

Jack's April report

At the March ANC1D business meeting, the ANC had no new business, and so adjourned after hearing from DC Government people, and the public.

Forty-nine years ago, Emily and I chose Mount Pleasant for our DC home. Young and able-bodied, we didn't worry at all about the suitability of our 19th Street row house for anyone elderly. Well, half a century later, here we are, now both over 75, and we're discovering that the flights of stairs that we easily strode up and down back then are now not so easy. Yes, this is about **"aging in place"**, a bit of a challenge in houses that weren't designed for the less than able,

Two things we have needed to deal with our stairs-climbing problems, one of which has proven to be extremely hard to get, thanks to obduracy on the part of the DC Government. The easy, if costly, one was a "stairlift" to help Emily get to the second floor bedroom and back. She loves it, and enjoys being carried smoothly up and down those steep stairs. The hard one – and it shouldn't have been hard – was simple handrails for our front steps. That's where the DC Government has done everything it could to prevent us from installing our already-purchased handrails, even though most row houses here already have them. And no, the problem was not historic preservation!

Many of the roads south of Park Road are much wider, on paper, than is actually used for pavement and sidewalk. Our front yards, including front porches, are actually unused portions of DDOT right-of-way, and this characteristic is what gives Mount Pleasant its spacious appearance, the houses set back far from the street.

Nobody's ever going to add lanes to 19th Street, or Lamont, or any of the other neighborhood streets that are so wide. Nonetheless, these portions of road right-of-way, which residents can fence in and treat almost as if private, are "public space", under the jurisdiction of DDOT. Hence, we needed a DDOT permit to install handrails on our front steps.

Yes, the DCRA and Historic Preservation as well, but they were no problem, signing off instantly on the permit application. But DDOT has been beyond than obstinate, holding up our permit for more than four months, culminating in this absurd demand:

A proper Traffic Control Plan must be submitted that matches the current roadway configuration, as well as pavement markings - Plan must follow the Traffic Control Plan (TCP) Submittal Guidelines 19th Edition, February 14, 2018 - A typical or handwritten will not be accepted. The TCP must be legible and follow the Guidelines - The TCP shall include two full main intersections and it shall include existing pavement markings - Appropriate signage shall be included as per MUTCD 2009 with its appropriate sequences.

For a pair of handrails? No closer than 12 feet from the sidewalk? What traffic was there to "control"? What "two main intersections" are affected?

As your ANC Commissioner, I have always advised residents to go through the proper permit channels, advising against

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simply doing work and hoping that nobody complains. It's going to be hard for me to issue such advice in the future, given the absurd opposition by DDOT to my very modest handrails permit request. What legitimate concern can DDOT have about my handrails? And why has this little handyman job taken months, with no end in sight?

The DC permit system should not be so onerous, so unreasonable, so time-consuming, that residents are dissuaded from even applying for permits, fearing an endless bureaucratic obstacle course. A fundamental problem is that every permit application is treated as if it's a major construction job, with no provision for a simple homeowner-handyman home improvement job.

Again, the DCRA has been very cooperative, helpful and responsive. Historic Preservation signed off on my application the same day it arrived at their desk. But DDOT – there's something seriously amiss at the DDOT Public Space permit office. And I'm not alone in making that complaint.

We ANC Commissioners are frequently able to assist residents with permits, not because we have special influence with anybody, but because we're familiar with the regulations, and can advise residents as to how best to proceed. **Historic Preservation** is, of course, a very common issue.

There were two historic preservation topics on the original March ANC agenda. One, for 3320 19th Street, culminated in a "consent" item on the March HPRB agenda. That is, the Historic Preservation Office staff advised approval by the HPRB without a formal review. Can't get much easier than that!

The other had to do with the balconies on the Renaissance apartment building, on 16th Street at Irving. The application was for removal of the balconies. My advice to the applicants: never mind the HPRB – the Historic Preservation Review Board – the District's historic preservation law will clearly prohibit such a substantial change to the front of what is a truly exceptional building, cited as an example of the *"grandeur and elegance that was to characterize 16th Street at its zenith"*. However sympathetic the Board members might be to the financial plight of the residents, who are people of modest means, the law compels the Board is to promote preservation, with little consideration for cost.

So that topic was removed from the HPRB agenda. I believe the residents are seeking financial assistance for the repair of their balconies, and I hope the District Government sees fit to help them pay for this work. The ANC will surely support them to obtain such assistance.

I think that most residents know that Mount Pleasant's storm drains all go into a “**combined sewer system**” – CSS – combined, meaning that's where household sewage goes, as well as stormwater runoff. It all goes to the Blue Plains Sewage Plant for cleaning before the water is piped into the Potomac. (Ignore those labels on our storm-drain openings – catchment basins – that claim that they “drain to Rock Creek”. With one possible exception, on the alley north of Ingleside Terrace, they do not. They go to Blue Plains for treatment and cleanup, not to Rock Creek.)

