

Jack's April report

At the March 20 ANC meeting, the commission:

* Endorsed stipulated liquor licenses for the sidewalk cafe at the Pupuseria San Miguel, and for the Woodner Market.

On April 3, the **DC primary election** was held, and almost nobody came. This election in past years took place in September, when the November general election was not so far off, and people were thinking about elections, not spring break and summer vacations. Why hold a primary seven months before the general? Because Federal law now requires that absentee ballots be mailed overseas at least 45 days before the general election to give armed forces personnel and other citizens outside the country time to mail them back. The primary could have been in August, or July, or June, but the Council didn't want a summertime election. Somebody said "combine it with the presidential primary", ergo, April.

But because the District is overwhelmingly Democratic, the primary election is tantamount to the general election. The early-spring election makes it harder for challengers versus incumbents, forcing them to do their petitioning and organizing in the cold of winter, before people are ready to deal with an election. And, should a challenger be victorious in the primary (Biddle?), the incumbent will be a de facto lame duck for eight months. This is a bad business.

Turnout at this too-early primary was just 15%, and that's how much of the electorate will have determined the 2012 election results. In Mount Pleasant, 1001 people voted at the polls, which I think represents more than the DC average. The most important election here was that for At-Large Councilmember, which Sekou Biddle won by a large margin, 662 votes to 140 for Vincent Orange, 96 for Peter Shapiro, 31 for E. Gain Anderson Holness.

The voting results for Biddle vs. Orange showed a strong west-to-east variation in the District, similar to the Fenty vs. Gray vote of two years ago. West of Rock Creek Park went heavily for Biddle; east of the Anacostia, heavily for Orange. Biddle's vote proportion, ward by ward, in decreasing order:

Ward Three: 71% for Biddle

Mount Pleasant: 70%

Ward Two: 62%

Ward One: 57%

Ward Six: 50%

Ward Four: 41%

Ward Five: 22%

Ward Seven: 15%

Ward Eight: 12%

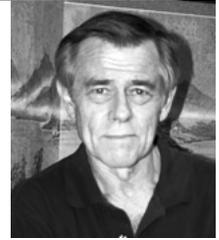
Mount Pleasant, for better or worse, is looking more and more like Ward Three.

As everyone knows, the Biddle-Orange vote totals were very close, a margin of just 543 votes for CM Orange. But absentee ballots have yet to be counted. There should be about 2000 absentee ballots, and there's speculation that most of those absentee ballots will be from Ward Two/Three types. If we suppose that 65% of 2000 absentee ballots are for Biddle, then he will have won the election. We'll find out on April 13, when those votes are counted.

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Should the ANC take a position concerning the **red-top meter, handicapped-reserved parking spaces**? DDOT has said that it plans to set aside 1500 metered parking spaces for handicapped only, and anyone without disabled-driver identification who parks in a red-top spot will get a brutal ticket, \$250. This program began on March 1, then was abruptly halted, by act of District Council, due to a barrage of complaints. On March 29, Council-member Mary Cheh held a hearing on the topic.

Nobody begrudges the disabled reasonable provision for specially convenient parking. Curiously, the March 29 hearing was dominated by complaints from advocates for the disabled about the new red-top-meter program, even though it amounts to a vast increase in the number of parking spaces set aside for their use only. DC policy has been that people with disabled tags on their cars can park for free, for twice the normal time limit, at any meter. This policy has been seriously abused, and DDOT showed examples of flagrant abuse by nondisabled drivers with faked placards. Key to the new policy is that parking for the disabled will no longer be free, eliminating much of the attractiveness of this fraud.

But that elimination of free parking anywhere seems to have upset many of the disabled. Some argued that the meters are not reachable by people in wheelchairs, or that access to meters is blocked by treeboxes or bicycles. It was noted that they could use the cellphone-payment system, but that was declared objectionable by one witness, who complained that to do so cost him an additional 35 cents, and so was unfair.

What no one mentioned was the significant reduction in parking available to the non-disabled. Some 1500 of the 17,000 parking meters in the District, or one meter in 11, would become reserved for the handicapped. (Not enough, complained one advocate.) It's already frequently hard to find a metered parking space, and this would make parking in commercial areas (including Mount Pleasant Street) that much harder. If I have the numbers correct, disabled-driver permits amount to about 3.6% of the total number of registered cars in the District. Is it reasonable that 9% of metered parking spaces should be reserved for 3.6% of DC drivers? (One must consider suburban drivers as well, of course, but presumably the ratios won't change.) Furthermore, these 1500 red-top-meter spots are in addition to the handicapped-reserved spaces already marked out where there are special needs.

In parking lots, the legally required (ADA) set-aside of parking spots for the handicapped is 2% to 4%, depending on

the size of the lot. Why does the District propose to set aside several times as many? The goal seems to be to provide one reserved space on each side of every commercial block.

