

September report to constituents

Here is news of the September Advisory Neighborhood Commission meeting, and the preliminary agenda for the October meeting.

Highlights of the September ANC meeting

Voting rights for non-citizens was the principal topic of the evening. This pertains not to "illegal", i.e., "undocumented" immigrants, but to "documented" immigrants, with legal residency in the United States. Close to a third of the people of Mount Pleasant are such legal, noncitizen residents, currently not allowed to vote in any elections.

We native-born Americans tend to identify voting with citizenship. But becoming a citizen is an expensive and intimidating process, and a large number of immigrants remain noncitizens, even after many years in the United States. These residents pay taxes, and are subject to all of our laws, but have no say in the making of those laws, nor in the disposition of those taxes.

Perhaps one could argue that these residents have not shown comprehension of the U.S. political system, nor of the English proficiency that might be needed to follow current events. But we are talking here only about the right to vote in *local* elections, and the District's political system -- a Mayor, a City Council, the School Board, the ANC -- is uncomplicated. As for news coverage, we have a wide variety of local Spanish language newspapers, as well as radio stations.

Opponents argue also that immigrants who fail to become citizens show a lack of commitment to the United States, and may retain their loyalty to their home countries. I think we should have more confidence in the great benefits of living in this country, such as the freedoms of speech and religion, and the opportunity to start one's own small business. Compared to anywhere in Latin America, the United States is truly the land of opportunity, and our immigrants recognize that.

Furthermore, an extension of local-election voting rights to noncitizen residents will signal acceptance and inclusion in our community, just as the current denial of voting rights sends a message of exclusion. It has long disturbed me that one sees few or no Latinos at our ANC meetings, though they are one-third of our neighborhood population.

The ANC passed, by a 5 to 0 vote, a resolution supporting the concept of local-election voting rights for noncitizen residents of the District (see box). Commissioner Grant abstained.

Latino gangs are an increasingly serious problem in Mount Pleasant and Columbia Heights. Their presence is apparent in the graffiti appearing everywhere: "L.C." for Latin Crew, or Little Crew; "STC" for Street Thug Criminals; and, most recently, "MS 13" (sometimes seen in Roman numerals), or Mara Salvatrucha, a notoriously violent

ANC 1D03 NEWSLETTER

Jack McKay, September 23, 2003

Whereas approximately thirty percent of the residents of Mount Pleasant are legal residents but not naturalized citizens of the United States, and currently are not permitted to vote in local elections; and

Whereas some municipalities of the United States currently grant non-U.S. citizens the right to vote in local elections, confirming the legality of that right; and

Whereas there is no legal precedent that suggests that the federal government would challenge the granting of this right by the District of Columbia; and

Whereas ANC 1D believes that federal citizenship should not be a prerequisite for local political enfranchisement; and

Whereas non-U.S. citizen voting legislation would be a viable way in which to award the full privileges of community membership to all Mount Pleasant residents; and

Whereas the right to vote would encourage greater participation by our non-US citizen population in civic affairs, and promote a stronger sense of inclusion in the Mount Pleasant community; therefore, let it be

Resolved that ANC-1D supports voting rights in local elections for documented residents of the District of Columbia.

Passed by the Mount Pleasant ANC, September 8, 2003, by a 5 to 0 vote.

Prior to World War I, immigrants in the United States were allowed to vote in local, state, and national elections in 22 states. After the war, the growing "anti-alien" sentiment ended practices of allowing noncitizens to vote. . . . On an international scope, several countries, such as Denmark, Sweden, Chile, Norway, and the Netherlands allow noncitizen immigrants to vote in local elections, and have allowed this for several years. -- U.S. Visa News, 2/23/99

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

gang. It's not uncommon now to see one of these symbols covered with an "X", and the symbol of a rival gang scrawled alongside, a sign that the gangs are competing for primacy in an area. These Latino gangs are not identified with specific areas, but are spread throughout the metropolitan area, and do not fight over "turf", but over perceived insults, and girls.

Jack McKay
 3200 19th St NW, DC 20010
 462-8692
 jack.mckay@verizon.net



MS-13 gang graffiti at the Mount Pleasant Library. I am working with the District Clean Cities program to have this and other Mount Pleasant graffiti removed.

Representatives of the Gang Intervention Partnership, which combines police and community organizations to attempt to deal with this difficult problem, said that these gangs are family substitutes for young Latinos, compensating for the difficulties of many hard-pressed immigrant families. Status may be the most important benefit: membership in a gang confers power and social standing on an impressionable teenager. Unfortunately, once in a gang, it is impossible to get out. It seems that we know why children get into gangs, but we don't know how to stop them from joining, and we don't know how to get them out. We have to figure out not only how to control the activities of these gangs, for our own safety, but how to keep our neighborhood children from being drawn into gangs.

That's all I've got space for this month.

Bancroft Grants. The ANC awarded grants of \$1000 each to PlayStart, for a pre-K playground at Bancroft, and to the Bancroft Gardens Project, for an attractive fence to protect the nearly-complete gardens.

That Bancroft Elementary, which has roughly 100 children in Head Start and kindergarten classes, has had no suitable playground for young children, is appalling. Smaller children attempting to play on the large play structure are pushed aside by the bigger kids, and have suffered serious injuries, including broken bones, on this structure, designed for older children.

Thanks to the unyielding tenacity of Iris Rothman, Bancroft will soon have a pre-K playground, with equipment of the correct size for these younger children. This playground will also be open to children of the entire community, whether Bancroft students or not, including during school hours.

You may have noticed the U.S. Botanical Gardens project adjacent to the Bancroft playground. The budget for this project allowed for only a chain-link fence. The ANC grant, together with funds from Historic Mount Pleasant, will permit a much more attractive fence around the garden area.

Quique Aviles of **Sol y Soul** summarized an application for an ANC grant of \$1000, to support "street theater" presentations designed to educate residents about their rights, in particular the rights of tenants of rental housing. This grant was approved by a 5 to 1 vote, Commissioner Sale opposing.

A major rebuilding of **the 3400 block of Mount Pleasant Street** is on its way. The contract has to be approved by City Council, and there will then be a meeting with the residents to review the plans. No, I don't know when the work might begin.

The proposal by WMATA and DDOT to **eliminate the stop sign on southbound 17th Street at Lamont** was rejected by the ANC. The idea was to reduce the noise of buses stopping and starting at this stop sign. The ANC thought that this modest benefit did not justify the possible hazard of a stop-less intersection. Whether the other part of the proposal, to **add a stop sign on eastbound Lamont at 17th**, will come to pass, is not clear. There was little objection to such a stop, because the curve in Lamont Street approaching 17th makes that intersection treacherous.

New stop signs: The Walbridge - Adams Mill intersection will shortly become an all-way stop. The people who live nearby, and who would be most affected by an increase in automobile braking and acceleration noise, favor the stops, because of the frequent near-collisions at this intersection. I dislike stop signs, but this is an intersection that warrants them, because visibility for drivers entering Adams Mill from Walbridge is poor, and the cars rounding the blind curve onto Walbridge from Adams Mill come at dangerous speeds.

Preliminary agenda (highlights) for the Oct. 6 ANC meeting

- 7:30 Call to order
- 8:00 Grants committee: Dorothy Marschak, CHIME
- 8:20 Housing committee: Aaron O'Toole, partial transfer legislation
- 8:45 Latino committee: Enrique Rivera, bilingual police officers
- 9:10 Business district committee: Alicia Milla, graffiti
- 9:40 Crime and City Services committee: Lars Hydle, PSA clusters
- 10:20 New business: amendment of ANC by-laws
- 10:30 Adjourn