

## August report to constituents

Here is news of the **August 2 ANC monthly meeting**, and other happenings in Mount Pleasant. At the monthly meeting, the ANC:

### ANC 1D03 NEWSLETTER #36

Jack McKay, August 30, 2005

- Advised DDOT to address traffic concerns on the 1600 block of Monroe Street by prohibiting through truck traffic and putting a stop sign on Monroe at the Brown Street intersection, while refraining at this time from the installation of a speed hump until the proper procedures for traffic calming measures can be followed;
- Advised the Department of Parks and Recreation to issue permits to the MPNA for three musical performances in the Lamont Plaza, including permission to use the electricity on site, with the proviso that the legal limits to sound levels in the park be observed, and that the electrical outlet be secured;
- Advised the Department of Transportation to deny public space permits to the developer of the apartment building at 1636 Kenyon Street, until the developer provides better plans for his proposed work.

**Robberies** are a never-ending plague in Mount Pleasant. We average about six a month, which is close to the average for DC. Nine of ten of these robberies take place east of 18th Street, many of them either close to Mount Pleasant Street, or along 16th. Here on the “west end”, the rate of street robberies is as low as it is in the “safe” neighborhoods west of Rock Creek Park.

An exception took place early in the morning of August 1, when two youths attacked a woman along Adams Mill Road, punching her and taking her purse. The two were arrested a short time later, a few blocks away, and were positively identified by the victim. This fit the classic pattern of robberies in Mount Pleasant: young men from Columbia Heights, prowling our “wealthy” neighborhood, looking for easy victims. These two were just 15 years old.

Some **statistics** of our marvelous little neighborhood:

- \* 38% of the residents of Mount Pleasant are foreign-born.
- \* 43% speak a language other than English at home. For two-thirds of these, the home language is Spanish.
- \* About half these residents speak English “not well”, or “not at all”.

Mount Pleasant has become a comfortable way-station for new immigrants to the United States. Yes, immigrants create certain difficulties, and we have to cope with the occasional cultural differences and misunderstandings. But these are people with the energy, ambition, and courage to leave their homelands and try to build new lives in America. I respect them, and I value the cultural variety, color, and energy that they bring to our town. I am proud also that the people of Mount Pleasant make our community a welcoming place for immigrants.

For reasons long forgotten, Park Road, a “minor arterial” for east-west traffic, becomes one-way westbound at 17th Street, forcing all eastbound traffic to detour to Monroe or Lamont Streets to get to 16th. The residents of these streets are justifiably unhappy about their extra burden of traffic. This is a fundamentally flawed traffic design, and we will propose that DDOT investigate and propose traffic routes that will not divert heavy through traffic onto purely residential streets.

The residents of the 1600 block of Monroe Street have attempted to mitigate their problem by petitioning for a **speed hump** on their block. DDOT required ANC approval of this petition, but we had a number of reservations.

- (1) The speed hump should be justified by traffic speed measurements, and supported by a DDOT traffic engineering judgment that the hump was the correct solution to the problem. The residents are not, after all, traffic engineers.
- (2) All the residents of the area should be included in the decision of the speed hump, including the residents of the Park Monroe apartment house, which faces on 16th Street, but which abuts Monroe, and has a parking garage and two driveways exiting onto Monroe. The Monroe Street petition included only row houses, no apartment dwellings.
- (3) Consequences of the speed hump elsewhere in Mount Pleasant should be considered, in particular the possibility that it would divert traffic from Monroe to the 1600 block of Lamont Street, the residents of which have been allowed no say in this matter.

The procedures outlined in the DDOT Traffic Calming Policies and Guidelines deal specifically with these concerns, and we’ve simply called for those procedures to be observed. The residents object, asserting that we should simply rubber-stamp their request. That they’ve decided among themselves that they want a speed hump should, they say, be sufficient. They’ve undertaken a political end-run, causing DDOT management to issue a top-down instruction to their traffic engineers: ignore the ANC, ignore the Policies and Guidelines, ignore their traffic engineers, just give the residents what they want.

By a three to two vote (Wayne and Rich voting “no”), we passed a resolution calling on DDOT to respect its own guidelines. We also recommended a stop sign on Monroe at the Brown Street intersection, as the residents had requested, because of a clear need and justification, and we asked that through commercial traffic on Monroe be prohibited.

