

February report to constituents

Here is news of the **February 1 ANC meeting**, and notes of other events in the neighborhood.

Most of this meeting dealt with routine business, such as making arrangements with the bank to change the authorized signatures for checks. At the moment, we still can't write any checks, which means that we can't pay any bills. Fortunately we don't yet have any bills, so we're not yet in trouble. However, Commissioners are being compelled to pay ANC expenses out of their own pockets, while this little difficulty is being resolved. Gregg Edwards has been paying Web site bills, and I've paid for audio system components, because these things couldn't wait.

The matter of **the single sales moratorium** came up. This is an experimental ban on the sale of single containers of alcoholic beverages, imposed here in 2000 in an attempt to reduce street drinking and concomitant problems. The moratorium was to expire at the end of 2004, so the Alcoholic Beverage Control Board held hearings last December and decided to continue the ban for another four years. We protested that the ANC should have been notified of this proposed DC Government action affecting our neighborhood. The ABC Board admitted that the ANC should indeed have been notified, and will hold a repetition of the December hearing on March 2.

I requested instructions from the Commissioners concerning what I should say and do at this hearing. The ANC has no position concerning the ban on single sales, and we have no intention of taking a position at this time, pro or con. Nonetheless, we agree that more information is needed (see box). Unable to agree on the details of instructions to me, we agreed to table this matter until the March 1 ANC meeting.

ANC 1D03 NEWSLETTER #30

Jack McKay, February 24, 2005

Opinions expressed here are those of Dr. McKay alone, speaking for himself, not for the Mount Pleasant ANC.

ANC vacancies: Single-member-districts 1D02 (north-east Mount Pleasant, from Oakwood Terrace to the Woodner) and 1D06 (south Mount Pleasant, between Hobart and Harvard, from 16th Street to Rock Creek Park) remain vacant. Devenia Roberts, who won in 1D02 as a write-in, has declined to serve, saying that she "was resigning and would not be involved". Unfortunately, she has been unwilling to send in a formal letter of resignation, despite repeated requests. Without that letter, the seat is not legally vacant, and we cannot initiate the process for finding a replacement.

Two candidates have appeared for the vacancy in 1D06, namely Angelia Scott and Rick Massumi. The DC Code requires, awkwardly, that an ANC special election be held "at the next regularly scheduled meeting" of the ANC. In order to encourage participation in this special election, we intend to have it on a Saturday, and that in turn requires that we reset our monthly meeting to a Saturday. The special election is to be announced at a public meeting – our March meeting – and the election to be held at the next monthly meeting, in April. The details will be worked out at the March meeting.

I never planned to challenge the **ban on single sales of alcoholic beverages**. Maybe the current ban, imposed in 2000, does some good, and it surely does little harm, so why bother? However, I don't like public policy that is founded on mere speculation and intuition, not real facts. The controversy over the renewal of the "temporary" ban for another four years has compelled me to learn more about this ban, and to ask how it works in reality.

Clearly the purpose of the ban is to force some problem drinkers, namely the destitute, who panhandle their way from one drink to the next, to go away, out of Mount Pleasant, and perforce into our neighboring communities. No one argues that this ban is supposed to prevent problem drinkers from their drinking. The ban deals with the problem drinkers by sending them away. I think the notion of solving our problem by shoving it into Columbia Heights or Adams Morgan is rather un-neighborly. Yes, perhaps they too could implement single-sales bans. Then what will the problem drinkers do? We really must know, before implementing such a policy.

There is substantial evidence that the ban is, in fact, ineffectual. It doesn't take much ingenuity for someone to buy a six-pack, then sell the singles on the street, for a quick and easy profit. A person who works professionally with our troubled alcohol consumers tells me that "there is no ban – it's only on paper, it's not real. Anyone who wants a single can get it."

Well, if that is so, how to explain the benefits claimed by the proponents of the ban? We can begin with our foot patrol officers, who are doing a marvelous job of imposing order on the street. Add improved methods of dealing with public drunkenness, getting them off the street with much less difficulty than before. Add increased staffing and outreach by our alcohol abuse clinics. Add gentrification, high rents forcing low-income people out of Mount Pleasant. It is quite plausible that all the improvements noted by the ban advocates would have come about anyway, without the ban.

We're asking for a study to find out the facts, so we can formulate a policy based on better knowledge of the problem, and of the real-world operation of the single-sales ban, than we have now.

