

January report to constituents

Here is news of the January Advisory Neighborhood Commission meeting, and a preliminary agenda for the next meeting.

Highlights of the January ANC meeting

By law, the ANC elects officers every January. We chose Will Grant to be the Chair for the coming year, and I'm taking his post of Vice Chair. Barbara Bitondo will continue as Secretary, and Peter Muller as Treasurer.

This meeting focused on **Mount Pleasant area schools**. For years I have been told that Mount Pleasant was a fine place to live, *unless* you had school-age children, in which case you had better move to Ward Three, to find good schools. This meeting was a chance to show that that is simply not so. It might have been true a decade ago, but it's not true now.

Julie Mikuta, our fine representative on the Board of Education, said that the "bilingual model", as exemplified by Oyster, would be expanded at Bancroft, which is now a true two-language, Spanish and English, school. Lincoln Middle School may also become a two-language school. Anyone who wants a child to grow up fluent in both languages should come to Mount Pleasant.

In response to my question about Latino gangs recruiting new members in our schools, Ms Mikuta said that the Board is working with eight elementary-school principals to develop education programs to help children learn to resist the lure of gangs. I questioned her also on a recent recommendation for closer central control of DC schools, which worries me because it was independence from downtown that permitted two superb principals at Bancroft, Fay Thompson and Erasmo Garza, to make Bancroft into an excellent elementary school. Ms Mikuta assured me that good principals, such as we have had at Bancroft, would be given wide latitude.

Bobby Caballero of the **Elsie Stokes Charter School**, located on 16th Street just below Park Road, said that his school, offering kindergarten through the fifth grade, specializes in language training by immersion. Stokes has two bilingual tracks, Spanish and English, and French and English. Eighty percent of their children come from Mount Pleasant and Columbia Heights. The waiting list for entering Elsie Stokes is long -- 250 children, compared to a school enrollment of 225 -- so parents are encouraged to sign their children up early.

Karl Jentoff described the **Capital City Charter School**, currently located above the CVS at 14th and Irving, but due to move to 15th and Irving this spring. Capital City, offering pre-K through the eighth grade, employs an "expeditionary learning" model, based on guiding their children to carry out projects. The waiting list is again large, some 450 children long, with selection by lottery. These long waiting lists prove the attractiveness of Mount Pleasant's new charter schools.

This August, **Jennie Niles** will open the **E.L. Haynes Charter School** in the 14th and Irving location about to be vacated by Capital City. As for Capital City, the educational model is the Outward Bound Expeditionary Learning system. A special feature of this school will be a nine-weeks-on, three-weeks-off schedule, year round, thus spreading the usual summer vacation throughout the year. This is to avoid the substantial learning loss of the traditional three-month summer vacation. During the three-week breaks, special skills workshops will be offered.

Reginia Ingram described our local parochial school, **Sacred Heart**, located in the 1600 block of Park Road. Sacred Heart offers a traditional Catholic education, pre-K through the eighth grade, and is making itself a Spanish/-English two-language school. It is currently two-language through the third grade, and will extend this upwards one

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Opinions expressed here are those of Dr. McKay alone, speaking for himself, not for the Mount Pleasant ANC.

I reject assertions that Mount Pleasant has a grave crime problem – yes, there's crime, but no more than is to be expected for an inner-city neighborhood adjacent to high-poverty neighborhoods – but it is clear that we have a real problem with **robberies**. Ordinarily we suffer less than two per week, but lately the number has been four or five.

I have discovered that only 10% of DC robberies are closed by arrest, versus 21% in comparable Eastern cities. This low closure rate not only leaves robbers free to rob again, but virtually eliminates the deterrence of potential arrest and punishment.

We will bring this low closure rate up in the February meeting, and we will call on the MPD to explain why our rate is so low, and to tell us what might be done, with our help, to increase it.

There was a **mugging on Monroe Street** on December 29, in the 1800 block, at 6:30 pm. A woman pushing a baby stroller (robbers pick on those least likely to be able to defend themselves) was accosted and her purse grabbed.

