

Jack's December report

On December 2, the ANC did the following:

- Formally disavowed the ANC's role in “voluntary agreements” for area retailers selling alcoholic beverages. These were written a decade ago, the ANC of that era partnering with the MPNA. (My resolution.)
- Appropriated up to \$1000 for a “public participation” program concerning the Mount Pleasant Library (I abstained from this vote).
- Advised the DDOT Public Space Committee to allow the gate at the entrance to the alley off Kilbourne Place near Mount Pleasant Street, with certain conditions, e.g., that the gate not be locked.
- Advised the DC Public Library to hold off on any decisions concerning the proposed expansion alongside the library, taking up what is now driveway and alley.
- Advised the Metropolitan Police to consider changes to the monthly PSA (Police Service Area) meetings, so that those meetings would better serve all the residents of Mount Pleasant.
- Advised DDOT to end the practice of rush-hour reversal of traffic flow on one lane of 16th Street, from Spring Road to Columbia Road. The ANC supports the proposal for a median down 16th Street, such as is done along 16th to our north, with left-turn bays to permit left turns from northbound 16th onto Park Road (my resolution).

This ANC has a poor history with giving **grants to neighborhood organizations**. A 2004 audit of this ANC (for the period October 1999 through June 2003) disallowed nearly all, 87%, of our grant expenditures, for inadequate paperwork. Such a poor record is not unusual. Recent audits for ANC 1B (U Street/Cardozo) disallowed 71% of their grants, and for 1C (Adams Morgan), 46%. This is an unacceptable record for handling public funds, and in mid-2004, we simply ceased giving grants. There's no legal requirement that ANCs issue grants, and only half the ANCs of the District do.

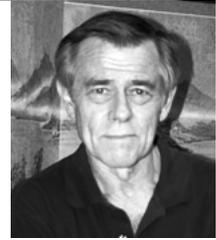
However, Commissioner Jane Zara has been pressing hard for this ANC to resume grants, ever since her election two years ago. Gregg Edwards yielded to her insistence, and they had the votes on the commission, so this ANC resumed a grants program this fall, over my stubborn resistance. Gregg did introduce several important changes: the grants would be small, mostly just \$200; a grant manager would be hired to run the program, so we wouldn't have to handle that task; no grants funds would be handed out until the applicants first provided the required documentation. The call for applications went out at the end of October, and 33 were received.

I haven't the space here to detail all the things that went wrong with this well-intentioned effort. I was rather sharply criticized by one commissioner because, doing my duty as Commission Secretary, I scanned the proposals received and posted them on a private Internet site for the six commissioners to see. Evidently that one commissioner wanted the proposal contents kept secret, not only from the public, but from us commissioners, even though we're supposed to judge which ones to fund. Furthermore, I think the public should be allowed to observe everything that we

ANC 1D03 NEWSLETTER #76

Jack McKay, December 28, 2008

Jack McKay
3200 19th St, Tel. 462-8692
jack.mckay@verizon.net
<http://DCJack.org>



do, especially when it comes to disbursing public funds. The commission disagrees, and even now, only parts of the proposals are posted for public view. The December ANC meeting was marked by bitter, personal disputes among commissioners.

The District auditor expressed his concerns about the way this program was being managed, including the grants manager, and the ANC agreed at the December meeting to let all our contractor agreements expire at the end of the year, so that the incoming ANC could review the situation and decide how best to proceed. But on December 7 the grants manager, unwilling even to finish the proposal reviewing task, abruptly quit. Neil Richardson, our Executive Director, had quit the day before. Our staff was abandoning us to this task.

I worry that some of the applications may not meet the ANC legal requirement for “public benefits”. One commissioner asserts that ANCs shouldn't bother about complying with the laws regulating grants, so long as the grants go to good causes; I disagree, strongly. At least six of the proposals came from organizations with which certain commissioners have very close ties. The grants letter offers the applications “post-grant help from ANC1D's grants manager” – but now we don't have a grants manager. There's a legal requirement that there be “public presentation of the grant request”, which, for 22 grants to be handed out, will take some time. (Will we not discuss, publicly, the 11 grant requests denied?) One commissioner suggested that we just read the grant titles, and approve the grants passed by the review team as a “slate”. I say no, that's not the “public presentation” required by law.

We've spent over \$2000 just in initiating this grants program, and by the time it's done, we'll likely have spent as much in grants management as the \$5000 we'll distribute in grants. This is not an efficient use of public funds.

We did not have to do this. We've got plenty of work to do without this messy business of grants. I'm not going to vote against the funding of the current grant applications, despite the many problems and legal uncertainties, because I think we owe the applicants that. But my position in the future will be unyielding: *no grants*. Better to give the money back to the District, than to mishandle it like this.

