

Jack's August report

At the July 19 ANC meeting, the ANC:

- Approved the most recent DDOT plans for the Kenyon-Adams Mill and Harvard-Adams Mill intersections.
- Agreed to ask that the Public Space Committee hearing for a tiny sidewalk cafe at the Pupuseria San Miguel be placed on the “consent” agenda.

The monthly informal meeting of the ANC was skipped this month. It's August, it's hot, nobody wants to go to meetings.

On July 19, the Board of Zoning Adjustment (BZA) held an excruciatingly long hearing for the zoning variance application by the **DC Public Library**, ending shortly before 10 pm. R-5-D zoning requires a 15-foot rear yard; the library wants zero feet, allowing building to the property line.

As the Northwest Current editorialized in July, the Library should have applied for this zoning variance at the start, rather than proceeding with construction, gambling “with residents' money” that the DCRA Zoning Administrator's decision would be upheld. Recall that the Administrator allowed the south side of the building, adjacent to the Park Marconi apartments, to be called the “rear” for zoning purposes. The BZA, on June 2, disagreed, one member calling the DCRA action a “manipulation of the zoning regulations for a predetermined outcome”.

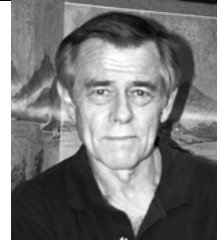
If this zoning variance should now be denied, then much of what's been built will be disallowed. The BZA can allow the variance only if compliance with the zoning regulation “would result in peculiar and exceptional practical difficulties to or exceptional and undue hardship upon the owner of the property”. What, the BZA now asks, is this “practical difficulty”, or “undue hardship”, that would follow from denial of the variance? The Library claims that the “hardship” is that they would be unable to fulfill their “institutional requirements”. Very well, the BZA asked, what are these “institutional requirements” that have only recently appeared, and whence did they come? The answers given by the Public Library at the hearing were not convincing, and the BZA instructed them to provide documents explaining the origin of these new requirements.

If the Library had been content, two years ago, to renovate and modernize the existing Mount Pleasant Library building, fitting in what they could, there would have been no problem, and a new Mount Pleasant Library would be approaching completion today. Unfortunately, the DC Public Library insisted on imposing on the Mount Pleasant Library the parameters of their ideal, 21st-century neighborhood library: more than 20,000 square feet of space, 80,000 books “and other library materials” on site, “200-plus reader seats”, conference and study rooms, and a 100-person-capacity meeting room separate from the library itself. But the building is too small, so an external addition was necessary. And the lot is too small, so the addition can be squeezed in only with difficulty. Add to that the restrictions of this being an architecturally distinguished building in a historic district, so from the outside it's supposed to look just as it did when build, 85 years ago – well, somebody should have observed

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that this problem was best solved by scaling back the Library's “ideal public library” specifications to suit local conditions, instead of trying to cram, as the saying goes, “five pounds of stuff into a four-pound bag”.

The two sides are to submit final arguments by September 8, and the BZA intends to release a decision on September 13.

There's been a plague of **parking tickets** in the neighborhood lately, in particular for “failure to remove expired residential parking permit”. Yes, the old registration/parking stickers have to be removed, you mustn't just add more stickers to the inside of your windshield. This not an easy task, as they stick pretty tenaciously. I use a single-edge razor blade to get under an old one and peel it up.

The **Pupuseria San Miguel** has applied for a sidewalk cafe permit, to put a few tables on the fenced-in space alongside the stairs down into the little restaurant. The proprietor, Neftali Vasquez, has had his problems with permits and the DC bureaucracy, so I've been trying my best to help him, along with Gabriela Mossi of the Mount Pleasant Business Association. The ANC passed a resolution of support for the permit, and on July 28 the Public Space Committee granted the permit, subject to conditions regarding the surface to be put down in that little yard. I think sidewalk cafes are good for the atmosphere of Mount Pleasant, and I'm happy to see the Pupuseria on its way to having one.

For eight years now I've been pushing for **rebuilding the Kenyon/Adams Mill intersection** to permit the left turn from westbound Kenyon onto southbound Adams Mill Road. The plans approved at the last ANC meeting are the 90% plans, which is to say, virtually complete. The work is out for bids, and construction could start this winter.

The job also involves work on the intersection at the top of the Beach Drive ramp (where so many people get confused about which lane to be in for the left turn onto Adams Mill Road), and the road up the hill. There will be bike lanes, which I hope will tell motorists that we bicyclists plugging up that steep hill have a legal right to be there, and they should perhaps refrain from cutting in front of us and stopping for the traffic light. Too many motorists don't understand that bicyclists can't just come to a complete stop on a steep slope, then start up again when the light goes green. We're not on motorcycles, where you can just let out the clutch and get rolling, however steep the slope.

