

April report to constituents

Here is news of the April Advisory Neighborhood Commission meeting, what we plan for the May meeting, and notes about other events in our part of Mount Pleasant.

Highlights of the April ANC meeting

Councilmember Phil Mendelson dropped in, a pleasant surprise. He had been quite badly treated on a visit to our ANC some months ago, but we made him welcome.

I queried him about the back-door tax increase brought about by sharply increased real estate assessments. He said that in the past, property tax *rates* were supposed to be recalculated every year, to keep the property tax *income* constant -- so that, even if everybody's assessment went up, your taxes would not. But City Council never did the recalculation, always preferring to pocket the increased revenues, and lately they have given up even the pretense of recalculation. Thus it is that our taxes are sharply increased, because property values here are going up dramatically, though of course our ability to pay those taxes is not.

Mr. Mendelson did point out that DC's property tax rates are lower than in adjoining jurisdictions. Our income tax rates are, however, higher. The unfortunate conclusion of the moment is that, because the District is faced with sharply declining tax revenues, and a huge budget shortfall in 2004, complaints about increased property taxes fall on deaf ears downtown.

Representatives of WMATA spoke about bus service in Mount Pleasant. The issue that brought them to the meeting was a matter of buses sitting and idling at Mount Pleasant and Lamont, much to the irritation of nearby residents. The buses are supposed to stop their engines if they sit for more than three minutes, but commonly the drivers fail to do that, because the buses then get uncomfortably cold, or hot.

The discussion went well beyond the idling matter. What with the massive commercial and residential development soon to take place in Columbia Heights, we may have to review bus routes and bus layover places. Mount Pleasant and Lamont is a bus layover spot because, since the days of trolley service, it's been the beginning of the run downtown. That's a great convenience to Mount Pleasant residents, because we're the first to board the bus on its route, and so can easily find seats. We do have to look harder at the east-west routes to see that those are suitable for the future, given the changes to come in Columbia Heights.

I asked about obtaining bus shelters for our weather-exposed bus stops, specifically those along Park Road and Adams Mill Road. It seems that the construction of bus shelters is a private contract, and the contractor gives the District a reduced price in return for his being permitted to sell

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Jack McKay, April 23, 2003

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

Robert Frazier spoke on the topic of the **Mount Pleasant Festival**, scheduled for June 1. As for the Farmer's Market, we hope to attract new people to our neighborhood, perhaps to return to patronize our shops and restaurants.

Nina Planck spoke on the creation of a **Mount Pleasant Farmer's Market**, to begin operation on May 31, and to run on Saturday mornings, 8:00 until noon. In contrast to other such markets in Columbia Heights and Adams Morgan, this will sell *only* seasonal food produced by *local* farmers. A goal is to draw more people into the neighborhood, hoping that they will return to patronize other businesses in the commercial district. On that basis this market has the endorsement of, for example, the People's Garden, despite its similar products. The Farmer's Market will be run on a three-month trial basis, after which its results will be evaluated: does it promote our neighborhood businesses, or take business from them? The ANC agreed to support this trial period for the Mount Pleasant Farmer's Market.

Sidney Shelton, a young neighbor of mine from Lamont Street, noted that **neighborhood teenagers need a decent basketball court**, and the Bancroft playground surface is in bad shape. He's right, of course, and I wouldn't have thought of this, but for his bringing it up.

The Bancroft playground is a DCPS responsibility, so there's not much that the ANC can do about it. It's also an elementary school, and I would prefer that it concentrate on serving younger, smaller children.

How about Lincoln and Bell, right across 16th Street? Can we encourage the use of their playgrounds? Lincoln is, of course, a dreadful mess, boarded up and virtually abandoned. It's due for renovation, with groundbreaking scheduled for May 13, and the new school to reopen in the fall of 2005. That's a long time to wait, and it is true that our youths would prefer a court on this side of 16th Street. This may, nonetheless, be the best solution to the problem.

By-Laws: The ANC By-Laws specify that the maximum that the ANC can give in grants in a year is 10% of the annual ANC stipend, or about \$1600. The ANC has, however, over \$30,000 in the bank, accumulated from previous years, so it would take decades to spend down that surplus. We voted to eliminate the 10% limitation from the By-Laws, in order that these funds be available for use in Mount Pleasant.

