

Jack's May report

At the April ANC1D business meeting, the ANC did the following:

- Advised the Board of Zoning Adjustment (BZA) to approve a “special exception” to permit a deck on the rear of 3218 Walbridge Place;
- Advised the Alcoholic Beverage Regulation Administration (ABRA) to approve renewals of liquor licenses at Lee-Irving Wine and Spirits and the Woodner Market;
- Approved a grant of \$7500 to Food for All, to continue food assistance for Mount Pleasant families suffering hardships due to the covid-19 pandemic;
- Advised the District Department of Transportation (DDOT) Public Space Committee to approve the permit application for the improvements at the 19th and Lamont park;
- Advised the Historic Preservation Review Board (HPRB) to allow the removal of some of the less-visible balconies of the Renaissance (3060 16th Street).

Concerning **the balconies on the Renaissance building** (3060 16th St), the ANC resolution supported the removal of several that are on the back of the building, not on the 16th Street frontage, and that are not very visible from Mount Pleasant Street. The HPRB seems to be open to that consideration, despite deeming the balconies “character-defining features”.

The ANC raised an unusual argument in favor of allowing the removal of balconies: “ANC 1D believes, however, that HPRB’s mandate to protect the 'character of the historic district' compels it to make a decision that supports the continued existence of affordable homeownership through the historic Kenesaw Cooperative”.

The Board wants to see more detail about the appearance of the areas of balcony removal before approving any request. They are sympathetic to the financial plight of the owner-residents, who are not high-income folks. So this will come up at the HPRB again, and the ANC will again be supportive of the resident-owners.

Input from the ANC was solicited for the **planned improvements at the 1900 Lamont park**. The commission approved the plans at the April meeting, by a vote of 4 to 0, with one abstention – me. I recused myself from the vote, because of a possible perception of a financial interest in the matter. Clearly a nice park next door to my house will be a more attractive neighbor than the current barren, erosion-ridden area. That could enhance the market value of my own house – hence the possible financial conflict of interest. (Only financial conflicts matter, not personal conflicts, which would be all too common among ANCs.)

So I abstained. Then, as ANC1D Secretary, I designated the permit application “approved” by the ANC on the DDOT TOPS website, on April 23.

The due date for that ANC submission was May 13. The topic is on the preliminary agenda for the May 27 meeting of the DDOT Public Space Committee, where I presume it will be readily approved.

It seems clear that no actual work can be done until that DDOT approval is in place. I think it's unfortunate that this

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“park” is under DDOT jurisdiction, as if it's a portion of Lamont Street, and not parkland. What does DDOT know about parks? Why should the Department of Transportation be telling the Department of Parks and Recreation what they may, and may not, do with this park? But DDOT declines to relinquish its role as “owner” of this lot, acquired by the District in 1911, intended to be a continuation of Lamont Street.

There's much discussion on the NextDoor site about the **proposal for a dog park** in the little triangle park on Park Road at Mount Pleasant Street. As is so often the case, people who live close by the location don't want it to be a dog park, while people who don't live close by, do.

I think there are many questions about the suitability of the site for a dog park. It's quite small, and includes a busy bus stop. Dog park regulations call for dog parks to be completely surrounded by five-foot fencing, with a double gate for entry. What will that look like, on that island adjacent to Park Road? I expect the historic preservationists of Mount Pleasant to have something to say about it.

Personally, I'm very fond of dogs, and I do enjoy watching dogs run and play. But I recognize the problems that can come with dogs, such as barking. It seems to me that people who live immediately adjacent to this park should have special weight in this consideration. It's one thing to have a dog park a block or two away; it's something else to have a dog park so close by that it's an unavoidable daily presence. What I'd really like to see at this point is a formal judgment by DPR of the suitability of this site for a dog park. If they deem it unsuitable, then everything else is a waste of time.

Oh, and DDOT's involved too. On the Park Road side of this triangle, everything within 30 feet of the curb is DDOT right-of-way (for a wider Park Road). So, as in the case of 1900 Lamont, DDOT's approval will be required, even though this has nothing to do with “transportation”.

On the topic of dogs – as I walk around Mount Pleasant, I sometimes come across **very aggressive, apparently vicious dogs**. Now, a dog barking at a passerby is not a violation of law. A dog snarling and leaping and apparently attempting to escape a yard in order to attack a pedestrian, walking by on public space, is. Here's the law: no dog owner “shall permit the dog to be confined in any yard or other enclosure . . . in a manner that allows the dog to bite or menace persons lawfully using any public street, highway, or public space”. That includes our alleys. We ought to be able to walk through our alleys without worrying that an aggressive dog will leap over its fence and attack.

Mayor Bowser is about to announce **substantial relaxation of the pandemic mitigation restrictions** on May 20. An end to the state of emergency could be not far off. When that happens, our monthly ANC meetings will resume at the Mount Pleasant Library.

