

Jack's August report

On July 20, the ANC did the following:

- Advised DDOT to compel District contractors to comply with current regulations for temporary no-parking signs;
- Advised DPW Parking Enforcement, and the Metropolitan Police Department, that parking violation citations should state explicitly what parking regulation has been violated;
- Asked all for ideas for a framework for a Mount Pleasant Commercial Corridor that is “a Green Street with vital and diverse economics and cultures”.

On August 3 we held an informal public meeting, for which the main topic was the upcoming (September 26) Fiesta DC.

On August 3, Ingleside Terrace residents were shocked to see **bulldozers reducing the Bancroft playgrounds to bare dirt**. I think people knew that the parking lot/basketball court was going to go to make way for a soccer field. But nobody was prepared to see the PlayStart playground annihilated. That little-kids playground was built just seven years ago, with funds contributed by the neighborhood, not a penny coming from the school system. To have this destroyed overnight, with not a word of warning to the residents who had provided the money and labor to build it, was a blow.

Why didn't the people behind this decision include the neighborhood in their deliberations? Even the ANC, which, at my instigation, contributed a thousand dollars to the playground, was kept in the dark. I hear that the Office of Public Education Facilities Modernization instructed the participants in the process, including the Bancroft PTA, to keep the Mount Pleasant neighbors in the dark, with a threat of cancellation of the project if word got out. That neighbors paid for, and built, the PlayStart playground, meant nothing. This seems to be the Fenty/Rhee attitude: avoid talking to the residents around a school, they'll just be troublesome.

There's more. The Bancroft gardens, planted and tended by the children, were flattened. Channel 9 showed video of a very unhappy 12-year-old, tearful at the sight of her destroyed garden. “It won't be the same,” she cried. Perhaps if neighbors had been told that this was coming, she and her friends could have been prepared for the event.

Yes, there will be a new, and nicer, playground. Will it be accessible to the children of Mount Pleasant, as PlayStart was supposed to be? Will the youths of Mount Pleasant be allowed use of the new basketball court, after school hours and on weekends? We don't know. Bancroft isn't telling us anything, and I sense that, because the new facilities will be costly, the new grounds will be locked up tight, fencing the neighborhood kids out, for fear of vandalism.

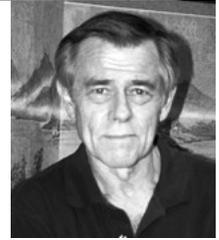
The only good news is that the great elm tree at the PlayStart playground will be saved. I learned on July 29 that the decision had been made to destroy the 60-foot-tall tree. I posted that on the Forum, a public outcry followed, and on August 5, Councilmember Graham elicited a promise from the director of Facilities Modernization to keep the tree.

I have long been a supporter of Bancroft, even irritating some residents who prefer to send their children to “better”, west-of-the-Park schools. My “pretend” granddaughter attended

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Bancroft, so I know something about it, and I've long advertised Bancroft as being much better than its unfortunate reputation, and better than indicated by its test scores. For eight years I've been Bancroft's strongest supporter on the ANC. But I was shut out of these discussions, too. Had I been included, the neighborhood would have been told of the plans for Bancroft, and we wouldn't have been taken by surprise by the bulldozers.

The resolution concerning “**Emergency No Parking**” signs was mine. For years I've protested the abuse of these no-parking placards by District contractors, as they take as much parking space as they want, for as long as they want, with no limits, and no explanation to anybody. In 2006, the District Council passed a law that required contractors to put certain information on those posters, including the name of the issuing agency, and a contact name and phone number, giving residents half a chance to discover why their scarce parking space is being usurped.

But what good is this law if District contractors are free to ignore it? The contractor doing the work recently on Adams Mill Road has been using the old signs, with none of the information required by the new law. Signs conforming to the current law are readily available, as the contractor doing the work on the wall at Park Road and 19th has shown. So how is it that the Fort Myer Company, a big-time District contractor, is allowed to get by with the old, “we're not telling you why, but you can't park here” signs?

Councilmember Graham agreed that this was appropriate, and he might well be able to do something about this disregard of the placard law, as chair of the committee overseeing DDOT.

The resolution calling for parking tickets **to specify explicitly the parking regulation violated** was also mine. This seems self-evident: if you get a parking ticket, the ticket ought to cite the parking regulation you're accused of violating. But tickets seldom do, simply stating “no parking anytime”, with no further explanation. Too close to an intersection? Too close to an alley? To a stop sign? Who knows? The folks handing out these tickets simply note the existence of a no-parking sign, and your parked car, and that's it.

This is of some immediate importance to me, as I continue to wage a battle for our permission to park as close as 25 feet from an intersection, for RPP-stickered cars on RPP-zoned blocks. Mostly I've been successful, with five of these tickets dismissed by the Department of Motor Vehicles upon my citation of the 25-foot law. Just one of my denials has been rejected, and that I took to the DMV Board of Appeals. In

that argument, my defense has been complicated by the absence of any indication of exactly what parking regulation was involved. How do you defend yourself against a charge of illegal parking, when no one will say what parking law you're supposed to have violated? Kafka lives, at the DMV!

