

Jack's June report

At the May ANC1D business meeting – held via the internet, employing “Zoom” software – the ANC did the following:

- Authorized spending up to \$2,120 to support the removal of invasive species along the Piney Branch at Ingleside site;
- Authorized spending up to \$13,550 for the purchase of hand sanitizer to be distributed to economically vulnerable and/or medically high-risk households in and near Mount Pleasant;
- Authorized spending up to \$16,000 for the purchase of multi-ply, reusable cloth face masks to be distributed to economically vulnerable and/or medically high-risk households in and near Mount Pleasant;
- Offered detailed advice to the HPRB concerning the proposed development on Oakwood Terrace.

Those May meeting actions committed a great deal of money, more than \$30,000 of public funds. Our stipend from the DC Government totals about \$13,900 a year, of which only about \$4,000 is needed for ANC operating expenses. That leaves a surplus of about \$9,000 a year that is available for “public purpose” expenditures.

The ANC has in the past found it very difficult to spend this modest surplus, because the rules governing ANC spending are strict, and unreasonable, due to the broad interpretation of vaguely written restrictions. For example, the ANC regulations prohibit the use of ANC funds to purchase “meals”. The intent was, I believe, to prevent us ANC commissioners from buying fancy dinners for ourselves. But the reading by the District lawyers is to prohibit the use of ANC funds to purchase food for anybody, including needy members of the public. We've been punished in the past for purchasing meeting snacks that, according to the DC Auditor, too closely resembled “meals”.

As a result of these stringent restrictions, that \$9,000 a year surplus has built up, over the years, into a bank account exceeding \$100,000. **The current coronavirus emergency**, a financial catastrophe for many residents, is an opportunity to make good use of those accumulated funds. Largely through the extraordinary work of Commissioner Chelsea Allinger, arrangements have been made to purchase large amounts of hand sanitizer, and large numbers of face masks, for the low-income residents of Mount Pleasant.

The expenditures authorized at the May meeting amount to three years of ANC1D's available funds.

Concerning **the ban on food purchases**, in May the District Council passed legislation allowing ANCs, during a declared District emergency, to bypass the ban: *“notwithstanding any provision of District law, during a period for which a public health emergency has been declared by the Mayor . . . a Commission may approve grants to organizations for the purpose of providing humanitarian relief, including food or supplies, during the public health emergency”*.

So that's what we'll do at the upcoming monthly meeting. In particular, there have been long lines for free food at the Spanish Catholic Center, the line beginning on Monroe Street, proceeding up 17th, then down Park Road, then

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through the Sacred Heart school grounds, to the back door of the Center. The Center is currently providing food for hundreds of nearby families. Courtesy of the new law, we'll be able to use our funds to help, as Commissioner Allinger will propose at the June meeting.

The **public health emergency** declared in the District by Mayor Bowser has been extended to July 24. Gatherings of more than 10 persons remain prohibited, despite the relaxation, as of May 29, of the most stringent mitigation measures. That means that our ANC meetings of June 23 and July 21 will have to be held via the internet, using Zoom, as was done for the May meeting. For some residents, this is a great convenience, as they can “attend” an ANC meeting without leaving home. But for the internet-disadvantaged, it is a problem, and we worry about our accessibility to all of the public under these conditions.

Another thing affected by the coronavirus emergency is the **upcoming ANC election**. In order to be on the November ballot, would-be ANC commissioners, including us incumbents, must get 25 signatures on petitions to be turned in to the Board of Elections in August. The problem at the moment is that going door-to-door to collect signatures isn't a great idea right now, with everyone worrying about the virus.

So the ANC rules have been modified to require just 10 signatures, and those can be obtained via the internet. The details of how this is to be done will become clear later this month, when the Board of Elections makes the petition forms available.

As always, all five ANC seats here are up for election. I don't know what the other incumbent commissioners plan, but I intend to run for another two-year term on this ANC.

On May 21 there was an internet-based community meeting concerning the proposed **“improvements” to the little park at 19th and Lamont**. Because of the coronavirus state of emergency, this meeting had to be held via the internet, using Webex, the District Government's preferred meeting software. For many residents, this is more convenient than meeting at the Library, blocks away from this park. But some residents don't have good internet access, or aren't comfortable with internet communications, so that's a worrisome shortcoming.

