

## Jack's April report

At the March meeting, the ANC did the following:

- Advised the DC Housing Authority “to continue Harvard Towers . . . as public housing for seniors and persons with disabilities”.

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That was a **short ANC meeting in March** – forty minutes, from call to order to adjournment. There were just three of us commissioners, barely a quorum. Commissioner Chelsea Allinger needed the Harvard Towers resolution passed in time for her to testify at the District Council on April 11, so we swiftly took care of that business, and went home.

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The **Harvard Towers resolution** came about in response to reports that the DCHA might “reposition” the facility. The Towers currently are public housing primarily for the elderly and disabled. The DCHA could do anything from converting it to voucher public housing to selling the property to a developer.

DCHA has a real financial problem, to be sure, due to deep cuts in Federal budget support. Considering the hefty increase in property valuations here, it might make sense for the District to sell the property, or otherwise take advantage of the higher value of the property. But we believe it's necessary to come to the support of the residents, who would be forced out of their Harvard Towers homes. I believe also that Mount Pleasant, despite having been transformed into a high-income neighborhood, has an obligation to have some public housing, rather than pushing such housing away into lower-income neighborhoods.

So the resolution passed easily, three to zero. Commissioner Allinger testified at the Council hearing on April 11, and was told that the Harvard Towers are not, in fact, on the DCHA list for “repositioning”, despite the earlier reports.

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On March 28 there was a community meeting at the Library to discuss possibilities for **the park at 19th and Lamont**. I missed that meeting, because Emily was coming home from the hospital on that day, and I needed to be at home for her. So I don't know what transpired there.

I think top priority has to be stabilization of the surface to halt erosion, which has become severe. I hope the Department of General Services (DGS) folks have some ideas for accomplishing that.

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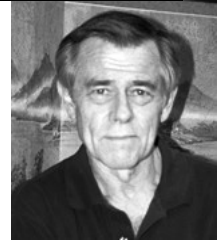
Commissioner Chelsea Allinger, a resident of the 19th and Lamont apartment house, is leading the ANC effort to guide the promised “improvements” at the park. The community meeting was advertised on the internet, of course, employing the NextDoor site. Interested in getting the widest possible publicity for the meeting, she arranged also for a US Postal Service program called Every Door Direct Mail (EDDM) to have an informational flyer delivered to nearly every address in Mount Pleasant. As I've noted with my monthly newsletter, the internet doesn't reach everybody, whereas paper delivered to every residence can.

Chelsea had 5000 flyers printed up, and went to considerable trouble to package them up in the manner prescribed by the USPS, eight stacks of flyers for eight USPS routes. She hand-

## ANC 1D03 NEWSLETTER #191

Jack McKay, April 15, 2019

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delivered the materials to the USPS center in Northeast DC on March 15, well ahead of the March 28 meeting date.

And there the flyers sat. Ten days later, as the date of the meeting approached, only two of the eight stacks of flyers had been delivered. By the 28th, the day of the meeting, five of the eight stacks of flyers remained undelivered.

The ANC paid the USPS close to \$900 for that service. As for the Library meeting, I understand that about 60 residents attended. How many more would have attended, had the USPS delivered the flyers on time? We'll never know.

As for the meeting, I was unable to attend, due to obligations at home, and I don't know what transpired there.

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I am told that a young boy, a pre-K child at Bancroft, was attacked and **bitten by a dog** early this month, as he played in a parking lot off Park Road.

What can I say? Anyone who owns a dog – and we used to, in our first years in Mount Pleasant, and in Pittsburgh before that – must maintain control over their dog at all times. Dogs are not permitted to run loose on public space. Small children are especially vulnerable. Even if a dog is just being playful, it may frighten a child into running into the street.

I encounter many dogs, of course, as I deliver my monthly newsletter. Many dogs just bark loudly, and that's fine. A few are seriously aggressive, and there are a couple of residences in my district that don't get newsletters because of their very threatening dogs. I have no fear of dogs, but I'm not inclined to risk getting bitten as I deliver my newsletter.

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Somebody produced an **April Fool's newsletter** that was an extremely accurate replication of my monthly effort. It was, I gather, very clever and amusing, and a number of residents have offered congratulations to me for it. But I had nothing to do with it – and I don't know who did it – nor have I actually seen the newsletter, but for a glance at a copy shown to me by a neighbor. I'd be pleased if someone would slip me a copy.

It was all done in a spirit of good fun, and I'm happy to have been the unwitting vehicle for the effort.

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The **Metropolitan Police** seem to have implemented a new policy for dialog with the public. Instead of periodic PSA meetings, they will “piggyback” on our monthly ANC meetings. An MPD representative will speak at the start of our meeting, and we'll proceed with our ANC meeting when he's done. So, if you have something you want to say to the police, come to an ANC monthly meeting.

