

August report to constituents

Here is news of the **August 1 ANC meeting**, and other happenings in Mount Pleasant. At this meeting, the ANC:

- Asked the Metropolitan Police for help with our burglary problem (my resolution)
- Requested increased security within the Harvard Towers apartments
- Requested a systematic review of the ability of seniors at the Harvard Towers to live unassisted
- Called on DCHA to take action against Mount Pleasant properties that are vacant and neglected (my resolution)
- Requested DDOT to implement means of reducing risk to pedestrians crossing 16th Street to the bus stop at the Woodner.

ANC 1D03 NEWSLETTER #48

Jack McKay, August 29, 2006

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The next ANC meeting is on
Tuesday, September 5, 7:00 pm,
La Casa Community Center.

In response to my photographic documentation of poor traffic-light visibility at **the Park Road/Walbridge/-Klinge intersection**, causing drivers to inadvertently run the red-arrow light on Park Road westbound, DDOT has installed new signal lights on a beam extending out over the traffic lanes. Not only are the signals much more visible than before, but the two signal heads are directed at the respective lanes. Drivers in the right lane, on their way to the “right turn” to the continuation of Park Road westbound, can hardly miss the signal light directly over the lane.

Of course, some numbskulls still do manage to miss it. During a 60-minute period after installation, two drivers ran the red arrow. Curiously, two drivers also ran the solid red to Klinge Road. Some drivers are truly beyond help.

I’ll continue to monitor this intersection to see how well the new signal light arrangement works.

Several constituents complained to me about the new DPW policy of **collecting bulk trash from in front** of our homes, instead of from alleys. This policy has led to a number of ugly piles of furniture and junk along Mount Pleasant streets. We protested this change, and evidently we weren’t alone. DPW will shortly revert to the alley-pickup policy: “It is clear that a number of our customers are not satisfied with this policy decision. Therefore, *effective October 1, 2006, the Department of Public Works will revert back to the old policy of collecting bulk trash at the regular collection point.*” – Bill Howland, Director of DPW, August 3.

The DDOT standard sidewalk is a harsh, industrial gray, which is fine in commercial districts, no doubt, but is unpleasant in residential areas. Our old sandstone-pebbled sidewalks are far more attractive, and the new standard material clashes with the old. I’ve relayed residents’ complaints about the new sidewalks to DDOT, and lo, they responded by producing **a new sandstone-beige sidewalk** coloration, far more pleasing to the eye, and blending well with the trees, lawns, and gardens of our row house district. If you haven’t seen it, come down to 19th Street and check it out. I think it’s a great improvement, and I’m grateful to DDOT for hearing, and responding to, our complaints.

My July water bill was a heart-stopping \$686. When new water meters were installed here a year ago, they weren’t connected to the electronics transmitting the water usage data. The old meters were left in the holes, connected to the electronics, though they were no longer in the water line, and so measured zero water usage. A WASA tech belatedly connecting the new meters said that this was the case for our entire area, so other residents may be in for such nasty surprises.

Burglaries, as I’ve noted in previous newsletters, **are up sharply in Mount Pleasant**. There were eleven in June, and eleven in July, versus our normal three or four. As of the writing of this newsletter, in late August, there have already been thirteen, a record for a single month.

The MPD tells me that this is to some extent a one-man crime wave. The “apprentice electrician” discovered one morning in one 19th Street residence is believed to be responsible for many of the burglaries of June and July. He’s white, medium height, dark hair, thin build. One of his scams is to offer tools (stolen) as “security” as he asks for a “loan”. The police know who he is, and are on the lookout for him. We have to be on the alert as well; don’t readily believe anybody who says he’s doing work inside your neighbor’s house. Call 311, and let the police decide if the supposed contractor is legitimate or not.

I’m **endorsing Jim Graham** for another term as Ward One District Councilmember. Jim has been extraordinarily responsive to requests from Mount Pleasant residents, and from me specifically, for actions from District agencies. The long-delayed rebuilding of the 3400 block of Mount Pleasant Street (alongside Bancroft) came about through his intervention. Mount Pleasant is now to get a proper traffic study, beginning this fall, thanks to his firm backing of my complaints that the merged Mount Pleasant/Columbia Heights traffic study of 2003 failed to address our problems. Jim is the Council member I call on whenever I need help. No other Councilmember is remotely as responsive or helpful.

I had a very gratifying conversation with him at a Latino-organized Meet and Greet in Adams Morgan in August. Jim clearly sincerely cares about the welfare of Latinos and other immigrant communities in the area. I’m looking forward to working with him in the coming term.

This report is from Jim Graham. Notable aspects: this **armed robbery** took place in broad daylight; it was interrupted by passersby responding to screams from the victim; and the perpetrator hid in a vacant property on Newton Street, one just cited in my resolution calling for action about such properties. This robbery was unusual in occurring west of 17th Street.