The “minimum” goals of the project are to “address existing erosion issues, prevent further erosion, tree assessment / pruning, and provide ADA accessibility into the space.”

Erosion is currently a dreadful problem, and the community survey of last year affirmed that fixing the erosion problem

should be a top priority. A deep trench has been cut by erosion into the ground at the alley end of the pedestrian walkway. Every rainstorm deepens the erosion trench further, more earth washed into the street.

Making the park ADA-accessible will be difficult, due to its steep slope, dropping 19 feet between the 19th Street sidewalk and the alley. The slope makes it a popular sledding hill, of course, and the continuation of its availability for winter-time sledding was given a high priority by the neighborhood survey.

We expect to see, in early July, first cuts at a park design, reconciling, it is hoped, the conflicting requirements for this troublesome location. Then there will be a community meeting, a meeting which must again be held via the internet, using Webex.

The eternal **development project on Oakwood Terrace**, on the narrow strip of land between Oakwood Terrace and 17th Street, continues, receiving on May 28 yet another modest expression of support from the Historic Preservation Review Board (HPRB): “The Board determined that the subdivision to combine two of the three lots should be cleared as consistent with the purposes of the preservation law. The Board supported the compatibility of the footprint and massing of the new construction, but requested that the project return for review of its development to address issues raised in the staff report and to organize the windows more regularly. It requested sections or three-dimensional modeling of the project. Vote: 5-0.”

That project has been under review since 2010. Some of the nearby residents hate the thought of anything being built on that difficult lot. Others agree, though, that the property owner has a right to build on the lot, much as they might prefer the lot be left undeveloped. Some have said that they would welcome a large house being built on the lot, something matching the single-family houses on 17th, rather than the row houses proposed. But the area is zoned for row houses, the style most characteristic of Mount Pleasant. The property owner has reduced the size of the proposed structure from three row houses to two.



Deep erosion in the park at 19th and Lamont

The proposed development at **3215 Mount Pleasant Street**, currently a laundromat, was reviewed by the HPRB on June 4. The developer has made substantial changes to the original design, responding to requests that the structure resemble the traditional architecture of the Mount Pleasant business strip.

“The Board approved as compatible the four-story concept as presented in the alternate option, with the fourth floor of lighter-colored brick set back from the façade and its forward volume set several feet forward of the interior court. The approval is subject to the condition that the design be further developed and reviewed by staff, including the development of some brick detail on the side of the northwest corner of the fourth floor and a more robust storefront cornice if the present one is to be replaced. Vote 6-0.”

I continue to struggle with the problem of **the delivery of my newsletter** to the residents of my ANC district. The March, April, and May issues were all posted on the internet only, as my usual hand-delivery to seven hundred residences was prohibited by the “stay at home” command of the coronavirus state of emergency.

Well, as of May 29, the “stay at home” mandate has been lifted, but still, venturing out in public is problematic, as the virus continues to spread. Emily and I have to be especially careful, because the consequences of infection would be especially serious for us, at our ages.

I really want to resume hand delivery. But I mustn't do anything that would put my wife's health, and life, at risk. So, we will see about this issue, and future issues. I do hope people are able to get my newsletter on the internet. A link is posted on the NextDoor chat site, every month.

Perhaps this is a good time to remind residents that this newsletter is entirely my own effort – the ANC has nothing to do with it – and funding for it is entirely out of my own pocket. I decline any ANC funds for it, because I won't allow any other commissioners to claim a right to govern its content. (Yes, that has happened.) Residents have kindly offered donations to help cover my costs, but no, I don't need the help.

The **default speed limit** on our narrow residential streets, where no limit is posted, has been 25 mph for many years. As of June 1 this default limit is 20 mph. The order imposing this new limit is to expire in September, but I expect this lower limit to be made permanent.

The key indicator of a 20-mph street is the absence of a center line. The lower speed limit does not apply to, for example, Park Road.

Will this law have any effect? I think not. Cautious drivers rarely exceed 20 mph anyway on our narrow residential streets. And aggressive drivers aren't going to be compelled to be any less aggressive, given that this limit won't come with any effective enforcement.

The June meeting of the ANC will take place at 7 pm, June 23. Due to the ban on gatherings of more than 10 persons, it will be a “virtual” meeting, accessible via the internet, using Zoom software.