In this neighborhood, **walking across an alley entrance** requires as much care as crossing a street. Too many drivers charge out from alleys, not stopping until they reach the street. This is extremely hazardous because visibility to the sidewalk is generally very restricted. Small children, especially, may be completely concealed by retaining walls, and may also be unaware of the danger presented by the alley exit that they're about to run across.

Here's the law: DCMR **18, 2207.1**, "The driver of a vehicle emerging from an alley, building, private road, or driveway *shall stop the vehicle immediately prior to driving onto a sidewalk or onto the sidewalk area extending across the alley, building entrance, private road, or driveway, . . .*"

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Way back last June, the ANC came to the defense of a Monroe Street resident who had **replaced the front windows** of his row house. The window contractor had somehow overlooked the matter of a historic preservation permit. The Historic Preservation Review Board (HPRB) hated the new windows, declaring them "incompatible with the character of this house, its consistently fenestrated row, and with the historic district in general". Historic Mount Pleasant (HMP) sided with the Historic Preservation Office, declaring that "the house was one of 25 such houses on contiguous streets and that to allow the substitution here would encourage others to do likewise".

So, what precisely was wrong with these new windows? They look pretty much the same to me, and had been chosen to match the appearance of the original windows. Even the HPO staff report said that they were "compatible replacements".

But not compatible enough, evidently. The homeowner is being instructed to rip out his new windows – and then what? Find new windows which are somehow "more compatible" than the installed windows? "Compatible" according to the law means "harmonious". In practice, "compatible" means whatever the people on the HPRB like.

The homeowner has appealed this decision to the Mayor's Agent, and a hearing is now scheduled for May 21. The ANC will again support the homeowner.

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In 2016, an 18th Street homeowner, with support from the ANC, won permission for an expansion on the rear of a house on 18th Street, despite some visibility of that expansion from an adjacent alley. This came up in an HPRB discussion of a house on Irving, with a bitter complaint that "Because of its numerous rooftop appurtenances, that addition is also slightly visible over the roof ridge, contrary to a condition of approval". In short, historic preservation requires that **alterations be completely invisible from the street**, even a tiny peek over a rooftop being forbidden.

That's not what the law says, the text of the law declaring that alterations are allowed if they are "compatible with the character of the historic district". But for the people at the HPO actually applying the law, nothing less than total invisibility from the nearest street is sufficient, however "compatible" in appearance the alteration may be.

The tone of the discussion at the HPRB was, essentially, "we're not going to let this happen again".

Where **Oakwood Terrace splits off from 17th Street**, there's a narrow spit of land, steeply sloping down from Oakwood to 17th. The lots on that spit have never been developed, presumably because of the sharp slope and narrow width. But increasing land values here have made development of those lots attractive.

Development was initiated several years ago, with a proposal to put two three-story buildings on the lots. This proposal encountered strong opposition from neighbors on Oakwood Terrace and, especially, on 17th Street, because of the replacement of the view of vegetated slope with a view of townhouses.

The ANC joined the neighbors in opposition, communicated through the HPRB, as only historic preservation approval seemed to be needed to proceed. It is significant today that the ANC resolutions advising the HPRB to deny permit approval were unsuccessful. The last decision on the matter came in December, 2014, when the HPRB gave conditional approval of the plans, rejecting the ANC resolutions in opposition.

Why this lay dormant for four years I do not know, but this month the ANC was notified that the project is returning to the HPRB for another round, somewhat downsized, addressing the concerns stated in the last HPRB decision.

ANC opposition in 2014 accomplished nothing. The ANC does not have "approval" authority. We can only "advise" DC agencies on the interpretation of the pertinent regulations.

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The **row house at 1814 Ingleside** has been a dreadful construction site for months. The contractor seems to have encountered permit problems (not historic, so far as I know). The developer did clean up the worst of the mess out at the street. But there's no sign of progress on the renovation of the house. I've offered ANC help, but he's not interested.

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Years ago, the principal internet chat site for Mount Pleasant was the Mount Pleasant Forum. Many residents wouldn't use that site, though, worrying about encountering hostile posters. The internet is not known for gracious conversation.

The Forum is gone, and today **the most popular site is NextDoor.com**. I encourage all residents to sign up for that site, even just to "read the mail", to be aware of whatever's going on in the neighborhood. Concerning Chelsea Allinger's effort to notify everyone of the 19th and Lamont part effort, it would have been very helpful if we could have counted on reaching everyone via NextDoor, rather than turning to that unhappy, and expensive, experience with the Postal Service.

Posting on NextDoor has generally been quite civil, in contrast to much of what goes on on the internet. Let's be sure to keep it that way.

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Winter's over, spring is here, and it's welcome. But it won't be very long before annoying **mosquitos** appear. Many residents have mosquito traps, and soon it'll be time to put them out. What's even more important is the elimination of mosquito breeding places, such as dishes under potted plants.

The next meeting of the ANC will be on <u>Tuesday, April 23</u> , 7:00 pm, at the Mount Pleasant Library.
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