“At about 2:30, this past Saturday afternoon [August 19], **in the 3200 block of 18th Street** in Mt. Pleasant, a woman pulled her car into her driveway. A man approached her, produced a pistol and told her to walk into her house. She did. He demanded money. She gave up a small amount of cash. He told her to go outside with him, and to get into her car. She refused and ran away. He grabbed her, she screamed, and attracted attention of passersby. He ran away.

“MPD officers on the scene located two witnesses in the alley about a block and a half away. They said they'd observed the suspect running through the alley. The officers canvassed [a vacant house at 1718-1720 Newton Street]. They found a BB gun and clothing matching the witnesses' description of the suspect. The gun was colored gray.

“Commander McCoy asked to see the gun, because of similar reports on a gray gun in a previous robbery. He considered gray colored guns unusual, as they are usually black or silver. McCoy went to the house, talked to the officers, saw the gun and some stolen property.

“McCoy asked if anyone had gone upstairs to make sure nobody else was in the house. There were holes through the floor, and the staircase was unstable. Yet, he went up the stairs [and] found the suspect hiding in a back room. He was identified as Paul Henderson, a registered sex offender with a lengthy record. Henderson had a crack pipe in his hand. In his possession, he had papers showing he'd gotten out of jail August 3. He was also wanted on parole violation.

“Detectives took him in and interviewed him. The woman positively identified Henderson as the person who assaulted and robbed her.

“There have been other burglaries nearby, and police found other property -- purses and ID's -- in the house where Henderson was hiding. Detectives are working to see if he's responsible for other crimes.

“(Note: Yesterday, I spoke personally to DCRA who went immediately to inspect the property. The property owner of both 1718 and 1720 Newton called me, to say that they were about to renovate. I informed him that, although the front of the buildings appeared secure, the rear was open. He stated that they must have just taken down the boards. In any event, I assured him that, unless he had the property secured today, DCRA would be doing it...at his expense.)” – J.G., 8/22/06

“**A robbery occurred on the 3300 block of 17th St NW** at approximately 7:00 pm on 7-26-06. Complainant reports three unknown suspects approached him and one suspect pointed a black automatic handgun at him and stated ‘I’m not f***** kidding give me your money.’ Complainant complied and gave the suspect \$80 and an Apple I-pod. Suspect then stated “Give me your phone.” Complainant stated that he didn’t have a phone and suspect gave complainant \$20 back. Suspects are black juveniles 12-13.” – Valna McFadden, MPD, 7/27/06

These are just children! But they’re armed with a weapon, and are much more dangerous than an adult with a gun. Too many children have found out that robbery is easy, that they’re seldom caught, and even if they are caught, they’re commonly merely returned to their homes with an admonition not to do it again. But the families are all too often part of the problem. Nobody knows what to do about this growing problem of child robbers. On this issue, Chief Ramsey, who reports that “arrests of juveniles for robbery have risen an astonishing 85 percent this year”, is justifiably concerned.

This robbery occurred in full daylight, in the early evening. Crime by juveniles most frequently occurs in the after-school hours, in the afternoon or early evening. The 10 pm “emergency” curfew will do nothing to reduce robberies by juveniles.

On August 7 we were told of an obscure but important problem, namely that on the following day, the Alcoholic Beverage Control Board was going to issue a bizarre ruling concerning the **hours of operation at Don Juan’s Restaurant**. The “voluntary agreement” for Don Juan’s requires that the restaurant “stop selling alcohol at 1:30 AM Sunday through Thursday and 2:30 AM on Friday and Saturday”. This has long been interpreted as the “last call” time, half an hour before closing. The Board was suddenly thinking of changing this interpretation to be the restaurant closing time, instead of “last call” time, forcing the restaurant to close half an hour earlier than the legally allowed 2 and 3 AM.

This is, for me, a different world; at such hours I’m quite certainly home in bed. Nonetheless, it seemed patently unfair to the restaurant to impose this change, putting it at a disadvantage versus restaurants permitted to stay open later. I don’t see where it makes much difference to the neighborhood whether the closing time of the restaurant is 1:30 AM, or 2 AM.

At an emergency meeting on August 8, the ANC voted four to zero to advise the ABC Board to stick to the “last call” interpretation. Evidently they have agreed to do so, and maybe our resolution helped them to that outcome, I don’t know. We’re told also that the application by the restaurant for an entertainment endorsement, so that they can again offer karaoke, will be routinely approved. I don’t care for karaoke, myself, and I’d choose to avoid any such event, but I gather that this is quite popular among some people, so why not let them have it? We’ll continue to tell the restaurant to keep the sound level down, so that the music, with or without customers singing karaoke, doesn’t bother the neighbors.