

December report to constituents

Here is news of the **December 6 ANC monthly meeting**, and other happenings in Mount Pleasant. At the December meeting, the ANC:

- Agreed to ask the ABC Board for an informal meeting, to discuss liquor license policies in Mount Pleasant.
- Agreed to advise the Historic Preservation Review Board (HPRB) to approve the permit application for 1869 Park Road (see box).
- Agreed to spend up to \$450 for a bench for the bus stop on Irving Street near the Kenyon intersection, where people waiting for the bus currently have only a guard rail to sit on. This is contingent upon an agreement by DDOT to install an ANC-provided bench.
- Amended the ANC by-laws to handle tie votes at our annual elections of officers.

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The bus stop on Irving Street just south of the Kenyon intersection is very popular with the oldsters from the Harvard Towers. They like it because it's closer to their back door than the Hobart stop, it's downhill, and they can sit on the guard rail and see the bus coming. But there is, absurdly, no sidewalk connecting the Towers to the bus stop. People walk in the street, in the bike lane, the traffic whizzing by, inches away.

The ANC and the MPNA are collaborating towards the construction of a sidewalk along that bit of road. The bike lane will be sacrificed (this was put in only for traffic calming, and never had a serious bicycling purpose), so that no parking spots will be lost. The construction of the sidewalk will also permit passenger-side doors of parked cars to open, whereas they are currently blocked by the guard rail.

We also want to put a decent bench at that bus stop, so that the oldsters don't have to sit on the guard rail. A DDOT engineer told me that he could arrange for the installation of a bench, if we would provide a bench (DDOT doesn't do benches, except in shelters, and there's no room for a shelter there). We'll see if we can make that come to pass.

The number of robberies in Mount Pleasant, after spiking to 15 in October, returned to a "normal" five in November. Evidently that October count was a statistical aberration.

We're not alone in seeing an appalling number of **robberies perpetrated by children**. This report is from England: "There has been a marked increase in younger victims and [robbery] offenders over the last ten years. . . . *The proportion of suspects aged 11-15 years increased from 15 per cent in 1993 to 36 per cent in 2000.*

"The younger age profile for robbery offences is not matched for other offence types. Information from the Metropolitan Police [London] shows that those charged with offences of personal robbery were typically younger than those charged with other offences, such as burglary and violence against the person."

At the December PSA 302 (Columbia Heights) meeting, the police reported the case of a 12-year-old who was arrested for robbery, and turned over to the custody of his parents, and who then went out and did another robbery. No one knows what to do with such young robbers, nor their evidently troubled parents.

ANC 1D03 NEWSLETTER #40

Jack McKay, December 27, 2005

The next **ANC monthly meeting** will be on **Tuesday, January 3, 7 pm**, La Casa Community Center, 3166 Mt Pleasant Street. On the agenda: officer elections, non-voting ANC delegates, Bestway public space permit.

The ANC advised the Historic Preservation Review Board (HPRB) to grant a permit for construction at 1869 Park Road. The HPRB has sometimes been a difficult bureaucratic hurdle, demanding "historical accuracy" even where the result could be inferior. An article in the December issue of *InTowner* cited "*the Board's resistance to allowing any alterations to the original appearance of structures within historic districts, even in cases where similar changes had been made to similar structures in prior years or where there could reasonably be argued that there are overriding issues of safety and accommodation consistent with the standards of the 21st century.*" An example here is a Newton Street home where the owners proposed a beautiful natural-stone staircase up their steep hillside, with a switchback to reduce the steepness of the climb. The HPRB rejected that design, insisting on a "historically accurate" stark concrete staircase running straight up the hillside.

I want the ANC to help residents overcome such bureaucratic obstacles, pressing the HPRB to grant permits, even if the requests are not strictly "by the book". We will depend, of course, on opinions from Historic Mount Pleasant (HMP) for such judgments. I've found the HMP people to be reasonable about compromises between historical accuracy and modern standards of construction and esthetics.

I encourage residents to consult with HMP before applying for permits, so that HMP, and the ANC, can help them get the permits needed. What no one wants is to have those miserable scarlet "Stop Work" labels slapped on their jobs after work has started.

The problem of the lot behind the Bestway and Don Juan's Restaurant, on 17th Street, has resurfaced. Where are these two businesses supposed to keep their trash bins? There is no alley, and there is no enclosed back area for these two businesses. The rear of the market and the restaurant is "front yard" on 17th Street, in full public view.