But I wonder – are traditional in-person meetings preferable, when having “virtual” meetings via Zoom makes public attendance so easy? Attending via Zoom allows a resident to participate without leaving home. You don't have to hike to the Library, or drive and look for parking, and then idly wait, seated in the audience, for the meeting to start.

I think we on the ANC should devise a way for residents to participate from home, even when we're meeting at the Library. Some years ago I tried making our meetings accessible via the internet, but the technology was not yet ready. La Casa, where we had our meetings, did not have a good WiFi connection, and meeting software such as Zoom and Webex did not yet exist (I was trying to do it with Skype). Now the technology is ready for public access to our meetings via the internet, so we really must arrange for that.

Much of the DC Government seems to have ground to a halt during the covid pandemic. There is, for example, **the matter of our Visitor Parking Passes (VPPs)**. DC is working on an on-line system to replace getting temporary visitor passes from an MPD station, and also (I think) to replace the passes that were mailed out every year to residents.

Currently, we're to continue using our 2020 VPPs: *“residents should continue to use the existing 2020 Visitor Parking Pass (VPP) into 2021. The District plans to launch a streamlined digital parking permit program in 2021.”*

Said “streamlined” program is now in the pilot-test stage, and ANC1D is part of that limited program: *“During the live testing, residents who live in ANC 6B in South Capitol Hill and ANC 1D in Mount Pleasant and their guests can use the digital portal and provide feedback on its functionality and accessibility.”* The pilot site is here: ddot.parking@dc.gov. Supposedly it will open to all of DC on July 1.

I tried it . . . in my opinion, this system needs work.

Remember my **front-steps handrails**, and my great problems in getting DDOT permits for them? Such things ought to be code requirements, not exceptional things requiring careful review for permits. The HPO and the DCRA were no problem for my permits, signing off without a moment's delay. But DDOT, which seems to have taken over the DCRA's title of the District's most obstructive bureaucracy, held up my permit for more than four months, demanding more and more documentation, culminating in a Traffic Control Plan, which was a total permit-stopper.

And yet, on April 1 (April Fool?), the permit arrived here, and my handrails are up, very much pleasing my wife.

What brought about the sudden approval of my permit application, after months of delay? I suspect that somebody higher up in the food chain at DDOT discovered what was going on, and ordered a stop to it.

The current DDOT director is Mr. Everett Lott, Acting Director just since February 10. His incumbency has started with what appears to be a stumble regarding this ANC.

The **Shrine of the Sacred Heart** is right across 16th Street from us. Separating it from 16th is a small triangle park. Now, before 2008, in order to make the left turn from northbound 16th Street onto Park Road, we had to go to the right off 16th, pass between the church and the triangle park, take the left onto Park, and then wait for the light to cross 16th.

The reason for this tedious roundabout left turn was to avoid northbound 16th Street traffic from being impeded by drivers stopped in the left lane, waiting to make the left turn directly onto Park Road. As is commonly the case at DDOT, expediting commuter traffic to the suburbs was given priority over living conditions in the city.

Years ago, I and another ANC commissioner, Gregg Edwards, decided that the little park across the street from the church should no longer be surrounded by traffic, but should be readily accessible to pedestrians crossing from the church. Furthermore, if traffic in front of the church could be eliminated, then the park could become a pleasant extension to the area of the Shrine, providing more space for church-goers, and for the mercado that sets up in front of the church on weekends.

So, in 2008, a resolution from this ANC persuaded DDOT to end of the ban on the left turn directly from 16th, and the requirement to make the park roundabout. This greatly reduced traffic on Pine Street/Sacred Heart Way, in front of the church. DDOT also added a left-turn phase to the traffic light on 16th to facilitate that turn.

Lately DDOT has made some changes that will tend, unfortunately, to increase traffic in front of the Shrine. This brought a protest from the Columbia Heights ANC, which also wants less traffic in front of the church, not more. DDOT then claimed “that there is and has always been ANC support for this change”, specifically citing our ANC.

Well, no, we did not! Our position, stated in the 2008 resolution, is perfectly clear: *“with the traffic on Pine reduced to negligible levels, the small park across from the Shrine of the Sacred Heart will become easily accessible by foot. . . That small park is very seldom used at this time, perhaps because it is surrounded on all three sides by traffic. Eliminating the roundabout, and consequently practically eliminating the traffic on Pine, will convert this automobile-dominated area into a pedestrian-friendly bit of parkland.”*

DDOT cites an ANC1D resolution from 2018 that called for the roundabout turn to be “optimized to ease traffic backup on Park Road between 14th and 16th”. That meant further reducing traffic on Pine, traffic which added to the backups at the 16th Street light. DDOT somehow read that to imply that we wanted more traffic on Pine Street. No, we certainly did not!

I'll communicate this to Interim DDOT Director Lott, who will be attending (remotely) our May meeting.

The May meeting of the ANC will take place at 7 pm, May 25. Due to the pandemic, it will have to be a “virtual” meeting, accessible only via the internet, using Zoom software. See the ANC1D website, anc1d.org, for details.