

Jack's January report

At the December 15 meeting, the ANC:

- Advised DDOT to consider conversion of the right lane of westbound Klingle Road, from the Adams Mill Road intersection to the Beach Drive turnoff, to bicyclist and pedestrian use;
- Advised the Mayor, and the District Council, to fully fund the modernization of Bancroft Elementary School in the FY2017 budget;
- Advised the National Zoo that an 8 AM opening time for the gates on the east edge of the Zoo will impose a substantial hardship on residents east of the Zoo;
- Supported a “special exception” for 1861 Ingleside Terrace, to permit a rear deck;
- Advised the HPRB to postpone consideration of a permit application for 1716 Hobart Street, to allow more time for consideration here;
- Reaffirmed its opposition to the proposed merger of Exelon and Pepco.

It's January, the month of **cold, dark days**. But we're already beginning to gain on sunrise, now two minutes earlier than earlier in January. Sunset has already been getting later, and is now nearly half an hour later than in early December. Day-light saving time arrives on March 13.

Mount Pleasant is right next to Rock Creek Park, and yet **it is not easy for residents to walk or bike to the park**. Park Road is dangerous for pedestrians and bicyclists. (Yes, we've asked for sidewalks, but the National Park Service won't allow it.) The route through the Zoo is safe, but isn't always available. On Klingle Road there's a sidewalk only on the south side, “Pedestrians Prohibited” on the north. How does one get kids safely into Rock Creek Park, on their bicycles?

With the work being done lately on the mineral oil leak, the westbound lanes of Klingle have been closed to traffic, being occupied by work vehicles and excavations. This has shown that vehicular traffic does not need two lanes westbound on Klingle. So, why not take one of the two lanes and make it into safe access to the park for pedestrians and bicyclists? That's what my resolution asks.

DDOT will study the traffic situation thoroughly, of course, and I'm sure they'll come to the same conclusion. So I am optimistic that this will, some day, come to pass. The Klingle Road access would couple nicely to the Rock Creek Park bike path, and to the Klingle Valley Trail, which is expected to be completed in December.

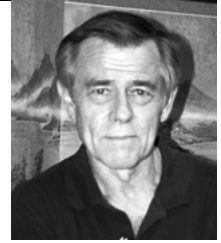
I noted last month that only half the ANCs in DC give out grants. In fact, only 14 of the 40 District ANCs now give out grants, one in three, and the total amount handed out as grants has dropped by half, from \$150,000 in 2012 to \$75,000 in 2014. ANCs are evidently getting out of the grants business, I presume due to the troubles encountered with grants. We're not very good at it.

In a related matter, our chairperson recently proposed that the ANC put on some community events in Lamont Park, paying the park fees, and local musical groups, for the events. I pointed out that this use of ANC funds would be illegal. Why? The rules are intended to prevent ANC commissioners

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from using any funds for their personal benefit, and “entertainment” is considered to be such an abuse.

The restrictions on the use of ANC funds are full of such surprising limitations. We were surprised last spring to discover that our purchase of toys as gifts for children at last year's holiday party was illegal. Why? Well, ANC funds are supposed to benefit all of the community – and such a gift benefits only the recipient, not everyone. So, our expenditure was “disallowed”, an assertion that the \$229 we spent for gift toys was a *misuse of public funds*.

It's hard enough for us, as in the cases of musical events in Lamont Park, or Christmas gifts for neighborhood children, to know what's allowed, and what's prohibited, in the use of ANC funds. Now, hand a cash grant to a neighborhood group, and how are they to know what's allowed, and what's not? It's no wonder that ANC grants have a terrible “disallowed” rate, such as the 78% experienced by the Columbia Heights ANC in their recent audit.

The stringent requirements for documentation of expenditures are even more troublesome. In FY2015 we spent \$1576 for “public purposes” in Mount Pleasant, of which 75% was disallowed, due mainly to the documentation of the use of the funds being deemed inadequate by the District Auditor. Currently I'm preparing the quarterly financial report for the Auditor, and the 16 checks we wrote during the quarter required 60 “supporting documents”. Such is the nature of dealing with DC Government funds.

As ANC1D Treasurer for seven of the past eight fiscal years, I've done a passable job of keeping our expenditures legal. Overall, ANCs have a disallowance rate of 4.6%. Our ANC, over the past eight fiscal years, has had 2.6% of its expenditures disallowed by the DC Auditor.

The commission appears to be insistent on starting up a grants program, despite my warnings of the problems with grants. Okay, I suppose, but someone else will have to be ANC1D Treasurer.

From the odors in the air, it's evident that some Mount Pleasant residents continue to **heat their homes with oil**. We switched to gas many years ago, because it was cleaner, and because one doesn't have to worry about keeping that ugly oil tank full. Aside from that, the economics have, in recent years, become compelling. Gas heat now costs about *half as much* as oil heat. Totalled over a winter, that's a substantial difference, and it won't be very many years before one recovers the cost of conversion.

