safely enjoyable only from inside a car. The pedestrian path is essential for pedestrian safety, and uphill bike lane is essential for safe bicycling after dark by bicycle commuters.

The Broad Branch route connects to the Rock Creek Park bike path, providing a bicycle-commuter route from Chevy Chase all the way to downtown DC, and thence to Virginia. "No" votes on the resolution to provide safe pedestrian and bicyclist use of Broad Branch Road came from Commis-sioners Terrell and Romero-Latin, who preferred saving the trees, even though these trees could be safely seen only by people passing by in cars.

Many residents have noted that the **streetlights installed on Adams Mill Road near the Kenyon intersection are really bright**. Bright lighting is kind of nice, but the sidewalk illumination due to these new streetlights was 10 to 20 times the level recommended for neighborhood streets, wasting energy and money. They caused discomfort for some residents, too, all-night light pouring into some windows.
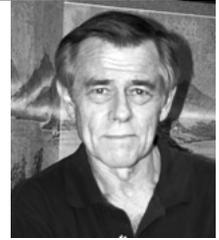
DDOT met with residents in February and agreed that the light level was "a bit high". Shields have been put on the streetlights that were shining into residential windows, but still, there's much more light than is needed.

A reduction in the power of the lamps in the streetlights would reduce the light level moderately, but would leave ample light for pedestrian safety. The redesign of the Adams Mill Road area included more than doubling the number of

streetlights. On the slope from the Harvard Towers to the Kenyon intersection, there are now 15 streetlights, where previously there were only 6. There will always be much more light than there was before, whatever lamps are installed in the streetlights.

DDOT asked for, and was given, an ANC resolution endorsing a switch from the 250 watt lamps to 150 watts.

The commission has passed two of my resolutions protesting zoning provisions that allow, in some cases, developers **to** expand existing structures from 40% lot coverage to 60% lot coverage. The proposed **development at 1865-1867 Park Road** is an example of this unfortunate lot-coverage provision in our zoning regulations. Single-family dwellings placed on those lots would be limited to 40% lot coverage. But one will be a "flat" (main house plus basement apart-ment), the other, a three-unit apartment house. The zoning regulations allow flats and apartment houses to expand to 60% lot coverage, potentially dwarfing the houses next door.

The initial design for 1867 expanded to 48% lot coverage, and loomed over its neighbor at 1869. The developer has significantly downsized this design, cutting back the rearward extension by 11 feet, thereby reducing it to 42% lot coverage. This change also reduces the building from three dwelling units to two. I consider that change a significant concession to residents' complaints. Had the developer been less cooperative, he likely could have gotten approval for the original concept. No zoning variances would be needed, and historic preservation rejected our complaints about the high lot coverage.

The initial concept was rejected by the HPRB, not because of our complaints about its size, but because 1865 looked like an oversize addition to 1867 (the two houses were proposed as a single unit). The developer revised the design to eliminate the connection, and returned to the HPRB on March 27 with the two-building design. As I expected, the HPRB approved it with little debate.

The second of the two houses, 1865, is still large – 51% lot occupancy, considerably larger than the 40% that would be allowed for a single-family dwelling – but isn't immediately adjacent to an existing house, and seems less offensive. This is a narrow lot, and the building is built right up to the east-side property line. This displeases the neighbors on that side, but the HPRB ignored their complaint. As always, if it's allowed by zoning, then it's okay with historic preservation. The HPRB folks worry only about the esthetics of the architecture: what does it look like? If it looks like it's an

original part of the historic district, then it's "compatible", and that's the one and only criterion that the law allows them to consider.

The 1865-1867 concept calls for **four parking pads** in the rear, off the alley above Park Road. Ordinarily zoning would require one off-street parking spot, for the three-unit apartment house. But because Mount Pleasant is a historic district, the developer is not required to provide any off-street parking at all. We must be grateful that he's offering a few.

Some neighbors are not pleased by these four parking pads on the alley. The developer has said that he'll do whichever the neighborhood prefers: four off-street parking pads, or none. My sense of the neighborhood is that curbside parking is all too scarce, especially at night, and that constructing five dwelling units where there currently is only one, likely bringing several additional cars to the neighborhood, would significantly exacerbate the evening parking shortage. That's more important, I think, than a few more cars using that alley.

