

## July report to constituents

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

## ANC 1D03 NEWSLETTER

Jack McKay, July 25, 2003

### **Highlights of the July ANC meeting**

I missed this meeting, having been granted the privilege of accompanying my wife to Salzburg, Austria, where she was lecturer for a course in Leadership Across Cultural Boundaries – a fitting topic for Mount Pleasant, no? – so I have to depend on the meeting minutes to summarize the July meeting.

The **Washington Free Clinic**, located just across 16th Street in Columbia Heights, provides free medical care to the needy, in particular the large Latino population of Mount Pleasant and Columbia Heights. Their presentation was in support of an application to the ANC for a grant of \$6500 to support prenatal and pediatric care. This is an indisputably worthy cause, but I will object to such a large grant, huge by ANC standards.

Everyone knows by now that Mount Pleasant has a **DC Main Streets grant** from the District, a project that is supposed to lead to a more attractive, more competitive business district.

Mount Pleasant's winning pitch for this grant was led by Elinor Hart's Main Street Mount Pleasant.

The ANC is to name three people to the Board of Directors of Main Street Mount Pleasant. We have the honor of naming **Elinor Hart** herself to the Board. The other two ANC nominees will be decided at the September meeting.

A hot topic of the moment is the selection of a **General Management Plan for Rock Creek Park**, potentially including changes to automobile traffic on **Beach Drive**. I summarized the four alternatives in detail last month. Public attention has been focused, to excess, on the Alternative D proposal to close a few segments of Beach Drive during weekdays between rush hours. This really should not be so troublesome, because this would change nothing south of Broad Branch, so Mount Pleasant travel to and from downtown

### **About ANC grants**

We have an odd problem. Our funding from the District is modest, so small that we will be hard pressed to set aside as much as \$1800 for a full year's worth of grants. However, our parsimonious predecessors managed to save up over \$33,000 in unspent funds, so we have a lot of money sitting idly in the bank. We intend to use this money almost entirely as grants to Mount Pleasant nonprofits.

In order to be able to distribute this money as grants, we eliminated from the By-Laws the rule that no more than 10% of our annual allotment, or about \$1600, be spent on grants in one year. There remains a \$500 per grant limit, which can be exceeded only if five of the six Commissioners agree that the grant pertains to a "special focus or effort" of the Commission.

Certain Commissioners want to be able to give out large grants even if they cannot muster five affirmative votes. One has proposed that the \$500 limit be wholly eliminated, in which case just three or four Commissioners could agree to give our savings away in a few large grants.

I think the five-votes provision is a valuable safeguard against abuse of this accumulation of taxpayer money. If those in favor of a grant cannot muster five votes, then there is a problem with that grant. I will resist any attempt to eliminate this five-vote requirement for large grants.

### **A stop sign for Lamont Street?**

I dislike stop signs, and I'm quite proud that one of my pre-ANC achievements was the defeat of a DDOT proposal to put stop signs on Irving Street at the 17th, 18th, and Hobart intersections. However, there are places where stop signs are needed to allow safe flow of cross streams of traffic.

Lamont Street has stops at 18th and 19th Streets, none at 17th. But Lamont makes a significant bend just a short distance from the 17th Street intersection, making oncoming Lamont Street traffic invisible to cars stopped on 17th Street, northbound. A tall hedge at the corner further impairs vision. Making the left turn from northbound 17th onto Lamont amounts to charging forward while blindly hoping that nobody is coming. I dislike stop signs, but one is justified at that intersection.

There's another benefit that may follow from a stop sign on Lamont at 17th. Much of the traffic southbound on 17th is buses making the turn-around. People who live near by are unhappy with the bus noise. DDOT has suggested that the stop sign for southbound 17th Street traffic be removed, so that the buses would not have to stop, thus eliminating a certain amount of braking and acceleration noise. This is possible only if there is a stop on Lamont.

DDOT wants the ANC to approve this change in stop signs -- adding one on Lamont, removing that on 17th. This DDOT proposal will be considered at the August 4 meeting.