Bus shelters: I ask you, my constituents: would you object to a bus shelter at, say, Park Road and 19th? Or at the corner of Klingle and Walbridge, where it would serve the many children and parents who take the bus to the Rosemount Center?

Bancroft Elementary: The Education Trust has declared Bancroft a "high-flying" school, having shown "sustained high performance over multiple years", despite a high-poverty student body. It's also a true two-language school, every child emerging fluent in spoken and written Spanish and English. Like the Rosemount Center, it's a little-known neighborhood treasure.

The 2004 DCPS budget includes \$1M to create new two-language schools, replicating the success of Oyster. Bancroft is a leading candidate for these funds. The fact is, though, that Bancroft is already a superbly functioning two-language elementary school. The \$1M would be nice, but they don't need it to do the job.

advertising space on the shelters. Said advertising then makes the shelters undesirable in residential areas. Personally, I find standing in the rain waiting for a bus to be an extreme deterrent to bus use.

Rodrigo Leiva, of the **Council of Latino Agencies**, described his plans for a Latino-Metropolitan Police conference, upon the anniversary of the Mount Pleasant disturbances of 12 years ago. This meeting will differ from other efforts in being Latino-driven, and in having Spanish as the principal language, thus bringing about, we hope, greater participation from the Latino community.

The ANC declared *Latino Community Affairs* to be a "funding priority" for this year, thus lifting the \$500 limit on grants. We then voted to give the Council of Latino Agencies a grant of \$1250 to support this conference. The size of this grant, the largest ever awarded by the Mount Pleasant ANC, shows how seriously we take Latino issues.

Crime in Mount Pleasant: In the last issue I noted that the recent increase in robberies in Mount Pleasant was grounds for increased caution, *but not fear*, and that it was unreasonable to blame the Metropolitan Police for the robberies. The MPD has lately made numerous arrests – along the 14th Street corridor, *not* in Mount Pleasant – and shut down at least two of these mobile gangs of robbers. Indeed, robberies have almost ceased since these mid-March arrests. The MPD deserves not criticism, but praise for a *job well done*.

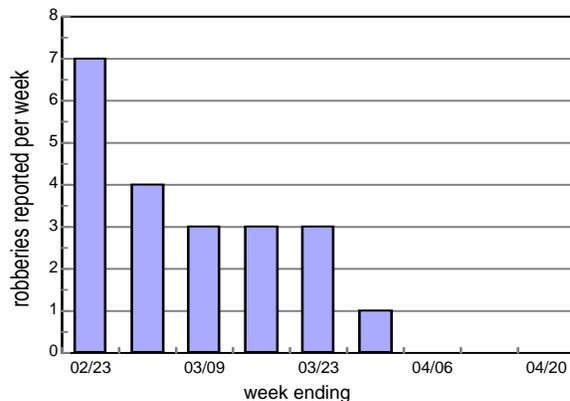
Caution remains essential for Mount Pleasant residents. The violent-crime rate here is about half the average in Ward One, but about three times the average in Ward Three. That relatively high crime rate is part of life in the inner city, east of Rock Creek Park. One must always be alert and careful.

The next ANC meeting will be on Monday evening, May 5, **7:30 pm**, at La Casa, 3166 Mount Pleasant St.

- 7:30 Call to order
- 7:45 Treasurer's report
- 8:00 Guest presentations:
 - Len Sullivan, NARPAC, on development in Columbia Heights
 - Iris Rothman, Update on PlayStart
 - Katie Palm, US Botanic Gardens, Bancroft Garden Project
 - Patricia Bitondo, Babe Ruth League Baseball
- 9:00 Community Forum
- 9:30 Committee reports
- 10:15 Unfinished Business:
 - ANC budget
 - Mount Pleasant Festival
- 10:30 New Business
- 10:45 Adjournment

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Robberies in Mt Pleasant



Robberies in Mount Pleasant, week by week. The arrests by the MPD of two roaming gangs of robbers in mid-March has virtually ended the plague of street robberies.