

Jack's July report

At the June meeting, the ANC did the following:

- Advised DDOT to make changes at the 16th Street crossing of Columbia Road to enhance pedestrian safety.

I mentioned last month that the Mount Pleasant Library had failed to make the meeting room reservations which they had promised the ANC late last year. That forced us into a far too small meeting room in May, and also to have our June meeting on Wednesday, instead of the normal Tuesday. But now we (presumably) have the correct meeting room reservations, so we'll be okay for the remainder of 2019.

Only three of the five commissioners were able to attend the **June ANC1D meeting**. The only New Business on the agenda was a pair of resolutions by Commissioner Chelsea Allinger addressing pedestrian and bicyclist issues along the border with Adams Morgan. Chelsea was absent, so Commissioner Robin Sandenburgh introduced the resolutions on her behalf.

The first resolution dealt with the pedestrian crosswalk across Columbia Road at 16th Street. That's a complex intersection, and pedestrian crossing can be difficult, even dangerous. This resolution passed easily.

The second resolution dealt with the left turn from eastbound Columbia Road onto Harvard Street, and the bike lane along Harvard Street to the Zoo. Residents of Harvard Street attended the meeting to protest certain aspects of that resolution. It was evident that the proposal needed more work, and publicity, and I moved that it be tabled until the July meeting. My motion to table was approved, 3 to 0.

Harvard Street is a popular morning commuter route from 16th Street to Adams Mill Road, and on to Beach Drive. As is true for all the roads which carry east-west through traffic across Mount Pleasant – Park Road, Irving Street, Walbridge Place – traffic speeds are troubling. Chelsea proposed an effort to “calm” traffic on Harvard by swapping the bike lane and the parking lane, putting the parked cars up close to the traffic lane, and the bikes between the parked cars and the curb.

Investigation after the meeting revealed a problem with the notion. Simply putting a narrow bike lane between a line of parked cars and the curb puts bicyclists in danger of having a car door suddenly opening in front of them (and bicyclists can make pretty good speed going downhill). So DC requires a median barrier between the parked cars and the bike track, ideally three feet wide, a minimum of two feet wide.

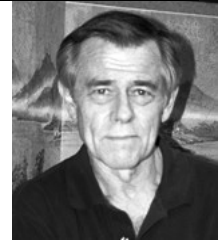
But that adds two or three feet to the space taken up by parking lane plus bike lane, and that's got to come out of the traffic lane. The traffic lane being 11 feet wide now, the change would reduce this width to 8 or 9 feet. No doubt that would slow traffic, but it's below the minimum width of 10 feet required for this category of street, classified a “collector”. So the proposal to slow traffic by moving the bike lane to the curb isn't feasible.

The next meeting of the ANC will be on Tuesday, July 23, 7:00 pm, at the Mount Pleasant Library.

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While the stated purpose of the resolution was “traffic calming”,

transforming the bike lane into a

bike track, with a barrier of parked cars between the bicyclists and traffic, was itself an attractive notion.

However, given the minimum width requirement for the traffic lane, the bike track was impossible – unless one eliminates the car parking, building instead a barrier-protected bike track like those on Klinge Road.

That would be nice, and, as a longtime bicyclist and onetime bike commuter, I certainly perceive the attractiveness of it. But is it worth the loss of as many as 70 parking spaces? These serve especially the apartment-house residents of Lanier Heights. How are these residents to make up the loss of so much curbside parking?

A certain advocate of non-auto transportation has made his position clear: “parking must be removed. Those are the geometries of the street. It's a zero-sum choice, and revelatory of what your Commission values: storage of cars or safety”.

Now, being a bicyclist, I know rather well the risks of biking on city streets (three emergency-room visits, one hospital stay). But I think it's unreasonable to demand that curbside parking should be removed whenever marginally increased bicyclist safety might result. That's a prescription for eliminating practically all curbside parking, anywhere.

For example: we could build a really nice bike track down Park Road, all the way from Mount Pleasant Street to Walbridge Place, by converting the parking lane to a bike track. Park Road is a very bicyclist-unfriendly road, but bicyclists use it regularly, there being few alternative east-west routes across Mount Pleasant. I think there's considerably more justification for a Park Road bike track than for the Harvard Street bike track (where there's already a bike lane).

But that would eliminate perhaps 60 curbside parking spots. I wouldn't support that, the residential need for curbside parking in this neighborhood being too great, and the number of bicyclists benefiting from a bike track too small. Ditto the bike track on Harvard: the cost, in lost curbside parking, is too great, in proportion to the public benefit achieved.

With the **heavy rains** recently, there's been discussion of water-permeable pavement here, to reduce the runoff from paved areas. I was pleased to see that the parking area behind the new condos at 1842-1844 Monroe Street is built with permeable blocks, and a water-storage subsurface, to capture and hold rainwater, rather than letting it run off into the alley.