Also part of this project is the establishment of a bus stop right next to the Harvard Towers driveway, something long

sought by advocates for the elderly and disabled folks housed in that building (owned by the DC Housing Authority). An Irving Street resident has complained about that new bus stop, evidently dismayed by the possibility of increased bus noise outside her home. Why, she wonders, is she finding out about this only now? This bus stop was first considered by the ANC in 2005, six years ago.

The ANC does what it can to tell the neighborhood what it's doing, and I post every resolution, and every month's minutes, on a couple of Mount Pleasant web sites, as well as the ANC1D web site. But a resident who doesn't track these web sites, for lack of internet access, or lack of interest, cannot easily be reached to be informed about ANC actions. I do this newsletter, so my constituents know what's up, but no other commissioner does that. So, for residents who won't check into any of these web sites, and who don't get my monthly newsletter, what is to be done? How do we tell them what the ANC is doing?

Twelve years ago I was taken by surprise by an ANC action affecting me and my neighbors, and that's when I discovered that it's necessary to pay attention to what the ANC is doing. Back then it was much harder, because the ANC before 2003 didn't post its actions on the Internet. Now we do, but residents still have to meet us half way, by taking the time to check into Mount Pleasant web sites to review what this ANC is doing. I don't know what more I can do.

The terrible Deauville fire of 2008 caused severe damage also to the **Meridian Hill Baptist Church**, behind the Deauville and facing on 16th Street. The church has been "for sale" for many months, but has found no buyers as a church. There is now a plan to redevelop the site as condominiums, built around and behind the magnificent steps and pillars and limestone walls. The developers have been to the ANC a couple of times, but the Commission took no position on the development at this time, as the developers were doing well enough with Historic Mount Pleasant and the Historic Preservation Office, and needed no boost from us. On August 4 the proposal was reviewed by the Historic Preservation Review Board, which agreed that the design was mostly acceptable, with some revisions required. The developers are pleased with that evaluation.

Marvelous as that great church was, it was severely damaged by that fire, and no buyers showed up to try to rebuild it as a church. The condo development promises to turn this vacant and fire-damaged property into something occupied and productive, so I intend to support that. The project will, in time, go to the Board of Zoning Adjustment for a zoning variance, not very different from that being requested by its nearby neighbor, the Mount Pleasant Library. That could be a bit more trouble at the ANC. But since the condo development will have up-to-date fire suppression facilities, as will anything built on the Deauville site, I foresee none of the problems that have been so troublesome at the rear of the library. It would be a shame to see this project fail, leaving the property a vacant, unproductive, fire-damaged mess.

The redistricting of the wards, required by the population changes of the 2010 census, is complete, with Ward One little

changed (a small piece west of Rock Creek Park, a bit of Woodley Park that really hated being in Ward One, was given to Ward Three). The DC Code says that, within 90 days after the completion of ward redistricting, we've got to complete the **redistricting of ANCs**, to adjust for changes in population.

There have been, during the past 10 years, some pretty large population shifts within the ward. Mount Pleasant has shrunk by over 1300 residents, and that means that our six-member ANC, already uncomfortably small, must drop to just five commissioners. One problem of small ANCs is that they are too easily dominated by one or two very active commissioners (as ours is). In addition, it's hard to fill the four officer positions with commissioners who have the required spare time and skills.

The average ANC in the District has eight commissioners. How can we grow our little ANC to eight or nine? We will have to acquire portions of a neighboring ANC to do that. I've long noted that Mount Pleasant and Columbia Heights, once two distinct and sometimes hostile neighborhoods, have been growing more similar, as western Columbia Heights redevelops, and as more and more Mount Pleasant residents go to 14th Street to patronize shops and restaurants, or to go to the Metro station. So, could the western parts of Columbia Heights and our neighborhood be merged into one ANC, centered on 16th Street, rather than separated by 16th Street?

That would certainly change the nature of our commission, giving it more of a 16th Street and east, Ward One focus. And that's why this matters to Mount Pleasant residents. Would they favor such a shift? Would Columbia Heights residents accept such a change? There's still a deep well of hostility in Columbia Heights, directed at Mount Pleasant, due to a notion that Mount Pleasant is full of arrogant rich folks who don't respect the people of Columbia Heights. One Columbia Heights commissioner said to me, surprised to see me attending their meetings, "the only time we've ever seen anybody from Mount Pleasant is when you wanted something". I've been working hard during the past nine years to overcome that image.

Too many burglaries in Mount Pleasant lately, and many of them on Park Road or north. These are in this ANC district:

7/6/2011 1800 block Monroe St
7/21/2011 3400 block Mount Pleasant St
7/28/2011 3400 block 17th St
7/30/2011 2000 block Park Rd (2!)
8/1/2011 1800 block Ingleside Terrace

Weather records that we really didn't want to set:

July 23, a "low" temperature for the day of 84 degrees, tying the all-time record-high daily "low".

July 22-25 – four days and nights in a row during which the temperature did not drop below 80 degrees. The previous record: two such days and nights.

Record daily highs: July 24, 102 degrees; July 29, 104 degrees; July 30, 104 degrees; August 1, 100 degrees.

No ANC1D meetings in August.