**Natural Gas Prices**

A guest presentation in August will deal with "Natural Gas Prices". What, you may ask, brings on that obscure topic? Simply, many people are worried about a surge in gas prices this coming winter. Consumption of natural gas has been increasing in recent years, because electrical utilities are bringing more and more gas-burning generators on line. The supply of natural gas has, however, remained constant, limited by the existing pipelines to gas fields in the North America. If the demand exceeds the supply, as might happen if next winter is very cold, then the gas price could explode. This is a case of inelastic demand – you can't simply switch your home heat to oil tomorrow if the price of gas goes up – and inflexible supply; it takes years to drill gas wells and build pipelines.

The Public Service Commission of the District asked to come speak to us about "the expected rise in the price of Natural Gas for the upcoming heating season". We thought this could be important to Mount Pleasant residents.

would be unaffected. Furthermore, every cross-Park route would remain open to cars, and every automobile-accessible picnic area would remain automobile-accessible. However, it is also true that the recreational benefits would be very modest, because few people are free for recreational activities in the middle of the day, on weekdays. Weighing the intense opposition against the modest recreational benefits, I have to agree that it's best to reject Alternative D.

The ANC passed a resolution that objected to the road-closing proposal, while not choosing between the two alternatives that keep Beach open, namely Alternative A ("Improved Management"), and Alternative B ("No Change"). I'm pretty sure that the National Park Service will choose Alternative A.

A lot of us would like to see "Mount Pleasant" added to the name of the **Columbia Heights Metro Station**. Past efforts to bring this about have been unsuccessful, perhaps because we were not sufficiently diplomatic in dealing with our neighbors across 16th Street. This ANC has decided to reopen this subject, but to do it with suitable respect for our Columbia Heights neighbors. The Commission resolved to undertake discussions with the Columbia Heights ANC to see if they could be persuaded to agree to the name change. This won't be easy.

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

**My position on "voluntary agreements"**

Restaurants with liquor licenses generally have "voluntary agreements", or "community agreements", attached. These are agreements negotiated with neighborhood groups limiting the operations of the restaurants, and have been used in particular to prohibit live entertainment, dancing, and other characteristics that might make the restaurant a de facto night club.

This promises to be a hotly contentious matter in the coming months, because there is pressure to make changes to these agreements. I will stand for these principles:

1. These agreements should be with the ANC, not an unelected neighborhood group. This is not to disparage the hard work done by MPNA, which has negotiated many Mount Pleasant agreements, but is simply an assertion that the neighborhood group should be one that is elected by the whole neighborhood, not selected by a few.
2. The restrictions on live entertainment should be sharply reduced, if not eliminated. No one wants Mt. Pleasant to become like Adams Morgan at night. But the Street is, in fact, very quiet after 8 pm, so this seems not to be a serious hazard.
3. Any changes to these agreements must come *only after full and fair hearings of all parties*, including the restaurants, the nearby neighbors, and the MPNA.

At the August 4 meeting, Mr Rick Massumi will call for major changes in the limitations on live entertainment, restaurant sales, and advertising. I will object to this, not because I favor those restrictions, but because I consider the *full and fair* hearings indispensable. I asked that MPNA be invited to present their case at this meeting, but Chair Sale rejected this request.

**Preliminary agenda for the August 4 ANC meeting:**

- 8:00 Call to order
  - 8:15 Community forum
  - 8:30 Guest presentations
    - Sam Bost, Natural Gas Prices
    - Rick Massumi, Restrictions on Class D and Class C licenses in Mt. Pleasant
  - 9:00 Community forum (continued)
  - 9:30 Committee reports
  - 10:00 Unfinished business:
    - ANC budget
    - Mt. Pleasant Main Street (ANC apptmnts)
  - 10:30 New business:
    - Washington Free Clinic grant
    - PlayStart grant
    - Botanical Gardens grant
    - Lamont and 17th St. stop sign.
  - 11:30 Adjournment
- Note the 8 pm start time. We have a conflict with another user of La Casa.*