

April report to constituents

Here is news of the **April 4 and 18 ANC meetings**, and other happenings in Mount Pleasant. At these meetings, the ANC:

- Agreed to offer “no objection” to a zoning variance at 1834 Park Road.
- Increased the authorization for the purchase of a bench for the Irving/Kenyon bus stop from \$450 to \$600.
- Authorized an expenditure of up to \$700 for a lockable cabinet for the ANC meeting electronics.
- Asked DDOT to “implement immediate [safety] measures” for pedestrians walking in the street to the Irving/Kenyon bus stop.
- Supported a DDOT/UFA effort to determine if an elm tree at 3131 Adams Mill Road, directly in front of the last section of collapsing wall, can be saved.
- Advised WMATA to assure late-night bus transportation from west of Rock Creek Park to Mount Pleasant, in the face of planned service cutbacks.
- Supported an application by Don Juan’s Restaurant for an entertainment endorsement to their liquor license, which the restaurant needs in order to offer karaoke to its customers.
- Asked that the legality of the destruction of the very old driveway behind the Bestway be investigated.
- Agreed to initiate a community discussion of the matter of live music in Mount Pleasant restaurants.

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Adams Mill Road begins at Klinge, goes south to Kenyon, then on down the hill to the back entrance to the Zoo, where it intersects Harvard Street. A short block of Harvard connects to the resumption of Adams Mill Road running through Lanier Heights into Adams Morgan, ending at Columbia Road.

Last September, at the urging of some confused Mount Pleasant residents, DDOT changed the street sign at the Kenyon intersection to read “Harvard Street”, as if Adams Mill ends there, instead of continuing on to Adams Morgan. Why anyone thought that was Harvard Street, and not a continuation of Adams Mill Road, I do not know. (The MPNA insisted on calling that point of land the “Irving-Harvard Triangle . . . the triangular lot at Irving and Harvard Streets”, and I speculate that an MPNA officer was behind the changing of the sign. But no one has admitted to that.) Our Commissioner Scott, a resident of the Harvard Towers, at the bottom of the hill, confirmed that “we [Harvard Towers residents] have always known this street as Adams Mill Road”. Not Harvard Street.

On March 30, I met with two DDOT engineers at the site, and their charts confirmed that this bit of road is indeed a continuation of Adams Mill Road, southbound, and is not Harvard Street, which runs east and west. A few weeks later the Harvard Street sign was removed, and the Adams Mill Road sign restored.

Next year the liquor licenses for Mount Pleasant’s restaurants will be up for renewal, so this may be a good time to start a public discussion of the **“live music” ban imposed by the Mount Pleasant Neighborhood Alliance**, via the so-called “voluntary agreements”. Current agreements ban “live music, dancing, cover charges or charges for admission to the establishment”. VAs more recently imposed by the MPNA add bans on disk jockeys and live entertainment. The “disk jockey” prohibition pertains to the Marx Café, which provides recorded music for the entertainment of its patrons. The “live entertainment” ban is intended to prohibit karaoke, which is not considered “live music”, and which has been popular at Don Juan’s Restaurant. The MPNA evidently wants to suppress any form of “entertainment” in Mount Pleasant restaurants.

This is not about the loudness of music, which is strictly regulated by noise ordinances, and of course recorded music can be just as loud as live. It’s about drawing more customers to Mount Pleasant restaurants, and more people to Mount Pleasant. The restaurant owners, quite naturally, want more. The sponsors of the ban don’t, preferring our streets quiet, not busy.

I’m not unsympathetic to concerns about noisy crowds on the street late at night, but the fact is, Mount Pleasant Street is so lonely after dark that residents walking home from the Metro station, or the bus stops, feel unsafe. It’s also true that only a few Mount Pleasant restaurants are large enough to serve more than a handful of people, so the total numbers that might be drawn here, as a result of “live music”, is small. It’s impossible for Mount Pleasant Street to become a busy nightclub zone.

The “live music” ban is an imposition on our residents as well as on our restaurants. Mount Pleasant residents shouldn’t have to make their way all the way to Adams Morgan, or U Street, to find entertainment with their dinners. I’m certain that a reasonable compromise can be written that will permit some live entertainment in Mount Pleasant restaurants, without imposing hardships on the nearby residents. I’m also encouraging the business owners to devise a complaint mechanism, so that if there should be any problem associated with any Mount Pleasant restaurant, neighbors have someone to complain to, and the business community leaders may then deal with the problem.

