

## June report to constituents

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

## ANC 1D03 NEWSLETTER

Jack McKay, June 21, 2003

### **Highlights of the June ANC meeting**

This ANC is working hard at reaching out to people and institutions that have not previously been included. We arranged for two controversial Mount Pleasant institutions to come and tell us about their operations here. Ken Setter of the **Shaw II halfway house** at 1740 Park Road described that institution, which smooths the way for the return of convicts (no sex offenders, no arsonists) to the community upon the conclusion of their sentences. Monita Laurent did the same for **the youth home at 1855 Lamont**, where teenagers who have been charged with offenses are, instead of trial and incarceration, put in a disciplined, structured environment and guided away from lives of crime.

These institutions face a dilemma. Both want to keep low profiles in the community to avoid worrying the neighbors. But both also want community interaction, as their "clients" would benefit from seeing how a community of law-abiding citizens works. Perhaps, through the ANC, these institutions can achieve closer interaction with Mount Pleasant. The youths and men of these two institutions were very warmly received by the people in attendance.

Marsha Boveja described the plans for modernization of the **Rosemount Center**, that remarkable Spanish-architecture building at the intersection of Klinge and Adams Mill Roads. This was not designed to be a school, and renovation is needed to make it a better facility. The work will be almost entirely internal, as the rooms are rebuilt to better serve as classrooms, handicapped access and emergency egress are improved, and central air conditioning is added. The Center will be closed for a year, its children cared for in temporary facilities elsewhere, while the work proceeds, possibly beginning a year from now. Because the school will be unused during the work, and the Center has its own parking lot, the disruptive effects of the construction work on the neighbors should be small.

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

**Police Chief Ramsey Resolution:** The ANC passed, by a 5 to 1 vote, a resolution calling for City Council to withhold Chief Ramsey's pay raise and to instruct him as to "how police performance must improve". I am the single dissenting vote. I voted "no", not as an endorsement of Chief Ramsey, but to express distaste for the inadequate grounds cited by this resolution.

The resolution blames Ramsey for increasing crime rates: "violent crime has increased in the District of Columbia since Chief Ramsey was sworn in in 1998, [and] robbery rates are at the worst levels since 1997". But the MPD, and the Chief, have little control over crime rates, which are driven primarily by social and economic factors. When unemployment goes up, as it has lately, so does crime. The comparison to 1997 is misleading, because that was when crime in the District dropped to record lows.

The resolution asserts that "auto theft levels in Mount Pleasant remain at the highest level of any other PSA in the Fourth District". This is simply false. Our neighborhood has a high rate of theft from auto, but the auto theft rate is only average to lower-than-average for the Fourth District. Aside from that, one wonders if we should be content so long as other parts of the Fourth District have higher auto theft rates than we do. The statement is not only wrong, but reprehensible.

The resolution notes that "approximately half of those questioned in a recent police union poll expressed that MPDC is 'not very effective' at serving and protecting the community and that its performance has declined under Chief Ramsey", suggesting that this is evidence of mismanagement. It doesn't admit that only one MPD officer in six responded to this survey, and this one-in-six sampling was self-selected, not random. Nor does it explain that 48% of the respondents thought that the MPDC was either "effective" or "very effective", and that 49% thought that MPD performance was either unchanged or improved since Ramsey's arrival. This poll means nothing.

I take ANC work seriously, and I will insist that our resolutions be well thought out and well substantiated. This resolution is amateurish, citing grounds that are misleading, inaccurate, and easily challenged. Whatever one thinks of Chief Ramsey, this resolution is indefensible. We on the ANC have to maintain higher standards than this, if our resolutions are to stand up to critical examination, as they must if they are to command respect.

**Children and schools:** The ANC has created a Children and Schools Committee, to provide for advice to the ANC from residents. I'm Chair of this Committee, and now I want to hear from people willing to serve on it.

We passed resolutions in support of the Center modernization, and calling on DPW to hasten work to end our too-frequent street-light outages.