The **Oakwood Terrace project** is again on the HPRB calendar, tentatively to be heard at their July 25 meeting. This project was first announced by the HPO for the April meeting of the HPRB. That didn't happen, and the project hearing was announced for the May HPRB meeting. Then it appeared on the calendar for their June meeting. And now it's announced for July, three months later than first scheduled.

I mention this because, in May, certain residents pressed the ANC to request a postponement of the HPRB hearing on this property, knowing that we have some right to request a delay. But in fact the HPO will allow an ANC a postponement only if it's necessary in order that there be an ANC public meeting before the HPRB hearing. Since we had gotten notice of the Oakwood Terrace hearing in early April, the proposed May HPRB hearing date permitted this ANC to consider the topic at our April and May meetings (the May meeting occurring two days before the HPRB hearing). Hence, the HPO would absolutely not allow the ANC a postponement beyond May, the ANC having had ample opportunity for public meetings on the topic.

Now, it turns out that the HPRB hearing was in fact postponed, but not because of any ANC request. The HPO reports that “neighbors were not given mailed notice from HPO because the building site does not include the southernmost lot and by not including the southernmost lot when selecting for notice recipients, most [sic] all neighbors were left off. HPO is correcting the issue and will mail out a new notice”.

So the HPRB hearing was set back to, as it happens, July. The developer is angry at these repeated delays, and, oddly, blames the ANC, even though we had made no request for postponement, and had nothing to do with it. (I believe that's the reason her lawyer slapped us with a FOIA demand.) Simultaneously the neighbors who wanted us to request a delay are annoyed that we declined to do so. So both sides seem to be mad at the ANC, the neighbors because we wouldn't request a delay, the developer because she was told that we had. Sometimes we just can't win.

Some of our row houses have **slate roofs**, and some of those old slate roofs are in need of repair. Slate is expensive stuff, and there are pretty good replicas of slate available at much lower cost.

There's a house on Park Road where the slate has been replaced with imitation slate, as part of an overall renovation project. The Historic Preservation Office (HPO) objects: “the faux slates can be easily picked out in comparison to the real ones next door, for differences in color, finish and dimension”. That statement implies that the imitation slate does pass as real slate, and the only problem here is that it doesn't precisely match the old slate next door. Perhaps if the neighbor had replaced his slate at the same time with the same imitation slate, then all would be well.

It's not as if the owner had replaced the slate with something inferior, such as asphalt shingles. The new imitation slate roofing, located high above the street, looks fine to anyone but a historic preservation specialist. Its only problem seems to be that it is not a perfect match to its (deteriorated) neighbor. Okay, but is it not “compatible with the character

of the historic district”, if it looks like real slate from the street?

The law says that, if an alteration is “compatible”, then it's allowed. The HPO's argument that it no longer matches its unimproved neighbor amounts to a prohibition on alterations, even if “compatible”. That's contrary to the District's historic preservation law.

Burglaries continue their remarkable decline in our neighborhood. Halfway through 2019, there have been just four burglaries in Mount Pleasant, and only one of those has been west of 17th Street.

That's not an indication that we can be careless about home security. Petty theft, and theft from auto, remain problems. Still, it's nice to have to worry less about your home when you're away, now that the burglary rate is down by 90 percent from what it was just seven or eight years ago.

Way back in September of 2018, the residents of the **2000 block of Park Road** (from the Pierce Mill intersection down to the bridge into Rock Creek Park) petitioned for Residential Permit Parking for their block. Because almost all of Mount Pleasant is now RPP-zoned, but their block wasn't, a considerable number of non-RPP cars were taking up block parking. What would be a minor problem if distributed evenly around the neighborhood, is a big problem when concentrated on a few blocks.

When I surveyed parking on that block last fall, I found that 40 percent of the cars parked there during the day had non-DC tags. That's the central problem: there are residents of Mount Pleasant who do not get their cars registered in DC, despite the legal requirement to do so, and so cannot get RPP permits, and must seek out blocks like this to avoid RPP violation tickets.

At length, the RPP signs have gone up on that block – both sides of the street. We'll see how many of those non-permit cars will now be moved to nearby, unzoned blocks. Fearing a surge of those cars onto their blocks, residents of Pierce Mill Road and Rosemount Avenue have petitioned for RPP.

That's what drives expansion of RPP in a neighborhood – the displacement of non-permit cars from newly zoned blocks to whatever blocks remain unzoned. It's an absurd policy. Either the whole neighborhood should be RPP-zoned, or none of it – not this block-by-block nonsense. Way back in 2003, a DDOT Parking Task Force condemned this block-by-block system, but to no avail.

I have requested RPP status for Klinge Road, so residents of that block will be allowed to purchase RPP permits, even though their block cannot be RPP-zoned, having no curbside parking.

Got a note that a “**a quick casual Mexican restaurant**” may soon be opening on Mount Pleasant Street. I've assured the entrepreneur that our ANC will be helpful to and supportive of a new restaurant in our neighborhood. I'll have more information on this in my next newsletter (September).