The ANC passed Gregg Edwards' motion for the ANC to sponsor quarterly **community meetings**, at which people will be encouraged to discuss the issues and problems of our neighborhood, in a friendly and informal setting. The first of these will be on February 28, at the Mount Pleasant Library. The idea is to bring together the disparate groups of our neighborhood to talk things over and perhaps overcome some of our divisions. We held such a meeting, unplanned, last October, and it was remarkable, as residents calmly talked over sensitive matters of race and class.

The ANC passed Gregg's motion proposing that "that we ask our neighboring ANCs for their ideas and perhaps support for legislation to require commercial buildings and encourage residential buildings to include their street number visible from the rear". The police, specifically, have asked for **house numbers visible from alleys**, so that they can tell where they are in an alley. This certainly is a good idea, but I've insisted that our request be for a voluntary program for residents, not mandatory.

The ANC passed Gregg's resolution asking that "this ANC sponsor as a probe, or pilot program, **a specialty forum . . . on public security issues**, at which we would invite the interested neighborhood groups to come and to participate in an initial discussion to lay out the issues and then to consider what we might do as a neighborhood". Yes, the monthly PSA meetings are supposed to deal with this sort of thing, but I agree that we need meetings that are less focused on what the police can or should do, and more on what we can do about, e.g., robberies.

The ANC passed a motion agreeing to send a letter to the MPD detailing our concerns about our new PSA Lieutenant (see box). We're not enthusiastic about challenging the new lieutenant, but we must, because our complex community requires smart, sophisticated policing.

Jack McKay
3200 19th St NW, DC 20010
462-8692
jack.mckay@verizon.net

At the January PSA meeting, I had a rather sharp exchange with **Lt Ewell**, as I objected to his hour-long harangue instructing us as to how we are to participate in future PSA meetings. (Jeff Jennings, of Jim Graham's office, pronounced the Lieutenant's performance "a disaster".) The next day, one of our fine foot patrol officers followed me into a Mount Pleasant Street shop to tell me that I had "done the right thing". This incident, an officer approaching a citizen to congratulate him for challenging his supervisor, shows just how seriously unhappy our foot patrol officers are with their new Lieutenant.

The February 2005 ANC meeting will be on **Tuesday**, March 1, **7:00 pm**, La Casa Community Center, 3166 Mount Pleasant Street. On the agenda: Open Resource Web site, Long Range Planning, ABRA hearing on single sales, Community Meetings, Specialty Forums, plans for 1D06 special election.

I am very concerned about **our new PSA Lieutenant, Dan Ewell**. I have been working happily with numerous MPD officers, including Lieutenants Grogan, Robinson, and Lyons, and Inspectors Hoey and Grooms. Ewell is the first MPD officer whom I have found problematic. My three concerns with Lt Ewell are:

- (1) He has not gained a familiarity with nor understanding of our complex community, but he's already imposing his heavy-handed tactics on the neighborhood. He came to Mount Pleasant in October, but he did not attend PSA meetings until January.
- (2) He has alienated our superb foot patrol officers, by dismissing their accomplishments here, and insisting that they take up his aggressive tactics in place of the procedures which they know, by experience, are effective here.
- (3) he has indicated that he will take a harsher line towards minor offenders in Mount Pleasant, that is, confrontation and arrest, where the foot patrol officers have found that firm persuasion is more effective, and does not alienate the "street people" of Mount Pleasant. Such heavy-handed tactics threaten to destroy the confidence that our foot patrol officers have won from the community, confidence that has caused people to come to them with vital information about seriously troublesome residents.

I think it is taking a great risk to "give the Lieutenant a chance". We cannot give up the great gains in police legitimacy won over the past year, and risk the sort of confrontation that led to the 1991 riots, by letting an exceptionally aggressive MPD officer impose his tough-cop techniques on our community.

Heller's Bakery will reopen on February 28. Heller's has been an institution in Mount Pleasant for 77 years. I remember when there were traffic jams outside the bakery on weekend mornings, as people drove from miles away to get Heller's superb baked goods.

In recent years, since the sale of the bakery by the original owners, Heller's has had a tough time. The crowds went away, the neighborhood changed, and the bakery didn't have the sales volume needed to survive.

Now, two brothers from Greece, Aleksander and Erland Duni, are fixing the place up and will try to restore the glory days of old. It will have more tables and sit-down space, attracting the coffee-and-doughnuts crowd as well as the baked-goods buyers.

The Mount Pleasant business district wants to draw more customers from the Mount Pleasant residential area. Many of us seldom patronize Mount Pleasant Street businesses – yes, including me – it's just too easy to hop into a car and go off to Cleveland Park or Tenleytown. Let's all make an effort to support our neighborhood businesses, and especially Heller's, Mount Pleasant's own neighborhood bakery, reborn.