<p>A lot of people from the Harvard Towers make use of the bus stop on Irving Street at the Kenyon intersection. They prefer that to the bus stop at Hobart because it's downhill to the Kenyon stop, you can see the bus coming from a distance, and there's a place to sit (on the guard rail, not very comfortable!). There is no sidewalk on the south side of Irving, so they walk down the bike lane, risking close encounters with oncoming traffic.</p> <p>Plans are under way to build a sidewalk along this stretch of Irving Street. I firmly believe that this will come about, because there is near-universal consensus that there ought to be a sidewalk there, and DDOT intends to incorporate this sidewalk in a pitch for Federal funds to rebuild the Kenyon intersection. (This would permit the left turn from westbound Kenyon onto southbound Adams Mill, a very popular maneuver, but illegal, due to the current layout of the intersection.) But these government projects move at glacial speeds, and the new intersection, and sidewalk, won't come to pass for another two or three years.</p> <p>We asked DDOT what could be done for these elderly folks trekking down the bike path, in traffic, while we await the sidewalk. Their answer is to define a safe pedestrian path with jersey wall barriers, much as was done along Klinge Road while the mural was being repainted. This will be ugly, and will cost about ten parking spots, unfortunately. I fear that's a price we must pay, if we're to provide a safe path for these pedestrians (and others hiking that path, e.g., to the Zoo). When the Kenyon project is done, the barriers will go away, and the parking spaces will be restored.</p>	<p>The Argyle Convenient Store will reopen on April 29, eight months after the fire that closed Rocky Rakani's store. Stop by, welcome Rocky back, buy something. A lot of residents missed Rocky's store.</p> <p>He would have been back in business months ago, but for obstinate District bureaucrats. The latest problem was, as I noted last month, that the ANC resolution calling for Public Space to issue permits "as soon as possible" somehow never made it to the bureaucrat holding up the permits. One official asserted that our resolution, sent in as an attachment to an e-mail, was ignored because they expected it to show up as a piece of paper delivered by mail. I pointed out that the law requires only that the ANC response be "in writing", and a document attached to an e-mail was precisely that. They had to concede the point, and henceforth e-mail attachments will be acceptable.</p> <p>Some DC agencies still insist that ANC resolutions be on paper, delivered by mail. Probably they're still using manual typewriters, too.</p>
<p>There will be no Mount Pleasant Festival this year. I think the disputes over who should manage the Festival, and how, could not be resolved. Last year the ANC called for a new Festival management team, one that would run the Festival "in a manner that promotes the positive assets of the Mount Pleasant neighborhood and commercial corridor." This didn't work out, I don't know why.</p> <p>Entirely by coincidence, an organization called Fiesta DC is reviving the DC Latino Fiesta, and is considering holding this year's Fiesta right here. Last year the Fiesta was held at Cardozo High School, and drew nearly 7,000 people. I think it makes excellent sense to hold the Fiesta here, in the heart of the Latino community of the District. This would be in late September, in conjunction with Hispanic Heritage Month. Perhaps that would serve as this year's replacement for the Festival, and it would have the advantage of featuring the special Latino flavor of Mount Pleasant.</p>	<p>The ANC supported a permit application for 1834 Park Road. This was just a matter of enclosing an existing porch, but, because the building very slightly exceeds (already) R-4 zoning regulations, having been built about fifty years before these regulations existed, a Board of Zoning Adjustment approval was required. With the ANC endorsement in hand, this should be no problem for the homeowners.</p> <p>I see my ANC role as helping residents overcome the obstacles put up by District bureaucracies, and get their permits. Certain current Commissioners want to be "permit police", behaving like yet another layer of stubborn bureaucrats for the homeowners to overcome. I disagree.</p> <p>There is a great thicket of regulations that restrict what we residents can do with our homes. We commonly need permits not only from the notoriously difficult DCRA, but from the Historic Preservation Office, from the Public Space Office, from the Board of Zoning Adjustment, and sometimes even from the Commission on Fine Arts. For the homeowner, this can be a seriously intimidating and time-consuming task, requiring numerous trips downtown, where one must deal with too many officious bureaucrats who know all the rules, while you don't.</p> <p>Barring plans that would be problematic for the neighbors or the neighborhood, I will try to help residents get their permits, guiding them through the bureaucratic maze, and persuading the ANC to offer support.</p>
<p>There's a big elm tree embedded in the sidewalk at 3133 Adams Mill Road, in front of the only portion of the retaining wall that has yet to be repaired. The residents are ready to rebuild that chunk of wall, but the tree is in the way of work on the wall, and the new wall will go about three feet deeper into the ground, so any roots extending under the wall will have to be cut. That could destabilize the tree, which already looks like it's ready to crash into the road.</p> <p>The ANC endorsed the (expensive) dismantling of the wall by hand, instead of by backhoe, to permit an inspection of the root structure of the tree. It may turn out that the tree cannot be saved, anyway. But it's worth a try to salvage a large, eighty-year-old elm tree.</p>	<p>Next ANC meeting: 7 pm, May 2, La Casa. Possible topics: non-voting ANC delegates; pedestrian passageway to the Kenyon/Irving bus stop; restaurant voluntary agreements.</p>