

Jack's October report

At the September meeting, the ANC did the following:

- Advised DDOT Public Space to issue a permit for a side-walk cafe on Park Road, at the Argyle;
- Advised HPRB approval of an application for alterations at 3143 19th Street;
- Advised DDOT “to proceed forthwith” with the proposed work on the 2000 block of Park Road, but *without* the proposed Stop sign for Pierce Mill Road;
- Requested a one-month postponement of HPRB consideration of an area adjacent to 3150 17th Street;
- Advised the DCRA to cease subjecting roof decks to “penthouse” regulations;
- Expressed support for “Vision Zero”, the program intended to reduce traffic fatalities in the District.

A Park Road resident wrote to me about an awful encounter with a **mentally ill man** in this area, commonly known as “backpack-man”: he “was just walking by and started banging on our car as we were inside it and yelling and cursing at us. We had just come back from a family day trip and my kids had fallen asleep to wake up to him banging our car and yelling at us.” It was terrifying.

Many neighbors have encountered this man, and a lengthy discussion followed on the NextDoor chat site. Evidently he camps out in Rock Creek Park, and regularly makes his way to 16th Street and back. He's become notorious at Bancroft, frightening children, and Commissioner Jon Stewart has spoken to him and asked him to stay away from the school.

His name is Benjamin Allen Sullivan. He's a Canadian citizen, here in DC since July 2017, thinking that the US Government will somehow help him. Seriously mentally ill, he's convinced that the CIA and CSIS (the Canadian equivalent) have implanted a radio, and microprocessor chips, in his body.

Now, what are we to do about him? The encounters with him are more than frightening, as he could well be dangerous.

The October 23 ANC meeting will also be a PSA 408 meeting, with Lieutenant Munk. The police aren't well equipped to deal with mental illness cases, but something must be done to protect the public from this man.

A resident wrote to say that she had been issued a “notice of violation” by DPW concerning her **Supercan and recycling bins, left in the alley during the week**. Well, it's a fact – the DC Municipal Regulations require that all trash and recycling containers be returned to private property, “by 8:00 p.m. of the collection day”.

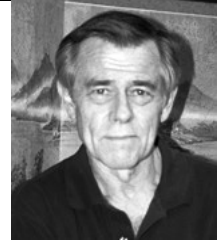
Visit any alley during the week, of course, and you'll see countless Supercans and recycling containers left out. This is not because Mount Pleasant is a neighborhood of scowflaws. The fact is that, for many residents, it's just not practical to take those containers from the alley onto “private property”. DPW recognizes this, and, in practice, ignores our violations – unless a resident files a complaint.

That's what's happened here. A neighbor, annoyed by the trash containers in the alley, perhaps interfering with his access to a parking pad, filed a complaint. If the owner of the

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Jack McKay, October 15, 2018

Jack McKay
3200 19th St, Tel. 462-8692
e-mail: jack@dcjack.org
<http://DCJack.org>



trash bins had some easy access to private property, well, that would be a legitimate complaint. But, like most residents along that alley, she does not. What is she to do?

The DPW, recognizing the situation, did the minimum necessary to respond to the complaint, issuing a “warning” notice to that one resident, while ignoring the dozens of other Supercans and recycling bins in the alley. But this was still upsetting for the resident, who now worries that the “warning” could be followed by actual fines.

Our Mount Pleasant *modus vivendi* has been to ignore the legal requirement to return trash and recycling containers to private property between collections, while of course doing what we can to keep them out of our neighbors' way. No one wants to find their garage blocked by their neighbor's trash containers (a common problem). So we do what we can to put our bins out of anybody's way. (The trash collectors, of course, move our containers all over the place, uncaring about blocking garage doors.)

Even that may be difficult, in our narrow alleys. So we do the best we can, and try to be neighborly about it. And if you do have to move a neighbor's Supercan to get into your garage, well, that's not too great a burden to bear.

Remember that weird **loss in water pressure** last July? Some Mount Pleasant residents found their water pressure suddenly dropping to near zero. The low water pressure then could have allowed contaminants to seep into the water lines, so DCWater issued an advisory to residents to boil any tap water to be used for drinking or cooking.

The explanation for this event is interesting. There are large differences in elevation in the District, Mount Pleasant being much higher than, say, Georgetown. So our water supply is divided into two pressure regimes, one providing just enough pressure for the low-elevation areas, and one operating at higher pressure to drive the water to higher elevations (including us).

On the evening of July 12, a DCWater employee opened a valve that connected these two water systems. The water system then equilibrated to an intermediate pressure level – excessive for the low-elevation neighborhoods, insufficient for our higher-elevation neighborhood. And that's when the water pressure here nearly vanished.

No one knows why this employee closed that valve. He's offered “inconsistent responses” in explanation.

The problem lasted just about one hour. Then the valve was closed, and proper pressure levels restored. As for

contaminants allowed into the water system due to the low pressure, no trace of such contamination was found. A whole lot of water was dumped down the drains as DC Water flushed water lines, just in case.

