

Jack's August report to residents

The ANC did not intend to meet in August, and I happily took off with Emily for a vacation. But in my absence, the Commission decided to hold a short, special meeting, for things that just couldn't wait until September. So they met on August 12, and did this:

- Advised the DC Public Library (DCPL) to delay closing the Mt Pleasant Branch Library until there are funds available for a temporary facility nearby. The current plan is to close our library for *two years* for renovations of the interior.
- Advised the DCPL to delay closing the Library until it follows the ANC law on communication with ANC1D, and allows substantial consideration of alternative approaches.
- Advised the ABC Board to reconsider, in part, its decision concerning music and entertainment at Don Juan's Restaurant. While fully allowing karaoke, which was the main issue, the Board limited live music to "roaming mariachis", for reasons unknown.

August is always a quiet month in DC. Emily and I went **far north for a week away** from the noisy, busy city. Usually we fly, but driving saved us well over a thousand dollars, even with gasoline at \$4 a gallon here, \$5 a gallon in Canada. Loaded to the gills with supplies for the week, our aging (2001) Prius hybrid averaged better than 45 miles per gallon on the 1750-mile trip.

In a small town in northern Ontario, we were startled to be yelled at by an angry Canadian in a passing car. We think he was objecting to our "Pro Immigration" bumper sticker.

I'll be on the **November 4 ballot**, as I've agreed to run for another two years of this ANC work. So far, no one has filed to oppose me. I'm disappointed, because the election is more meaningful when voters have a real and explicit choice.

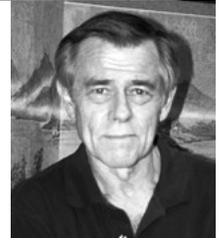
Five of the six current Commissioners have filed for re-election. Only Jane Zara, who represents Mount Pleasant north of Lamont Street and east of 18th Street, has not. Phil Lepanto, resident of the 1700 block of Lamont Street, has filed for that seat, and I'll be happy to work with him.

A constituent said she wished I had supported the effort to restore **Kling Road** as an automobile road. But what I and the ANC did was irrelevant. The road advocates won the battle, totally, in 2003, with the District Council measure prescribing restoration of the automobile road. The Council act was so compelling that the Kling Road Environmental Impact Study refused even to consider any compromise options, such as half the road for one-way automobile traffic, and half for recreational use (Berger Option G). I speculated at the time that this would be an empty victory for the road advocates, because the National Park Service was not going to tolerate the automobile-only road, devoid of any recreational component, through Rock Creek Park.

ANC 1D03 NEWSLETTER #72

Jack McKay, August 26, 2008

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It appears that the NPS has in fact succeeded in blocking the road, by stonewalling the Environmental Impact Statement behind the scenes. As Councilmember Graham said during the recent Kling Road debate in Council, "the handwriting is on the wall," namely that the Federal Government is simply not going to permit the restoration of the Kling Road of old. The Council agrees that it's time to move on, and do something useful with this area. So the FY2009 budget bill calls for "the environmental remediation of Kling Valley and construction of a pedestrian and bicycle trail", with Federal financial support. Mr Graham's last-minute efforts to derail the trail were rejected 10 to 3 by the Council. This ANC's endorsement of Ward Three Councilmember Mary Cheh's proposal of a bike/hike trail had negligible effect on this result.

That outcome was brought about by the uncompromising insistence of certain Kling Road advocates on all of the roadway for cars, with nothing for bicycles and hikers. Had they included a recreational component to make the road more palatable to the National Park Service, the outcome might have been entirely different. But we'll never know.

Politicians leap happily on board the **single-sales bans**, because those are easy, cost-free vote winners. But they're bad public policy, and I won't support bad public policy, no matter how popular.

What's wrong with banning the sale of single containers of alcoholic beverages, as a means of reducing the problems caused by chronic inebriates on our streets? The following:

- (1) Not one alcohol abuser stops drinking because of the singles ban. It's not that easy to cure alcoholism. Any benefits brought to Mount Pleasant by the single-sales ban here have come about only by causing our problem population to go to other neighborhoods for their alcohol. That's nice for us, but not so nice for our neighboring communities, and it's certainly no real solution to the problem.
- (2) There's no evidence today that the Mount Pleasant ban, in place here for about eight years, is beneficial. Only a trial suspension of the ban would show whether the ban is really doing us any good, or not. The bill pushed by Councilmember Graham, making the single sales ban in Mount Pleasant permanent law, would prevent any such evaluation.
- (3) As long as the Council plays with these popular bans to please constituents, they can continue to avoid facing up

to the real problem of thousands of such homeless alcohol abusers on the streets of DC.