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**Tentative agenda for the July 7 ANC meeting**

7:30 Call to order  
7:45 Community Forum (start)  
8:00 Guest presentations:  
    R. Duguay, C. Gardner, Washington Free Clinic  
    J. Mulla, Southern Sudanese Voice for Freedom  
8:30 Community Forum (continued)  
8:45 Committee reports  
9:15 Unfinished business: ANC budget, Rock Creek Park Management Plans, Main Streets, housing committee  
9:30 New business: 7-11 Lights, Ingleside paving  
10:00 Adjournment

**Rock Creek Park, and Beach Drive:** Three portions of Beach Drive north of Mount Pleasant are closed on weekends for use as walking, biking, and roller blading areas. Currently the National Park Service is considering a number of "Alternatives" for future management of Rock Creek Park. Their preferred plan is Alternative D, which would apply these same Beach Drive closures during the week as well, between rush hours, when traffic is light. This proposal (which came from Mayor Williams) has been remarkably controversial, a controversy aggravated by misunderstandings of what is proposed.

Facts: 60% of Beach Drive north of Broad Branch will remain open to cars, all day, every day; none of the east-west cross-Park routes will be obstructed, because these open segments preserve every cross-Park linkage; every parking lot along Beach Drive will remain automobile-accessible; 26 of the 28 numbered picnic areas will remain automobile-accessible; rush hour traffic will, obviously, be unaffected, the closures applying only between 9:30 AM and 3:30 PM; two-thirds of the users of Beach Drive don't even use these northern portions of the road, entering and exiting Beach between Broad Branch Road and Rock Creek Parkway.

I have studied this portion of Beach Drive in detail, including biking the nominally "closed" portion four times. I conclude that, while the consequences for automobile drivers of closing the road during the day will be modest, and the diversion of this traffic to Connecticut Avenue and 16th Street insignificant, the recreational benefits will also be very modest. It's not much of a bike ride, it doesn't do bike commuters any good at all, and few people have the leisure time for recreation in the middle of the workday. Hence, I am proposing ANC endorsement of Alternative A, which would not close any parts of Beach Drive during the week. It would impose HOV-2 on Beach during rush hour, and that could be troublesome.

**Parking on Park Road:** Last summer Mara Cherkasky and I won the suspension of the rush hour parking restrictions on Park Road, thus making over 60 parking spots useable for overnight residential parking. I counted cars to prove that the rush hour parking prohibition was unnecessary, there being insufficient traffic on Park Road to warrant two lanes. DDOT agreed, last September, to suspend the rush hour prohibition, by reversing the signs on the signposts, facing away from the street. This trial was to go at least until December 31, depending, of course, on satisfactory traffic flow with parking allowed. December 31 came and went, DDOT left the signs reversed, and I decided to leave well enough alone.

But on Thursday, June 5, the DDOT contractor doing the alley work, unaware of our arrangement, returned the rush hour prohibition signs to their face-out position. DDOT knew nothing of this change until I told them about it. DPW allowed one weekend for people to see that the signs had been changed. Of course almost nobody noticed the change, and on Monday morning Park Road was lined with parked cars, as usual. Parking Enforcement pounced, issuing hefty \$100 tickets for blocking a rush-hour lane, as if these cars were jamming traffic on a major commuter artery. They didn't care that it was obvious that the parked cars had little effect on traffic flow, nor that people had obviously simply not seen the signs. Parking Enforcement, with no warning, issued \$3000 worth of tickets on Monday morning alone.

I thought this would be easily resolved, because obviously the contractor was in the wrong. But my contacts at DDOT declined to make a decision, instead calling for a "traffic study" before they did anything. You don't need to count cars, I said, just come out and observe traffic flow with the parked cars in place, and you will see for yourself that there is no need for the rush hour parking prohibition. But they wouldn't listen to me.

It took three days, a barrage of e-mails and calls from me, and finally an insistent phone call from Councilmember Jim Graham to the DDOT Director, demanding that he deal immediately with this situation. The Director issued instructions late Wednesday afternoon that the rush hour prohibitions were to be terminated forthwith, and all tickets issued voided. Thursday morning I showed this message to the Parking Enforcement personnel, to no avail, as they went right on with more outrageous ticketing and towing. I estimate that in four days they handed out \$8000 in parking tickets to hapless area residents. I'm helping people contest the tickets, which are being voided by DMV without argument.

Later Thursday morning a DDOT crew showed up and *physically removed* the Rush Hour No Parking signs from the 1700 and 1800 blocks of Park Road. Now perhaps we can keep that much-needed parking.