The **2000 block of Park Road** is in dire need of repaving. There is also a DDOT proposal for a number of measures intended to enhance safety on that block. In order to combine the two, and not delay the repaving until next year, DDOT has come up with an expedited plan to implement safety measures on that block in a temporary fashion, with paint and pavement posts, instead of concrete.

I offered a resolution advising DDOT “to proceed forthwith” with the work, but with two modifications. One change is to eliminate the proposed Stop sign and other measures on the Pierce Mill Road merge with Park Road, which would cost a significant number of parking spaces, for no real safety benefit. That one-block road is more like a long driveway than a road, and residents don't need to be told to stop and look for Park Road traffic before exiting Pierce Mill.

The second modification requested in my resolution was retention of the “bike lane” buffer space alongside the cars parked on the downhill side of the street, serving as a sidewalk, there being no street-level sidewalk on this block. DDOT wants to paint a “virtual median” in the middle of the road to force drivers up close to the parked cars, thinking that this will cause them to reduce speed. As I've argued many times, the minuscule reduction in traffic speed expected, perhaps 3 mph, is far from sufficient to justify the elimination of the “sidewalk” safety space alongside the parked cars. (And think about taking the time to make sure your child is properly placed in her car seat, while Mommy is perforce standing in the street.)

A commissioner moved that that second modification be stricken from my resolution. And his amendment was passed, four votes to one. So DDOT will go ahead with the painted median, and the boundary of the traffic lane will lie just a foot or so from the parked cars.

Of course it's just paint, so drivers will be free to veer out into this “median” to avoid brushing by residents in the street. So maybe this won't be so bad. But when it's all done, I want to hear from residents about the elimination of the buffer space, and traffic pushed up close to their parked cars. Will the reduction in speed, if any, be perceptible? Would it not be better to have some clear space alongside the parked cars, even if that results in traffic going a few mph faster?

What I really want to see on this block is a structure in the center of the road at the Rock Creek Park end, something substantial and well marked, telling drivers coming from the Park that they're entering a residential neighborhood and must slow down. The road-center object might persuade the downhill drivers also to slow a bit, by minimizing the “open road ahead” view that current encourages drivers to hit the gas. Consider this a “gate” to Mount Pleasant.

But DDOT didn't see a way to incorporate that in their expedited, paint-only plan. We'll have to take this up next year, when (presumably) DDOT will be considering the final, concrete version of this roadwork.

Recently we overcame opposition from historic preservation to allow a Kenyon Street resident to put a fenced deck on top of his alley garage, accessible from his back yard. Many residents, including me, have such things, expanding the usable space of their back yards.

But the DCRA has recently decided that **such decks must be regulated as “penthouses”**. This has never been done before, and no reasonable person would look at a garage-roof deck and call it a “penthouse”. Those regulations were written for structures placed on roof tops, housing air conditioning equipment, for example, and call for such things to be set back from the edge of rooftops, rather than being built right up to the edge. But a deck of course should go to the roof edge – why not? – there's no good reason for requiring setbacks, significantly reducing the area available.

My resolution objects to this application of penthouse regulations to decks. But it'll take a lot more than an ANC resolution to get the DCRA to change this new policy.

The November election is not far off, and residents will be offered a choice: to have me continue as their ANC commissioner, or not.

This month exemplifies what I, as your representative, do.

- Modifying the DDOT plan for Park Road to better serve residents – taking out the Pierce Mill Road portion of the plan, attempting to “tune” the rest for maximum safety.
- Raising the problem of a severely mentally ill resident, and advising the Metropolitan Police to deal with this real personal safety hazard.
- Fighting an absurd DCRA policy treating decks as if they're “penthouses”.
- Devising a neighborhood policy to deal with Supercans in alleys, in the face of a regulation that is, for our neighborhood, impractical.
- Supporting a neighborhood business, the Argyle, as it applied for a sidewalk cafe permit.
- Helping a resident fight a bogus parking ticket;
- Assisting residents applying for historic preservation permits.

And, of course, keeping the neighborhood informed, not just about what I'm doing, but what the ANC is doing, and what else is news in the neighborhood. My monthly newsletter is my means of reaching out to everyone, not just internet-active folks. I've hand-delivered over *one hundred thousand* of these newsletters to my constituents, over the past 16 years, and I'll continue them, if I'm re-elected.

My guiding philosophy is simple: keep Mount Pleasant a neighborhood for *everybody* – where all are comfortable, and welcome, and no one feels like an outsider in a neighborhood dominated by somebody else. Gay, straight, black, white, Anglo, Latino, rich, poor – this is everyone's neighborhood! That's why Emily and I chose this neighborhood, 46 years ago, and we want to keep it that way.

The next meeting of the ANC will be on <u>Tuesday, October 23</u> , 7:00 pm, at the Mount Pleasant Library.