Michael Choi, proprietor of the Bestway and owner of the lot (Alberto Ferufino, proprietor of Don Juan's, leases from Michael), is willing to build enclosures along the back of his building so that the trash bins will be hidden. But there's a legal problem with that. Like much of Mount Pleasant, 17th Street is a 90-foot right-of-way, only 54 feet of which is actually used for road and sidewalk. The remainder, 18 feet on either side of the street, is public space, which residents are allowed to fence in and use as our own. We're required to maintain these chunks of unused right-of-way in the manner of parkland, hence the odd name of "parking" for these lots. District regulation prohibits the "deposit" of trash on these parkings, and this rule has been interpreted to mean that one cannot keep a Supercan, or other trash container, on these spaces.

Hence it seems that these businesses cannot keep trash bins on the 17th Street frontage. One has to ask, where then are they to keep their trash? Indoors is a violation of health regulations; outdoors, a violation of public space regulations. The District regulations simply do not provide for this situation.

A daylight carjacking occurred at high noon November 29, on Hobart Street: "C1 reports that when she pulled up in front of her house, S1 came up to the driver's side door, pulled a gun from his waistband, pointed it at C1's head and said "give me the keys, get out!" When complainant asked if she could get her groceries the suspect grabbed the keys and took the vehicle. Stolen was a 2003 white station wagon BMW . . . and \$300 in groceries." (I thought the victim was being remarkably cool-headed in asking for her groceries.)

The car was located a few days later, parked in the 3400 block of 14th Street, one of the most notorious trouble spots in Columbia Heights. That's just a few blocks away, of course, and that proximity explains a good deal of the trouble we see in Mount Pleasant. I love Columbia Heights, but it is afflicted with way too many young men with no skills, no job prospects, and little fear of arrest or jail time.

For many years we've complained about the lack of safe access for pedestrians and bicyclists to Rock Creek Park from Mount Pleasant. The National Park Service is aware of this: "The east side of the park is very steep and it is difficult to find areas of moderate slope to provide pedestrian and bicycle access. The NPS has already identified the installation of a new trail along Piney Branch Road as a goal to be completed under this general management plan. As it develops more specific plans that will tier from the general management plan, the NPS will consider other opportunities to improve access to the park from the east."

Last July I wrote these critical words about what DDOT intended to propose for new parking regulations: "DDOT will also propose graduated RPP fees: \$25 for a household's first RPP permit, \$50 for a second, \$100 for a third – and no household will be allowed more than three. The theory is that people will own fewer cars, and thus take up less parking, because of these escalating fees. But owning a car is already a big expense, our insurance costs alone dwarfing these RPP fees. Furthermore, in high-density neighborhoods such as ours, car ownership is a substantial inconvenience, because of the nighttime parking problem. If those factors don't already minimize car ownership (and nearly half the households in Mount Pleasant own no car), why will these RPP fees do so? Basically, people who own cars, despite the high costs and difficult parking, do so because they feel their cars are necessary. **Thus, these DDOT fees will only be costly to residents, while doing nothing to alleviate our parking shortage.**"

Well, this has come to pass; on December 5, the Mayor's bill calling for higher RPP fees, and a three-permit limit, was introduced to District Council (Bill B16-0536, the "Omnibus Parking Amendment Act of 2005"). My opinion has not changed, and I will oppose these higher RPP fees.

The National Park Service is about to adopt a new General Management Plan for Rock Creek Park, including plans for **better management of Beach Drive traffic**. Beach Drive was never intended to be a north-south in-town highway, but that's what it has been, ever since the tunnel connecting it to Rock Creek Parkway opened in 1966.

The debate concerning these plans focused on the proposal to close three segments of Beach Drive north of the Broad Branch intersection to automobile traffic between 10 AM and 3 PM on weekdays, just as those portions are closed now on weekends. This would allow the use of Beach Drive for rush-hour commuting, but dedicate those three portions to recreational use in the middle of the day, when traffic is light. *All the east-west crossings of Beach Drive would remain open, sixty percent of Beach Drive north of Broad Branch would remain open to cars, and no traffic south of Broad Branch would be affected. Every parking area the length of Beach Drive would remain automobile-accessible, as would 26 of the 28 picnic areas.* It's a bit puzzling that this modest proposal caused such upset, given that most of us use Beach Drive only south of Broad Branch, i.e., to get to Rock Creek Parkway, or across to Connecticut Avenue, and few of us use Beach Drive north of Broad Branch during midday-weekday hours.

It seems clear that the Park Service will choose what it calls its "improved management" plan, versus the above "environmentally preferred" plan. This will "reduce traffic volume and speeds" along Beach Drive north of the Broad Branch intersection, by means of increased enforcement, and traffic calming devices (speed humps). This should have negligible effect on Mount Pleasant residents. It may even improve conditions for us, if the traffic control measures decrease the number of Maryland suburbanites using Beach Drive as their highway to downtown.