Yes, there are real solutions at hand. The fundamental problem is that there are several thousand homeless single men in the District, many of them substance abusers. Most homeless shelters put their clients out early in the morning, and don't let them back in until evening. During the day, these men have no place to go to but our public parks, nothing to do but feed their habits, and no access to toilets. So they crowd our parks, drink whatever cheap alcohol they can lay their hands on, and use our alleys for toilets. It's District policy that causes these troubled and troublesome men to be *our* neighborhood nuisances, all day long.

What can we do? At the least, homeless shelters could make their toilets available during the day, so these men wouldn't be using our back yards and alleys. Even better, Mayor Fenty, to his credit, is pressing for Permanent Supportive Housing, to get the homeless off the streets and out of our parks.

But that program has yet to make a dent in the homeless population, while the Council of the District busies itself with single-sales bans, pretending that those bans are valid solutions to the problem. At Councilmember Graham's instigation, the Council has declared the current single-sales ban bills (for Ward 2, Ward 6, and Mount Pleasant) "emergencies", permitting short cuts to the normal legislative process. Concerning Mayor Fenty's effort to get the homeless off the streets and into supportive housing, well, the Council will hold hearings in September. A bogus solution to the problem is evidently considered an "emergency", but a serious solution is not.

More than 16,000 people are homeless in DC; a quarter of them are mentally ill, and perhaps a third are substance abusers. They can be unpleasant people to have around, no doubt about it. But we've got to do better than simply trying to make them go away, to somebody else's neighborhood.

Perhaps this is an opportunity to state my fundamental view of Mount Pleasant, which I try to support through ANC work. Mount Pleasant should be a place where *everyone feels welcome and comfortable, despite differences in our lifestyles, ethnicities, incomes, and backgrounds. This means:*

- *wealthy, poor, or in-between;*
- *white, black, Latino, Asian, or "other";*
- *young, old, or in between;*
- *long-time residents, or new arrivals*
- *immigrant, or native-born;*
- *gay or straight;*
- *homeowner or renter;*

and anything else I've missed.

We chose Mount Pleasant for our home because it was, in 1972, perhaps **the only truly diverse neighborhood in the District.** Let's not let that slip away from us. Yes, I hear from longtime residents who now believe that they are viewed with suspicion in their own neighborhood, worried that newer arrivals from suburban backgrounds may not be accustomed to true, inner-city, east-of-the-Park diversity.

August has been about **as dry as May was wet**, when we had, officially, 10.66 inches of rain, essentially tying the 1953 record of 10.69 inches. So far in August, we've had just over half an inch, and we're close to tying the 1962 record for the smallest amount of August rainfall, 0.55 inches. That's one-eighth the usual amount, and, despite all that springtime rain, the U.S. Drought Monitor now rates the DC area "abnormally dry".

Aside from your own garden, **please water your street trees.** Too many have been allowed to die, simply overlooked by the nearby residents. The city doesn't water trees, so if nature doesn't do the job, then we residents must. I see young trees in drought trouble on 19th Street, on Newton, on Ingleside Terrace. I'm sure there are many more. If you're within hose range of any young tree, please give it some water through this dry period. If we residents don't take care of these young trees, they will die.

A neighbor has asked me to remind everyone that dog owners are responsible for picking up their dog's excrement. Almost all dog owners are quite diligent about this, and conditions here are far better than they were some years ago, when you had to walk with your eyes focused on the ground ahead of you, due to the ubiquitous **dog poop**. Still, a few dog owners haven't accepted their responsibility for their dog's poop. Please, if you have a dog . . . out of consideration for your neighbors, pick it up, as the great majority of dog owners do.

Styrofoam "popcorn" pellets are used for package packing material, but what is one supposed to do with the things? They can't go into recycling, and they're really bad in the trash, becoming permanent landfill junk. How to re-use them? Bag up clean styrofoam packing pellets and take them to the UPS Store on Monroe Street at 14th. They'll happily accept them for re-use.

I was going to note that we were making it through August with zero **robberies**, an extraordinary thing. But that couldn't last; on August 22, two robberies, and on the 24th, one more. Mount Pleasant averages six robberies per month.

The robberies were, as almost always is the case, well to the east side of Mount Pleasant: 17th and Lamont (purse snatch), 16th and Oak, 16th and Meridian. Burglaries, in contrast, are spread around the "row house" areas, as burglars look for houses unoccupied because the residents are at their daytime jobs. Mount Pleasant has averaged five burglaries a month, but lately the rate has been high: ten in May, twelve in June, six in July, seven so far in August.

Thefts from auto are an endless plague in Mount Pleasant: easy to commit, easy to get away with, too minor an offense for the MPD to put much effort into "solving". Ordinarily there are about 11 such incidents each month. This month, we're already up to 17. These are scattered all over the neighborhood, east to west, north to south, wherever cars are parked on the street. Lately, automobile GPS navigation systems have been favorite targets for these thieves.

The next ANC meeting will be on **Tuesday, September 2,** 7:00 pm, La Casa Community Center, 3166 Mt. Pleasant St.