

August report to constituents

Here is news of the **August 2 ANC meeting**, and notes of other events in the neighborhood.

The main items of business had to do with the Mount Pleasant business district, as we dealt with restaurant liquor licenses and an application by the Bestway Market to build a grocery cart corral on the sidewalk in front of the market.

Behind these issues is the question of just what role the business district plays in our neighborhood. Many of us spend little time there, because it may be just a bit too far to walk, especially in poor weather, and once you're in a car, it's easy to go to Connecticut Avenue or Wisconsin Avenue for shopping or restaurants. Nonetheless, even for those of us who seldom patronize the businesses of Mount Pleasant Street, the health of the Street matters:

- Mount Pleasant Street adds wonderful color, interest, and vitality to the neighborhood. Without the businesses of the Street, Mount Pleasant would be a "bedroom community", certainly a pleasant place in which to live, but lacking the multicultural, multilingual vibrancy of the Street, with its mix of Latino, Asian, African-American, and Anglo businesses.
- A rundown, decaying business district would be a liability to all of us, reducing property values and compromising safety. There are now two long-closed restaurants, and two vacant buildings, marring the Street. A business district of darkened, abandoned buildings would degrade the whole neighborhood, and would be a magnet for unsavory activities.

Thus I think it is essential, for the welfare of the neighborhood, to improve business conditions on Mount Pleasant Street. It is troubling that the Habana Riviera and Nopales restaurants sit vacant, unable to attract new occupants. Why aren't new businesses rushing to fill these vacancies on Mount Pleasant Street? Homes for sale here go in a flash, so what's

Emily and I had dinner at Frank Connell's newly opened **Red Bean Restaurant** on Mount Pleasant Street, across the hallway from the Tonic. Leaving the restaurant at about 10 pm, we found the Street nearly deserted. There were just a few people in sight, not enough to give the Street a sense of safety. This is what I've been told several times: there are so few people on Mount Pleasant Street in the late evening that residents, especially women alone, do not feel safe. We need to have more people patronizing our businesses in the evening.

The justification for the ban on live music is, contrarily, to reduce the number of people on Mount Pleasant Street at night. The ban has nothing to do with loud music, because the law prohibits music that is very audible outside the business, whether that music is live or recorded. The purpose of the ban is to reduce the attractiveness of our restaurants, so that they do not attract crowds of late-night patrons.

Crowds are not the problem on Mount Pleasant Street. The problem is not enough people on the Street, not too many. No one wants Mount Pleasant Street to be mobbed the way Columbia Road is mobbed at night. But right now, having more people on the Street in the evening would be a benefit to the neighborhood.

ANC 1D03 NEWSLETTER

Jack McKay, August 19, 2004

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

One morning this month an Ingleside Terrace resident called to tell me that a **very large and apparently healthy elm tree** was being cut down, and was this possibly a mistake? I rushed on over, and we quickly determined that the tree was in fact rotten, so DDOT was right to bring it down.

The significance of this is that I was at home, on hand to deal with the matter, midmorning on a weekday. This ANC work is, for me, a full time job. I'm on call all day, every day, and I'm happy to be in a position to deal immediately with such urgent problems.

In the predawn darkness of June 19, a resident of Walbridge Place woke to find a **stranger in her bedroom**. There followed a horrific, cruel, vicious assault. To our shock, a nearby neighbor, David Bryant of Adams Mill Road, stands accused of this assault. Mr Bryant is already a registered sex offender, due to a 1982 incident.

I've not mentioned this before because there are great complexities to this very sensitive matter, and it is difficult to obtain all the facts needed to make a report that would be fair to all concerned. I have been following the case very closely, attending court hearings for Mr Bryant, and speaking to his family, and to the victim.

The evidence against Mr Bryant, who is being held without bail, is powerful. If the forensic evidence (now being analyzed by the FBI, at a very slow pace) confirms the charge, he will go away for a very long time.

The victim is dealing with this matter with extraordinary strength. She is angry at having been so viciously attacked, but she is not allowing this nightmarish incident to change her life. Yes, she has purchased a security system, no longer trusting that a locked screen door, and a barking dog, could protect her against intruders. But in all other respects, she is going on with her life in Mount Pleasant, as before.

wrong with vacant business places, that there are simply no takers? This is a highly desirable neighborhood, with many residents ready to spend money in nearby shops and restaurants. That these sites have sat vacant for months indicates that there are problems that deter desirable businesses from coming here, and we must make changes if we want good new businesses to come and fill these vacant places.