The new owners of the somewhat rundown apartment house at **1636 Kenyon Street**, the St. Dennis, came to us with a request for a public space permit, for a dumpster to take up the right lane of Kenyon Street for a full year, while they carry out interior demolition and renovation of the building. While we would like to see this building modernized, we're troubled by the manner in which this is being done. The owners employed the "95-5" loophole to avoid giving the residents an opportunity to buy their apartments, as the law requires. (They buy 95% of the building, then later the remaining 5%, a subterfuge to evade the tenants' rights law, now prohibited by new Council legislation.) I found one resident who had lived in this building for 27 years, and now found herself forced out, "under duress", she said. One pair of residents, Latina sisters, remain in the otherwise-vacant building, even as the developer sets about internal demolition work. This is all very troubling, and now the developer expects us to allow him to take over one lane of Kenyon Street, between 17th and Mount Pleasant, for a full year.

We declined to support his application for a public space permit, insisting that he provide us with up with a plan for his proposed work, and better justification for his blocking a street for a year. He and his "Mister Permit" subcontractor expect us to meekly rubber-stamp his permit application, and have complained to DDOT about our uncooperative attitude. Our resolution, passed 5 to 0, called on DDOT to withhold any public space permit application for work at 1636 Kenyon. We're not going to let this developer ride roughshod over the residents of Mount Pleasant.

DPR is now requiring users of the Park that might "disrupt the normal routine of the neighborhood" to get ANC approval of Park permits. Essentially, any such disruption is then the ANC's responsibility. Specifically, any musical performance using amplifiers requires ANC approval.

Some have objected to having to come to the ANC for approval. It's not that we would withhold approval; except in the case of problematical performances, permit approval would, I assure everyone, be automatic. If upset neighbors complain to us about certain performances, then we're in a position to insist on changes before allowing new permits.

We passed a resolution advising DPR to grant permits to MPNA for three performances, through October. (They wanted permits for 12 performances, essentially a blank check for a year.) If there are no complaints, then future approvals will be automatic. If residents are disturbed by the music, then speak to us, and we'll see about controlling the sound levels. Many performers have no idea what sound level their powerful amplifiers are producing, and the modern style is, unfortunately, to blast the audience with sound levels at the threshold of pain.

We requested a lock on the electrical outlet at the Park, so electricity would be available only for DPR-permitted performances. The sound level of musical performances now being the ANC's responsibility, we and the DPR must be able to control the use of amplifiers in the Park. It doesn't make much sense to have the site open for anyone to show up and plug in amplifiers, and then blast the neighborhood with whatever sound levels he likes.

Lately the **WASA lead-water-line contractor** has been working his way up the 3100 and 3200 blocks of 19th Street. Then the "Emergency No Parking" signs showed up in the 3300 block of 19th, north of Park Road. Now that's a different matter, because that block was completely repaved, curb to curb, last fall, after the streetlight work. Recently paved streets are supposed to go on a "suspended streets" list, and are immune, by law, to all but emergency excavations for five years. Evidently, however, the section of DDOT that does this paving work failed to put the streets repaved last summer on the list, so the section of DDOT that issues public space permits gave WASA permission to excavate our newly paved streets.

At the behest of a resident, I notified DDOT, which sent out an inspector, who determined that "because the roadway in the 3200-3300 block is new pavement DDOT had WASA stop further work in that section" until a proper decision could be made. That's why the lead-line replacement work on 19th north of Park Road came to an abrupt halt.

I know some residents are now unhappy that the lead-line replacement work has been delayed. I'm not judging which is more important: preserving newly paved streets, or taking out the lead water lines. I have to go by the law, which prohibits excavations of newly paved streets, barring emergency. Now DDOT understands that this WASA permit application pertains to a newly paved street, and they'll judge whether lead-line replacement constitutes an "emergency" or not.

The latest word from DDOT is this: "Regarding 19th street WASA has not yet determined if there are lead services that need to be replaced. Test pits will be performed in the grass area to see if replacements are necessary. This will not affect the roadway. If it is determined that services will need to be replaced WASA will not cut the roadway until Confirmed plans are in place for the immediate and total restoration." I presume that "replacements are necessary", so the lead service line work will be done, and perhaps DDOT will really insist that the roadbed be properly repaved. Some of the patches done by the WASA contractor around here are pretty poor, and we all recall what a mess Monroe Street was last year.

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The next **ANC monthly meeting** will be on **Tuesday, September 6**, 7 pm, La Casa Community Center, 3166 Mt Pleasant Street. On the agenda: liquor license transfers, the District Comprehensive Plan, a public pay phone permit, a pedestrian walkway through Bell/Lincoln to Mount Pleasant, public recreational facilities in the area, the DDOT reply to the Monroe Street traffic calming resolution, DDOT Public Space notifications.