Speaking of parking: Newton Street residents met with the Stoddard Baptist Home, and DC parking enforcement representatives, on March 24, to talk about **parking and truck problems on Newton Street**. One longstanding problem is that of delivery trucks blocking the street, while delivering things to the Home. DDOT will investigate the possibility of a loading zone for these trucks, though DDOT representative (and Mount Pleasant neighbor) Alice Kelly warned that such a loading zone would cost parking spaces. Presumably those parking spaces would come out of the portion of Newton Street which, being Baptist Home frontage, is not zoned RPP. Still, residents will pay a price, because they do park there, especially overnight.

The basic daytime problem is that many workers at the Home come to work in personal automobiles, and there's no commercial parking lot in Mount Pleasant. The Administrator of the Home, Mrs Remy Johnson, said that employees bring about 50 cars to the neighborhood each morning. The Home "stacks" all they can into their little parking lot, but that's not sufficient. So they overflow onto Newton Street, much to the dismay of residents. I know from my frequent trips around the neighborhood that Newton is one of the very few blocks in Mount Pleasant where one cannot find a parking spot in the middle of a weekday.

Back when I helped the streets north of Park Road become zoned for RPP, I arranged also for employees of Mount Pleasant businesses and institutions to purchase daytime-only parking permits. Drivers with daytime-only permits would be allowed to park only on blocks with "1DD" labels (such as my own), where there is known to be space available during the day. That would take Baptist Home drivers off Newton Street and put them down here.

That effort, unfortunately, came to nothing, mainly because the supposed beneficiaries of the system, the employees of Bancroft and Stoddard, protested their having to pay about $3 a day for these permits. That's pretty cheap parking, but they insisted on "free", which was simply not an option. Seeing that Bancroft and Stoddard employees objected to the plan that was to be for their benefit, allowing them to park on our

RPP streets, CM Graham withdrew his support for the plan, and that was the end of it. Alice Kelly, who was organizing that system for DDOT, says that it is now "off the table".

Residents of Newton Street complain that the parking problem there has worsened in recent years. I suspect that that is due to the opening of 10 new dwelling units at 1823 Newton, and three at 1865, no doubt bringing more cars into the area. Stoddard and Bancroft employees contribute to the daytime parking problem, but little to the overnight parking problem. The overnight parking squeeze is due to us residents owning too many cars. That's a hard problem to solve.

As everyone knows, the **District primary election** was held on April 1. Why is the primary, normally held in September, now so early in the year, all of seven months before the November general election? Don't blame this on a 2009 Federal law requiring that absentee ballots be mailed to military and overseas voters at least 45 days prior to an election. That pushes the District's September primary into August. But the District Council didn't want an election to be held during the summer-vacation period, and so advanced the date into the late spring. Then someone had the bright idea of saving money by combining the DC primary with the presidential primary, which must be held in the early spring for maximum leverage on the August presidential conventions. And then, for consistency, it would be done this way in non-presidential years as well. Presto, our September primary is now scheduled for the first Tuesday in April.

Bad idea! So we have a primary campaign in the cold and dark of midwinter, long before anyone is ready for it. And now, courtesy of that too-early primary, our Mayor and our Ward One Councilmember are "lame ducks", rejected by the voters, but still in office for a solid nine months. How much enthusiasm do you suppose Jim Graham is now going to feel for his work? This is no way to run democratic elections.

I suspect that before long the District Council will agree that it's worth the additional cost to have the primary in, say, mid-May. April 1 is just too early in the year.

The voters have spoken – a few of them, anyway, a pitiful 22% voter turnout. I'm pressing for an end to such an early primary election. The District primary used to be in September. Due to a Federal law, it now must be earlier in the year, but it does not have to be the first Tuesday in April. I expect the District Council to recognize its mistake in that selection, and to reschedule future primaries for May or June.

The election has produced a generational shift in our elected officials. **Vincent Gray (age 71) and Jim Graham (68) are out, Muriel Bowser (41) and Brianne Nadeau (32) are in.**

Mount Pleasant favored Muriel Bowser (46%), voting 20% for Gray, and 20% for Wells. The neighborhood went heavily also for Nadeau (62%) over Graham (37%). That's quite a stunning outcome, considering how long and hard Jim has worked for this neighborhood, attending countless evening meetings with residents, and making countless phone calls and e-mails to District agency bureaucrats on our behalf.

The next meeting of the ANC will be on **Tuesday, April 15, 7:00 pm, at the Mount Pleasant Library.**