Sympathetic as one must be to the disabled, this taking of 9% of metered spots for the disabled seems to me to be excessive. I have been unable to get an answer to the question of how many such spots would be here in Mount Pleasant. This will likely mean five or six parking spots on Mount Pleasant Street, and our local business owners won't like that. Nobody wants to be unkind to the disabled, but this seems like a very generous allocation of parking for the 10,000 DC drivers with disabled tags or placards, at the expense of the 270,000 without.

I have to correct a statement I made in my March newsletter, that Historic Mount Pleasant (HMP) showed no interest in the **sand-brown sidewalks** I had succeeded in bringing to Mount Pleasant, a much better match to the original sidewalks than the dreadful industrial gray that is the DDOT standard. Fay Armstrong, president of HMP, protested my claim that they "showed no interest" in my sidewalks. Digging through my old e-mails, I find that Fay was enthusiastic about my sidewalks, back in July, 2006: "I think the new sidewalk looks very nice – a huge improvement over the deadly grey stuff. When do we need to show popular approval downtown, and to whom? Should I invite other HMP board members to take a look and do a letter on letterhead?"

Well, yes. A month later I forwarded to Fay an e-mail in which DDOT engineers said they were "working to get the color approved". A supportive HMP response to that DDOT e-mail would have been helpful, but didn't happen. In retrospect, I see that they needed more explicit direction from me as to what they could do.

A 19th Street neighbor has a gutter that needs to be replaced. The wood in which it is mounted has rotted out, so the new gutter cannot simply be mounted in place. The homeowner's contractor put up a fascia to which the new gutter could be attached, with the assurance that this new fascia would not be visible, behind that gutter. But **historic preservation socked him with a "stop work" order**, and demanded the gutters be restored to their pristine, circa-1911 appearance. But because that perfect preservationist repair would be too expensive, as much as \$30,000, the owner just isn't going to do it. Will there be interior damage due to rainwater leaking into his house? Too bad. Does the neighborhood really care that his house will look very slightly different than it did when it was built? I don't think so, other than a handful of purists.

The District's historic preservation law does not require strict "preservation", requiring only that alterations be "compatible with the character of the historic district". But the people who govern historic preservation ignore this provision allowing alterations and demand perfect preservation, perfect restoration to a house's original condition, as if we live in a museum, not a neighborhood. Your house isn't your house, it's a museum piece, to be preserved in every exterior detail, whatever your personal needs, at whatever cost.

Is this what the neighborhood agreed to, when Mount Pleasant became a historic district in 1986? I believe that

residents wanted only to prevent incongruous development, that is, the replacement of old buildings with new, modern-style architecture. Draconian regulation prohibiting any change to the appearance of their own homes, however minor, wasn't what was promised. But that's what we've got.

I complained in my February newsletter that the "**public members**" of the **Historic Preservation Review Board**, the group that might be appealed to in cases such as the above, are invariably chosen to be fervent preservation advocates, representing that community, not the public. The Council has just confirmed another such "public member" appointment to the HPRB, and again, it's a committed preservationist, not a representative of the people. The appointee is D. Graham Davidson, an architect, a trustee of the DC Preservation League, and the owner of a million-dollar house in Cleveland Park. He joins "public member" Nancy Metzger, owner of a million-dollar Capitol Hill townhouse.

Why can't the HPRB have "public members" who are District homeowners of ordinary incomes, people who might actually care about the costly burdens placed on homeowners by the demands of historic preservation? The historic-preservation folks complain about being called "elitist" by some. Well, just look at the "public members" of the HPRB. The epithet is, I think, accurate.

Despite the court suit filed by **Klingle Road** die-hards, reported on here last month, Mayor Gray's 2013 budget includes \$3M for construction of the recreational trail. Maybe when the trail is actually built, the road people will accept reality and give it up. As onetime road supporter CM David Catania said in 2008, "I suspect the majority of the citizens of this city couldn't find Klingle Road on a map if you put a gun to their head . . . we have more serious challenges in this city than this tiny road . . . [I] hope that once and for all we can put this issue to rest." Amen to that, Councilmember!

Among the top 10 target schools for out-of-boundary applications: our own **Bancroft Elementary**. I think our neighborhood school is finally coming into its own, and should be not merely the school in our neighborhood, but our **neighborhood's school**.

The long-awaited reconstruction of the **Kenyon/Adams Mill intersection** to permit the left turns from Kenyon to southbound Adams Mill is close at hand. DDOT has its request for bids out, responses due April 12. Project budget (not just this intersection, but the intersection at the Beach Drive ramp and Zoo entrance as well) is \$3.5M.

Some gas-line work was just completed at the Kenyon intersection, and the road stripped and repaved. No doubt that brand new pavement will shortly be ripped up for the intersection reconstruction. You would think things would be better coordinated. But DC utility companies, like Washington Gas Light, can't be bothered to coordinate their work with DDOT projects. I pestered DDOT to make sure that the gas-line work didn't conflict with the plans for the intersection, so I hope that was accomplished.

The next <i>business</i> meeting of the ANC will be on Tuesday, April 17, 2012, 7:00 pm.
