

Jack's January report

There's been no ANC meeting since December 6, due to the holiday season. The next meeting will be on January 17.

For the past *nine years* I've been working on getting the Kenyon/Adams Mill/Irving intersection changed so that drivers can safely make **the left turn from westbound Kenyon to southbound Adams Mill**. Due to the peculiar geometry of that intersection, that turn is prohibited. But it's awkward getting to southbound Adams Mill Road, thence to the Zoo and Beach Drive, or to Adams Morgan, so many drivers ignore the left-turn prohibition signs and make what amounts to a U-turn in the intersection, or they make a left from the alley paralleling Kenyon, thinking (wrongly) that they're legally evading the left-turn ban.

The resolution of this problem is, after all these years, close at hand. I believe work will start in the early spring, revising the intersection to permit that left turn, as well as making improvements to the intersection at the end of the Beach Drive off ramp, and adding bike lanes.

A last-minute problem cropped up when DDOT rescinded its decision to move the bus stop on Irving at Kenyon to the Harvard Towers driveway. I never thought that that move was a good idea, because of the visibility limitations on that curve, but DDOT had agreed to do this, at the request of two ANC commissioners. That change threatened to delay the whole project, but a meeting of DDOT engineers with Commissioner Scott on December 20 resolved that problem, so the project is about ready to begin. But I won't really believe it until I see the work begin.

Moving the bus stop was supposed to provide easier access for the residents of the Harvard Towers, a District-owned building housing many elderly and disabled residents. Many of them make their way down Irving Street to the bus stop, a hazardous walk because there's no sidewalk, so they walk (or roll their wheelchairs) in the street. A jersey-wall barrier was put up in Irving Street in 2006 at the ANC's request, to give them **a pedestrian-safe route to the bus stop**.

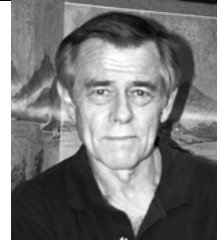
Unfortunately, over the years, the guide poles installed to divert traffic from the end of this jersey wall structure were shorn off by clumsy drivers, and evidently somebody at DDOT decided that the end of the jersey wall, exposed by the loss of those guide poles, was itself a hazard to traffic. Then, perhaps unaware of the purpose of that barrier, DDOT shoved the barriers at the bus stop end of the passageway up hard against the curb, firmly closing off the pedestrian path.

At the December 6 meeting, Commissioner Scott said that Towers residents who use walkers could negotiate that closure with some difficulty, but of course wheelchair users were out of luck, forced again to ride in the street, into oncoming traffic. On December 9 I sent a sharp protest to DDOT, objecting to the closure of this pedestrian route. DDOT listened, and on December 15 the jersey-wall barriers were moved back out away from the curb, and the pedestrian-safe path to the bus stop restored. DDOT engineers reviewed the situation with Commissioner Scott (who uses a wheelchair), and came to an agreement for a bus stop location that

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will better serve the Harvard Towers residents, connected to their driveway with a wheelchair-accessible sidewalk.

On December 17 a resident sent an e-mail complaint about **“Emergency No Parking” signs on Ingleside Terrace**. DC Water (formerly WASA) had posted several signs taking parking space on Ingleside for six days straight. I saw no sign of any work being done. This is all too often the case, and many times I've complained about District contractors taking more space than they need, for longer than they need, seldom with actual Public Space permits. They put up these posters and take over our scarce curbside parking space with little concern for the hardships imposed on residents.

An Ingleside resident tells me that the work was done, on the first day – but nobody took the no-parking signs down! So residents were significantly inconvenienced, for utterly no purpose. After the full six days, there were still signs posted, apparently abandoned in place by the contractor. There seems to be no penalty to the contractor for this abuse of the power to post no parking. My contact at DDOT Public Space, after investigating this incident, says this: “We will bring this up with both our inspectors and the utilities. Having signs up after work is completed does have an impact on the neighborhood, though it might not be a technical violation of a permit.” Well, it ought to be a violation!

The single positive note in this incident is that the agency concerned, DCWater, did identify itself on the no-parking placards, and provided a telephone contact number. This has been required by DC law since 2006, but that law has long been ignored by DC contractors.

A resident complained to me that a contractor working at his home had been ticketed for parking in an RPP zone, despite the display of a visitor's parking pass. The Parking Enforcement aide **claimed that our “permanent” visitor passes aren't valid for contractors**.

Bogus! DC Municipal Regulations 18, 2414.2 states that visitor passes are valid on commercial vehicles “only while the operator of the vehicle is actually involved in the performance of construction, maintenance, repair, or reconstruction work at an address on a residential permit parking street”. The implication is clear: *yes, the visitor's permits can be used by contractors*. I've asked Bill Howland, the head of DPW, to set the Parking Enforcement staff straight.

The PSA 301 meeting of December 28 was the last as part of the Third MPD District. **As of January 1, we are PSA 408, a**

remote southwest corner of the Fourth District, which begins here and extends north and east to the Maryland border. I call our remote PSA a “bump on the rump” of 4D. Council-member Graham says we're the “Guam” of the district. The commander of 4D, Kimberly Chesley-Missouri, knows that I'm unhappy about this change, and has asked me for a walking tour of Mount Pleasant. There's nothing wrong with her as 4D Commander. She's just following orders, and will make the best of the situation.