The problem with the Combined Sewer System is that, when there's a heavy rainstorm, the flow into the storm drains is too much for the pipes to Blue Plains to handle, and the system overflows. The overflow goes to CSOs – Combined Sewer Overflows – which dump the untreated mix of stormwater and sewage directly into Rock Creek. This is nasty stuff, and DCWater is under Federal direction to stop it.

So, how often do Mount Pleasant's CSOs – there are eight serving our neighborhood – overflow? The answer turns out to be, with one exception, seldom. Last fall, for example, 97% of the CSO overflow into Rock Creek came from just one CSO, namely CSO 49, emptying into Piney Branch, north of Piney Branch Parkway and east of 17th Street.

This is of some current significance because DCWater has a program promoting the disconnection of gutter downspouts from the sewer system, to reduce the frequency of overflows. If the rainwater from your roof is directed into rain barrels, or water-absorbing soil, then it won't add to the rush of stormwater into the CSS causing sewage overflows into Piney Branch, and thence to Rock Creek and the Potomac.

However, because only that one CSO contributes substantially to overflows, Mount Pleasant residents served by the other seven CSOs – that is, almost all of Mount Pleasant – are not eligible for the downspout disconnection program. Only a few residences on 16th Street are served by the notorious CSO 049, and are eligible.

You can find out more about this DCWater program here: <https://www.dewater.com/projects/downspout-disconnection-program>

As everyone knows, nursing homes have been especially hard hit by the covid-19 virus. Our Stoddard Baptist Home is no exception; 14 of their residents have died of covid since the plague began. They're doing all they can to keep the virus out of the Home.

As for **the covid plague in DC**, the daily count of new cases continues with little change, neither increasing – there's not yet any sign of a new surge in infections – nor decreasing. I have been hoping that the arrival of warmer weather would bring the daily count down, just as the arrival of cold weather last winter precipitated a January peak, as people were forced indoors, in close contact with other people. But there's no hint of that. Not yet, anyway.

Like everyone else, Emily and I are sick of the restrictions imposed to reduce the spread of the contagion. But we're just not there yet. The daily count in DC remains four times the level considered safe for a transition to a less stringent degree

of pandemic mitigation. So we continue with masks and social distancing, and I watch the count every day, hoping to see a decline that would bring us some liberation.

I'm hearing complaints about **rats** along the alley above Park Road that leads from 19th Street to Rock Creek Park. This happens every spring, after a mild winter that lots of rats survive. There may be somebody putting out poison for the rats; please don't do that, it's too easy for people's dogs to find the poison and be poisoned. It's best to call on the Department of Health for rat control.

The Health rat control people will locate the rat burrows and deposit their poison – or dry ice – far into the burrows, so nobody's pets are threatened by the stuff. And the rats die far underground. That's hard on the rats, to be sure, but that's what must be done.

To be effective, all residents in an area must participate, signing petitions allowing the rat control people access to their private property to implement the rat extermination effort. More information can be found here:

<https://dchealth.dc.gov/service/rodent-control>

Our side streets in Mount Pleasant are generally 32 feet wide. Parking on both sides takes away 16 feet, leaving 16 feet for cars, i.e., two 8-foot-wide lanes. I think we all realize that that's not very much – traffic lanes really should be 10 to 12 feet wide. So when you, in your car, encounter somebody coming in the opposite direction, it's a tight fit. (And forget about oncoming trucks; all you can do then is dive to the side and let the truck pass by.)

Cars these days have side mirrors which extend out pretty far, complicating the squeezing by an oncoming (or double-parked) car. If the height of your passenger-side mirror happens to match the height of the driver-side mirror of the parked car, well, contact may happen. These mirrors are supposed to flip out of the way when that happens, ideally with no harm done. But occasionally that doesn't work, and somebody's side mirror gets busted.

All of which is to say – let's make it a habit to **fold those driver-side mirrors in** when we're parked on the street, to make it easier for drivers to squeeze by.

The ANC has been notified of a permit application to DDOT for the improvements planned for **the park at 1900 Lamont**. Yes, DDOT is insisting on control of this park, asserting that it remains their Lamont Street right-of-way. When the decision was made to make this a public park, 20 years ago, nobody bothered to transfer jurisdiction to the Department of Parks and Rec. And DDOT has not been willing to give way.

The start date cited on the permit application is April 30. So maybe that's when actual work will begin. Really, it can't come too soon – everyone wants that barren mess of mud and erosion fixed up, just as soon as weather permits.

The April meeting of the ANC will take place at 7 pm, April 20. 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.