Back before I was on the ANC, I complained that one couldn't know what was on the ANC's meeting agenda before the meeting, but had to attend the meeting to find out. One wants to know if a topic of particular importance is coming up, to know whether one should attend the meeting, or not. Nobody wants to blow an evening at the meeting only to have nothing of great interest discussed. Nor does one appreciate skipping an ANC meeting, only to discover that something very important was the subject of an ANC resolution.

So I work hard at providing a complete list of expected topics on the ANC1D web site. There one will find the "agenda", the brief list of topics, and the "notes", which includes details, including proposed resolution texts.

I consider it improper and inconsiderate for a commissioner to show up at the meeting with topics that have not been published before the meeting. It's not right for us to fail to tell the public what we're going to take up at the monthly meeting. I point out that, for every resident attending the monthly meeting, there are roughly 500 Mount Pleasant residents not present. It's wrong for us to make decisions concerning the neighborhood without warning to residents that we're going to consider such decisions, and if they want their opinions to be known, then they should either communicate their views to the commission, or attend the meeting.

The December ANC meeting brought about another aspect to this problem of prior notification to the public. A band of advocates attending the meeting insisted that we pass their resolution reaffirming opposition to the Pepco/Exelon merger. We had passed such a resolution last April, but of course Exelon has made some changes, and the Mayor and District Council are now battling over that revised merger proposal. (Neither the Mayor nor the Councilmembers are going to be influenced by what this ANC says.)

That April resolution had been properly announced to the public via our published agenda, but this December "reaffirmation" was not. I objected that we hadn't had time to study the revised offer, and it was improper for us to judge the matter without such a study. More to the present point, no one outside that meeting room could know, from our published agenda, that this topic was going to come up. It's not right to hear only one side of any issue, while contrary opinions are given no opportunity to be heard. So, even though I was the author of that first resolution opposing the Exelon merger, I voted "no" on this "reaffirmation", because of these shortcomings in the process.

On December 11, DDOT published "Proposed Rulemaking" that would, among other things, **greatly increase traffic violation fines.** Most of the publicity about these increased fines has focused, unfortunately, on the \$1000 fine for driving 25 mph or more above the posted limit. No rational person does that, so that doesn't really matter to us residents. What may matter is the fine for "failure to come to a complete stop before turning [right on red]". Currently a hefty \$50, this would become \$200. Similarly, doing a right-on-red where that maneuver is prohibited would be \$200, versus the present \$50. Also, a new violation is created:

"failure to yield right-of-way to transit bus", the fine a stunning \$500.

The notion behind these increased fines is that they will bring about greater compliance with the traffic laws. DDOT seems to think that DC drivers are so fat-cat-wealthy that they (we) shrug off \$50 fines, and must be threatened with fines of \$200 or more in order to persuade them (us) to respect traffic laws.

That theory is wrong, on two counts. First, I know of no one who is unbothered by a \$50 fine. Even for residents who can pay the fine with ease, it's a serious shot. Second, enforcement of these regulations is negligible, so the de facto fine is zero, whatever the fine is on paper. Hence, these steep fines will not, in my opinion, bring about better driver behavior. Quadrupling the fines cannot compensate for inadequate enforcement.

But presumably somebody will be socked with these hefty fines, in the weird lottery that is traffic law enforcement in the District. Again, some of us can pay a \$200 ticket without too much pain. But for many residents, that's a mortal blow to the family budget. Plenty of DC residents would find a \$50 ticket devastating. Make that \$200, and even more punishment would be inflicted, not just on the driver involved, but on their families.

I introduced a resolution at the December meeting to protest these steeply increased fines, and to propose that the size of fines be adjusted to the finances of the violator (as is done in some European countries). But there wasn't time for a proper discussion of the resolution, as the 9 pm library closing time forces us to stop the meeting at 8:45 pm. This resolution will be "unfinished business" at the January ANC meeting. Fortunately, DDOT has extended the deadline for responses to January 31.

For nearly seven years now I've been pressing for a **speed camera for the 2000 block of Park Road**, where drivers emerge from Rock Creek Park at speed, and drivers coming around the corner from Mount Pleasant speed up when they see that inviting, open road ahead. There are no houses on the southwest side, and the houses on the northeast side are high above the street, so this block appears to be already out of the congestion of Mount Pleasant, inviting speed.

The MPD has explicitly promised that camera, but it's never quite come about, and now the manager who made that promise has gone to another job. On January 4 I met with the new program manager, Mr Lamont Hilton, on the site. He was visibly impressed by the speeds reached by drivers on that block. He does want to make speed measurements on that block, which I am certain will confirm the need for the camera. I am confident now that we will, before very long, get it.

It is time to renew applications for **Visitor Parking Passes.** These are not automatically sent out to all households, but must be applied for on-line, on the DDOT website.

The next meeting of the ANC will be on Tuesday, **January 26, 7:00 pm, at the Mount Pleasant Library.**