

May report to constituents

Here is news of the May ANC meeting, and the preliminary agenda of the June meeting.

ANC 1D03 NEWSLETTER

Jack McKay, May 24, 2004

May ANC meeting notes

The ANC met on May 3. There were but five of us, Jenny Babcock having resigned because she's moving to Capitol Hill. Jenny was doing an admirable job with grants and with housing issues, and she was a compassionate soul on the ANC, caring deeply about the less-privileged residents of Mount Pleasant. I am very sorry to see her go.

I encouraged Jenny to file her formal resignation by April 22, the deadline after which the vacancy could not be filled until the regular election in November. She did so, and Matt Silverman has filed to take her place. If he is the only certified candidate, then he will be appointed to the vacancy at the June meeting. If another applicant appears, then we will be required to conduct a public vote at the July meeting. I hope we can avoid that (see box).

We heard from DDOT about the work to replace our decrepit street light circuits, and we passed resolutions dealing with library funding, restaurant liquor licenses, and the renaming of Rabaut Park. I've stuffed details in boxes, as I try to cram this report onto a single sheet of paper.

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

The June ANC meeting will be on June 7, 7:30 pm, La Casa Community Center. Some topics expected to come up:

1D04 vacancy

The Columbia Heights ANC provided an unfortunate example of the defects of ANC special elections. Their Chair, Charles Matiella, was elected in 2002 with XXX votes, but was removed from office in April by a mere 24 to 7 vote. So few people participate in such special elections that they are not valid indicators of resident opinion. Matt Silverman is well qualified to be the ANC Commissioner for 1D04, and I hope he will turn out to be the only candidate.

City Council worries a great deal about phony restaurants, which only pretend to be food-serving restaurants, while in truth functioning as night clubs or bars. This is a way to get a liquor license while avoiding the greater difficulties of getting a night club or tavern license. I understand that some "restaurants" in Adams Morgan get 90% of their revenue from alcoholic beverages, and only 10% from food, so this concern is not without foundation. A bill that is about to be passed by City Council will require that **restaurants get at least 45% of their gross revenues from food, or forfeit their liquor licenses.** (This is current law, but seldom does the District audit restaurants' books to confirm compliance. The new law promises firmer enforcement.)

The problem here is that the 45% criterion is too high for our neighborhood restaurants, and especially our Latino restaurants, which feature very inexpensive food. Because their food is cheap, but their drinks not (and we don't want their drinks to be cheap), they have trouble making the 45% mark. According to this arbitrary criterion, our restaurants are not really restaurants, but are bars in disguise.

I think not. Haydee's is my favorite restaurant in Mount Pleasant, and there is no question that it is a restaurant. I go there for the fajitas and burritos, not the beverages (I don't drink, myself), and I'd not hesitate to take a child to Haydee's, whereas I'd never take a child to a tavern. But Señora Haydee Vanegas tells us that the 45% criterion is, for her restaurant, troublesome. She cannot control how many people come in for a meal, and how many come in to nurse a few drinks and enjoy the cheerful camaraderie of the place.

Don Jaime's, Corado's, and Don Juan's have similar difficulties. I arranged a meeting of our Latino restaurateurs with Councilmember Jim Graham, to try to persuade him to request a moderation of this criterion, or perhaps the creation of a special "pub" class of hybrid restaurant-taverns. He declined to help, arguing that they should just get tavern liquor licenses, and then have no food-sales requirement to meet.

That is not a valid solution. Mount Pleasant does not want taverns. We like our restaurants, and I think it absurd that the District would threaten to bankrupt them because they don't sell enough food, or their food is too cheap. (You can get a full meal at Haydee's for the price of an appetizer at a downtown restaurant.)

The Commission agreed, and unanimously passed Commissioner Muller's resolution calling on the District to make suitable provisions for restaurants that, because their food is inexpensive, fall short of the 45% criterion. City Council will not do that, and we will have to continue to press this matter during the two years allowed for restaurants to come into compliance with the new law.