Mount Pleasant was in 4D before the 2004 MPD redistricting, but this is different. Back then, Mount Pleasant and Columbia Heights north of Harvard Street were both in 4D, so east and west of 16th Street were in the same district, using the same radio frequencies, answering to the same MPD brass, and working out of the same MPD station. With the transition to 3D in 2004, both of our neighborhoods were shifted, so we remained in the same MPD district as our Columbia Heights neighbors. *The current redistricting is the first to put east and west of 16th Street in different districts.* It should be obvious that we're closely connected to Columbia Heights, and a great deal of our criminal activity is due to young toughs crossing 16th Street to do their deeds, then rushing back across 16th when they're done. It's no accident that 80% of our street robberies occur within two blocks of 16th Street.

The MPD insists that this division of the MPD officers east and west of 16th won't impair coordination and communication across that boundary. I do not see how this change can fail to harm officer-to-officer communication. The ANC passed my December resolution objecting a second time to this transfer, but to no avail, of course. Chief Lanier is bent on making the change, and is impervious to neighborhood objections. “Community policing” doesn't include actually listening to what the community wants.

Speaking of Chief Lanier, she continues to assert that improvements in crime must be due to effective policing, not to anything else. Yes, **homicides are down, 108 in 2011, the lowest count in years.** But this decline in homicides began in 1993, almost two decades ago, first under Chief Thomas, and then under Chief Soulsby, and continuing under Chief Ramsey. It would have been quite remarkable if this steady decline hadn't continued under Chief Lanier.

Similar declines have been observed everywhere in the U.S. There's much speculation about why homicides have declined so, but it's evident that “improved police work” isn't the cause, not when this happens in all cities, whatever their police practices. One leading theory is that we were, with leaded gasoline, inadvertently inflicting lead poisoning, and consequent brain damage, on urban children. The phaseout of leaded gas, completed in 1995, sharply reduced the amount of lead in the air. As the children of the lead-free gasoline era reach the peak ages of male violence – the late teens and early twenties – the number of such young adults with lead-caused damage decreases, and with it, the number of homicides and other violent crimes. To quote one report in my files: “*A recent peer-reviewed study . . . shows that variations in childhood gasoline lead exposure from 1941 to 1986 explain about 90% of the variation in violent crime rates from 1960 to 1998*”. Chief Lanier never mentions such

factors, asserting that “Our positive results can be attributed to proactive patrol measures” and the like. She claims all the credit, dismissing external factors such as the reduction in environmental lead, or the end of the dreadful crack wars.

Well, but perhaps the point is, are you and I now safer on the streets? That's the clear message coming from the Chief, and from Mayor Gray, too. But it's not necessarily true.

The lower homicide count has little effect on us. Most homicides involve people who know each other, and for some reason decide to settle their disputes with a gun. (This is why the clearance rate for homicides is high. Start with the victim's acquaintances. Fully 98% of the homicides that are solved are solved because the perpetrator is either known from the start, or identified by someone who knows who did it. Forget fingerprints and other such forensic clues, which are TV mythology.)

On the other hand, robberies virtually always involve a stranger assaulting an innocent person. Furthermore, there are 40 times as many robberies in DC as there are homicides. In Mount Pleasant, there are 90 robberies for every homicide. You and I are far more likely to be a victim of a robbery, than to be a victim of a homicide. In fact, most “persons unknown to each other” homicides are the result of robberies “gone bad”, such as that of Gregory Shipe on Irving Street in 2005. Street robberies are by far the greatest threat of violence to ordinary residents.

Well, so, are robberies down? *No, they're not*, not in the District as a whole. The count of robberies in DC has been about 4000 per year since 2007, after rising from a low of 3057 in 2004. The average number of robberies over the past decade is 3800 per year; the preliminary count in 2011 is 4056 robberies. That's not an improvement, and if Chief Lanier's police practices are so effective at crime prevention, why are robberies increasing, not decreasing?

In Mount Pleasant, it is true, robberies have declined, from 72 in 2007 (Chief Lanier's first year), to 49 in 2011. In Columbia Heights, robberies have *increased* during this same period, from 258 to 297. Thus it appears that we're safer from street crime in Mount Pleasant, but only here in Mount Pleasant, and mainly west of 18th Street.

We finally heard back in December from the DC Auditor concerning our **quarterly financial report**, turned in last April: *zero disallowed expenditures*, my seventh straight quarterly report as ANC Treasurer with that result. We ANC commissions work under close auditor scrutiny, which is certainly okay, especially considering that we're all amateurs, and we have difficulty with the nuances of the DC Code. Example: purchasing “refreshments” for ANC meetings is okay, but purchasing “food” for ANC meetings is forbidden. Junk food like cookies is okay, but anything that is actually nutritious is not, because that might be considered a “meal”. Yes, we got burned on that, once.

The renovated and expanded **Mount Pleasant Library** will open in “the spring of 2012”.

The next *business* meeting of the ANC will be on **Tuesday, January 17, 2012, 7:00 pm.**