The victim cried out, and Monroe Street neighbors raced to her assistance, some phoning 911, others rushing out to help. Within a minute, neighbors recovered her purse. The robber fled down the alley between Monroe Street and Park Road, where a neighbor pursued him in his car, herding him towards 17th and Park, where the police grabbed him: "C1 (WF, 36yrs) reports that S1 approached her and said, 'give me your purse.' S1 then grabbed C1's purse and fled south in the alley. S1 was apprehended by MPD and positively identified. S1 was arrested."

Quick work, due to neighbors ready to help, with no concern for their own safety. Mount Pleasant has always been that kind of neighborhood -- neighbors watching out for neighbors. No one here is afraid to "get involved".

grade a year. The student body is 89% Latino, and tuition roughly \$3100.

Toni Conklin of Bancroft Elementary described our superb public school. (It was very dismaying to see several members of the audience walk out before this presentation. Evidently some parents have blindly written off our public school, without even giving it a look.) I led off this discussion with my own appreciation of Bancroft, which offers a wonderful learning environment, characterized by a great depth of

affection between children and teachers. Ms Conklin confirmed my description, noting that she loved living next door to Bancroft, and thus enjoying random encounters with Bancroft children on her doorstep. Bancroft has two teachers for each class, and features multi-age learning, grouping children of different ages but similar abilities, thus encouraging each child to learn at his or her own best pace. Bancroft is a true two-language school: *every child entering Bancroft will become fluent and literate in Spanish and English.*

Children attending Bancroft, as well as our other neighborhood schools, will also learn priceless lessons in the appreciation and understanding of the world's languages and cultures. Bancroft has *the highest proportion in the District of language-minority children, 89%*. Bancroft's children represent countries all over the world -- El Salvador and other Central American countries, of course, but also Vietnam, Ethiopia, and many others. Bancroft takes great pride in this multinational student body.

Mount Pleasant now has a fine selection of neighborhood schools, and there is no reason in the world to send a child to any west-of-the-Park school. *Our schools are among the best in the District for quality of education, and are superior in cultural diversity and in two-language teaching.*

Later in the evening, I brought up the matter of **adding "Mount Pleasant" to the name of the Columbia Heights Metro Station**. Six months ago we passed a resolution calling for discussions with the Columbia Heights ANC about this, their approval being required for such a change. I was advised in December that the Metro Board would consider name changes at its January 22 meeting, and that a decision was needed before then. Hence, I pressed the matter, and obtained authorization from the ANC to take the lead in these discussions. See the box for the outcome of these discussions with Columbia Heights.

Getting the approval of the Columbia Heights ANC to **add "Mount Pleasant" to the Metro Station name** was, I warned our Commissioners, going to be enormously difficult, because of Mount Pleasant's history of insensitive dealings with Columbia Heights. We're commonly viewed over there as the arrogant rich folks in the big houses, turning our noses up at poverty-ridden Columbia Heights. I have been doing what I can to overcome this view, by attending all Columbia Heights ANC meetings, and many PSA meetings, and participating in Columbia Heights community planning work.

On January 14 I addressed the Columbia Heights ANC, supported by our new Chair, Will Grant. I noted that the probability of my persuading them to approve our request for a Metro name change was nil, but we came to speak to them nonetheless, simply to begin a new era of mutual respect and cooperation.

Their new Chair, Mack James, lectured us bitterly on the behavior of past representatives of Mount Pleasant, who came to them only to tell them what to do, not to negotiate as equals. Mr James was in fact one of the gentler respondents to our request. One Commissioner declared that she had not even bothered to read the letters I had hand-delivered to them on this matter. They don't like us much, and we have a lot of damage repair to do.

Thus, the name change will not happen, but we have opened new communications with the Columbia Heights ANC. It's up to us now to live up to our promise of more respectful dealing with our neighbor community.

Preliminary, partial agenda (highlights) for the February 2 ANC meeting; times approximate

- 7:30 Call to order
- 7:50 Community Forum
- 8:10 Desi Deschaine, Ward One
Neighborhood Citizen Summit
- 8:20 ROOTS for Peace Grant Prop.
- 8:30 Committee Reports
 - robbery closure rates
 - pay phones
- 10:00 Adjourn