Rabaut Park, commonly known as "Pigeon Park", is that triangular park at the base of Mount Pleasant Street, where Adams Morgan, Columbia Heights, and Mount Pleasant meet. Andrea Broadus of Adams Morgan has been leading an effort to rename the park (who recalls who Rabaut was?) in honor of the Monsignor Oscar Romero of El Salvador. I investigated to see if there was any sensitivity among Latinos to the choice of a Salvadorean, and found none, at least for the Monsignor Romero. I asked that the resolution be revised to omit a reference to "serving God", because we want to avoid endorsing any religious views. The other commissioners agreed with me, and the revised resolution passed, unanimously. I think this makes the park a nice symbol of respect for our Latino residents.

Richard Huffein, representing the **Friends of the Mount Pleasant Library**, spoke on the problem of the District budget for public libraries. There was some discussion of what a suitable budget was, and how the DC budget compares to that of other cities. I argued that we did not need to compare our library budget with that of other cities, because one has only to visit our libraries to see that they are underfunded. The Mount Pleasant Library in particular is cramped and dingy, and all too often the computers are not working. I argue that libraries are especially essential in a mixed community such as ours, giving children from book-poor families some access to books to balance the resources of book-rich families. Furthermore, these days our libraries are crucial for bridging the "digital divide". Children from computer-less families need some access to the Internet, which is turning into an invaluable information resource. Many children come from families with no home computers, and our libraries are needed to equalize this resource, as well as books.

Ordinarily I prefer to stay out of District budget issues, because one never knows what invaluable program will be sacrificed to fund a program that we endorse. In this case I make an exception, because our libraries are in the top rank of indispensable District services. A resolution calling on the District to provide full funding to our public library system was offered, and was passed by a unanimous vote.

DDOT offered an overview of the imminent work to **replace our obsolete street light circuits**. We've been pressing for this for months, because of the all-too-frequent streetlight blackouts in this area. Our ancient streetlight circuits are in desperate need of modernization, and the project to accomplish that started on May 19, beginning on Oakwood Terrace. Mount Pleasant north of Park Road will be done this year, south of Park Road in 2005. East of Bancroft School will be done in May and June; around Bancroft, in July and August, while school is out; west of Bancroft, this fall.

The work involves not only circuit modernization, but replacement of all of our street lights, and in particular, the use of the "Washington upright " poles everywhere, taking out the "cobra" overhead lights. I know this will be controversial, but it is the right thing to do, not only to give our neighborhood a uniform, traditional appearance, but to improve the lighting of our sidewalks. The cobra lights tend to be above the tree foliage, leaving our sidewalks in deep shadow. In a residential area such as this, we need good sidewalk lighting more than we need good street lighting; after all, cars have headlights, pedestrians don't. The uprights, much shorter than the cobras, and positioned along the sidewalk, put the light where it's most needed: right on the sidewalk, under the trees.

There are two of these cobra lights adjacent to my house, and I'll be glad to see them gone, because they leave the sidewalks in the dark, hidden by the leaves of the trees. The uprights will do a much better job of illuminating the sidewalks.

Many times I've complained about the absurdities of our **Residential Permit Parking** system. The Mayor's Parking Task Force report was released on May 13. This will be followed by City Council hearings, and, before very long, a reformed RPP system. Here is one quote from that report:

"The current block-by-block approach in the RPP program was cited by the Taskforce as one of the major flaws in the current system. Under the current system, RPP areas are not necessarily contiguous or consistent due to the peculiarities of the ballot process. If one lives in the area with the generally restrictive parking conditions, but does not live on an RPP block, one cannot get a parking sticker and is effectively treated in the same way as a visitor or commuter."

I believe that we can count on the elimination of this absurd block-by-block opt-in, opt-out system. No longer will we have an RPP system that concentrates all non-RPP cars on the remaining non-RPP blocks, gives non-RPP block residents inferior parking rights, and allows RPP residents to evade the burdens of the system by telling their visitors and household employees to go park on their neighbors' non-RPP blocks.