There have been two developments of note concerning modest-cost apartments in Mount Pleasant. Both **the St. Dennis apartments**, on Kenyon adjacent to Mount Pleasant Street, and **the Deauville**, the site of the enormous fire of March, 2008, appear to be on their way to restoration. This is particularly important for the businesses along Mount Pleasant Street, as the vacating of these two apartment houses forced hundreds of their most dependable customers out of the neighborhood.

In June we were advised that the Department of Housing and Community Development will provide a \$4.1 million loan for the purchase of the remains of the Deauville by the tenants. The owner of this building has been very hard to work with, and it took long and difficult negotiation with him to pull this deal off. Plans are to rebuild the apartment house, with 67 units of affordable housing. Forty of those units will be occupied by people who lived there before the fire.

The St. Dennis, at 1636 Kenyon, within sight of the Deauville, has been vacant since 2005. (I know of at least one tenant of the St. Dennis who relocated to the Deauville, only to be forced from there by the 2008 fire.) This is a classic tale of landlord abuse. In 2004, the owner of the building sold 99 percent of the title to a developer, keeping a token one percent. This 99-percent sale was a gimmick, no longer legal, a way to evade the District law requiring selling owners to give tenants an opportunity to purchase their homes. The new owners persuaded almost all the tenants to leave, then practiced "eviction by neglect" to get the last few, a Salvadorean immigrant and her two grown daughters, to leave. In July, 2005, this situation came to my attention, and I asked Councilmember Graham to get involved. Mr. Graham, and Mr. Blake Biles, of the law firm Arnold and Porter, put a stop to the eviction of the three women, and set about arranging for funding for a tenant purchase.

In July, we were advised that the Department of Housing and Community Development is ready to provide a \$3.7 million loan "to assist with the substantial rehabilitation activities for the property". I believe that points the way to a happy ending for what began as an unhappy tale of renters tossed out on the street. Development will be by the National Housing Trust, and will yield 32 low-income rental housing units.

Councilmember Graham, and Blake Biles, and the courageous tenants, deserve all the credit for making these two deals come to pass, providing over \$7 million for the reconstruction of two apartment houses, totalling 99 dwelling units, for residents of modest incomes. This is why I'm a Graham supporter for his re-election: on important matters such as this, Jim does the right thing, helping people who need help against tough, avaricious property owners. He does this not because they represent many votes – they don't, not in the Latino immigrant community – but because it's the right thing to do.

Fiesta DC is coming to Mount Pleasant, September 26. The ANC informal meeting of August 3, attended by several Fiesta DC board members, was largely devoted to this topic. Fiesta DC has entirely new management, and it was essential that these new people be made fully aware of the problems we've encountered. I emphasized the problem of closing Irving Street, a crosstown arterial, to through traffic. Traffic and parking are a mess, and the Fiesta needs to do better than in the past at handling these problems.

That said, support for the Fiesta in Mount Pleasant is very strong. People love having it here; they just want the associated problems to be dealt with more effectively than in the past. The ANC is doing what it can.

Jim Graham just got his **Ward 1 Enhanced Residential Parking Program** through the Council, so that will before long go into effect here. Two elements of this legislation will affect us. First, all residents of a neighborhood will be eligible for RPP parking permits, *whether their own block is RPP-zoned or not*. That's a long-overdue change. The policy of refusing RPP privileges to residents of unzoned blocks, treating them as if they're not really residents, but are visitors from outside the neighborhood, has long been regarded as unfair, but the Council has been unwilling to change that policy. Well, no longer will a block have to "go RPP" just so that the residents can have full residential parking privileges.

The second element is troubling. Any RPP-zoned block must have half its parking reserved for "Ward One Only", that is, there will be no two-hour allowance for visitors. That's intended to prevent shoppers from clogging up residential parking. Mount Pleasant doesn't have a significant problem of short-term visitors taking up whole blocks, denying residents any place to park. This policy will be especially hard on the Stoddard Baptist Home; what are people visiting their aged relatives in the Home to do? There's no commercial parking lot in Mount Pleasant. Visitors must find two-hour curbside spots, or give up visiting their relatives. I see no value in eliminating the two-hour visitor-parking allowance, especially blocks away from the commercial strip. But it's the way the law is written, so it's coming, pointless or not.

The ANC has a choice of whether or not to participate in this program. This ANC will choose to participate, I am sure of that. I'll vote for it, because it's important to me that all residents of the neighborhood have full residential parking privileges, even if their own block remains unzoned.

The August 3 informal ANC meeting was intended to be about the notion of making Mount Pleasant Street a "**Green Street**", as advised by the Revitalization Study. Okay, but exactly what does "green street" mean? Street trees, sure. But how, in sidewalks already cluttered and narrow? "Improved pedestrian environment" -- yes, but how? Less pavement, more earth -- fine, but what pavement gets removed? I'd like to see less space on the Street taken up by parked cars, more space for trees and sidewalks and greenery and pedestrians, but wouldn't that harm the restaurants and markets on the Street? We'll take this up for public discussion in the future.

The next ANC <i>business</i> meeting will be on Tuesday, August 17 . There will be <i>no</i> informal meeting in September.
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