One liability cited by restaurant owners is the flat prohibition on “live music” imposed by the “voluntary agreements” attached to their liquor licenses as binding contracts. The ANC has passed a resolution in support of permitting live entertainment, with suitable limitations to protect nearby residents from untoward consequences. In order to become a participant in the “voluntary agreement” process, we must file formal “protests” of the liquor licenses. Hence, we agreed to “protest” the renewals for all the restaurant liquor licenses now up for renewal, not because we object to those licenses, but because we want to participate in the negotiation of “voluntary agreements”, with the overall objective of loosening the total ban on live music in Mount Pleasant restaurants. Wouldn't it be nice to be able to go to, say, Haydee's, and hear our own Mount Pleasant Mariachi Band play?

The question of a grocery cart rack in front of the Bestway Market came up, because this rack would be on public space – the sidewalk – and the Department of Transportation, which supervises this sort of thing, requested an ANC judgment of its acceptability to the neighborhood. The architect doing the cart rack design, our own Aric Moore, a good neighbor on 19th Street, had designed a structure that was attractive, not just functional. Nonetheless, Mr Moore and Mr Choi would have done better to have cleared this design with Mount Pleasant Main Street and Historic Mount Pleasant before submitting it to DDOT. Lacking the support of these groups, the proposal was doomed in the ANC. At my recommendation, they withdrew the application, so the ANC declined to state an opinion on the matter.

I am working with Mount Pleasant Street business owners to encourage better cooperation in the future with neighborhood organizations. I want to see a Mount Pleasant business district that is truly a part of the community, not one that is at odds with us homeowners, as has too often been the case.

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The September ANC meeting will be on September 13, 7:30 pm, La Casa Community Center, 3166 Mount Pleasant Street. Note that this is not the first Monday of the month, but the second, the first Monday being the Labor Day holiday. Because this meeting is still three weeks off, I do not have a preliminary agenda.

I've noted before the problem of **the 3400 block of Mount Pleasant Street**, alongside Bancroft. The roadbed is narrow, as little as 23 feet across, so there is simply not enough space for a 10-foot travel lane and two 8-foot parking lanes. What's worse is that there is no place for trucks to turn around at the bottom of this dead-end street, so they must go down the hill backwards, squeezing carefully between the two rows of parked cars. The only good answer is to widen the road, and that can be done only by eliminating the tree box on the Bancroft side.

There are eight young London Plane trees in that tree box. One has been killed already, by an emergency excavation to fix a broken gas line. The great majority of the neighbors are prepared to sacrifice the remaining seven, in order to have a wider road, end the truck squeeze, stop damage to the sidewalk, and still have parking on both sides of the street.

One resident of the block objected strenuously to the loss of the remaining seven trees, and threatened to halt the project with a lawsuit. I called on Councilmember Jim Graham to help us out. He pressed DDOT to proceed with the widening of the street despite this neighbor's objections, and persuaded DDOT also to support transplanting the young trees onto the Bancroft Elementary school grounds. Duff McCully at DPR will supervise the moving of the trees, and Fay Thompson at Bancroft will welcome them. Thus we will have the wider street, with both-sides parking, and we will have the trees as well. The work will be done in October, cool weather being needed for the survival of the transplanted trees.

Two years ago, when I first entertained this notion of being an ANC Commissioner, I said that no one should have to attend an ANC meeting to know what was going on. Who has the time, or the patience, to sit through our interminable, boring, eye-glazing, sleep-inducing sessions? **This monthly newsletter** is my means of telling everyone what the ANC is doing, without anyone's having to suffer through our monthly meetings.

The newsletter has also turned into a way to tell people of happenings in the neighborhood. It can be hard to find out what's going on nearby, because there is no neighborhood newspaper, and the city papers don't bother with very local events. So I do what I can to report on “neighborhood news”, as best I can in a single-sheet newsletter.

I deliver these newsletters myself, over seven hundred of them, to your doors, with the help of my good neighbor Rod Case. It's a hilly neighborhood, with some astonishingly steep and tall steps, so this is good exercise for us two old guys.

It can be hard going, especially in the ice of January, and now in the heat and humidity of August. But from what I hear from constituents, it's well worth the effort.