Sometimes you'll see **plastic covers over automobile license plates**. I've never thought twice about the things, but one Mount Pleasant resident got a rude shock when he got a ticket for the clear plastic cover over his tags. Not only are plastic covers, tinted or clear, illegal in the District, but the fine for this offense, since April 2005, is a brutal \$500. Apparently

the District Council decided that anyone who put a plastic cover on his tags, even clear plastic, did so with an intent to defeat traffic speed and red-light cameras. Some of these plastic covers are marketed with the claim that they will prevent traffic cameras from reading the tags.

This resident's car had had clear plastic covers from the day he bought it, and he never imagined that there was a problem. You would think that District inspection would reject a car with tag covers, if they're so seriously illegal. But no, they say nothing, and release the inspected cars to the street, where the owner is vulnerable to a \$500 ticket. Pernicious: the DMV brought about the heavy fine for clear plastic tag covers; the DMV inspects cars, but allows them to pass, with illegal tag covers; then the DMV collects \$500 fines from offenders. This is your District government at work.

I think this \$500 fine for a plastic tag cover is unreasonable, and I'm going to do what I can to change it, as well as warning residents of this dreadful fine. Not that I'm in favor of plastic tag covers, but I object to excessive traffic fines. Imagine what such a brutal fine does to a low-income family's budget.

I dislike the early darkness of winter days. December 21, the day of the winter solstice, was the shortest day of the year, of course, but even before then sunset was coming a bit later each day. The earliest sunsets, 4:46 pm, came in early December, and already we're gaining close to a minute of sun each day, all of it at sunset.

The second day of winter yielded, early on the morning of the 22nd, **the lowest temperature recorded here in 2008: 16 degrees.** Fortunately that bitter blast didn't last long. Let's hope for mild weather on January 20!

Residents are to place **holiday trees and other greenery** in curbside tree boxes—without ornaments or tinsel—by January 2, 2009. Trees will be picked up during a special two-week collection from January 2-11. -- DPW

On November 21, the District Council held hearings on a bill by Councilmembers Mary Cheh and Maureen Bowser to **require a favorable vote by property owners before their neighborhood could be declared a "historic district"**, with all the additional regulation that entails. That seems pretty reasonable to me, but the historic preservationists, including our Historic Mount Pleasant, object to allowing this bit of democracy in the process. They argue that preservation is good for the public at large, and so ought to be forced on homeowners, even if those residents object.

The bill seems to be set aside, but the Historic Preservation Review Board is proposing regulations that would have the same effect: the Board's policy, they say, is to insist on "broad community support" for any historic district designation, and advocates will in the future be required to demonstrate that that "broad community support" exists. Petitions for historic district designation in Brookland, Chevy Chase, and Lanier Heights have lately been stopped by vocal opposition from residents, who have learned from our experience how troublesome, and expensive, historic preservation regulation can be.

Evidently no such requirement for "broad community support" existed in 1986, when Mount Pleasant was declared a historic district, even as a member of the Board noted that "the community itself was split over the decision". And perhaps Historic Mount Pleasant will explain why they want to deny homeowners any right to vote on whether their own neighborhoods are to be declared historic districts.

Just when you think that **crime** is nicely down, the rates pop back up again. In all of November there were only two robberies in Mount Pleasant. But on December 1 alone, there were three, including an armed invasion of the African Hair Gallery on Park Road. On December 5 there was a purse snatch on Kenyon, and on the 12th, an armed robbery in front of the apartment house at 1900 Lamont, and an assault with intent to rob on 17th Street. Then, on the 22nd, there was an armed robbery on "little" Mount Pleasant Street, north of Park Road.

That's seven robberies, four with guns, and the month isn't over yet. Only one of the seven, the 1900 Lamont robbery, was west of 18th Street.

The Hair Gallery robbery was reportedly a Latino gang incident, and gang activity is said to be increasing in eastern Mount Pleasant. Just a few blocks away, at 14th and Newton, a Latino youth was stabbed to death on December 12.

Home **burglaries** remain low, but a 19th Street neighbor reports that someone got into his house by walking across row-house rooftops, jumping onto his back deck, and coming in through an unlocked deck door. The resident accosted the intruder, who gave him the usual bogus tale of being a contractor on a job, innocently looking for something.

Coming west on Park Road, **crossing the 17th Street/Mount Pleasant Street intersection**, there's always confusion over which lane goes straight on Park Road. Is it the center lane on the east side of the intersection, or the right lane? All too many drivers are quite certain that the right lane on the east side of the intersection magically shifts into the left lane on the west side, and anybody in the center lane is supposed to yield to them.

I'm pressing DDOT, which is currently rebuilding the 1600 block of Park Road, to put down clear pavement markings so that there will no longer be any confusion about which lane goes straight on.

The District auditor says he'll issue our routine **ANC audit**, for the period October 2005 through March 2008, before the end of the year. In 2005-2006, Rich Wysocki was ANC Treasurer, and he did a fine job. We became accustomed to leaving the task to Rich, but that didn't work so well with his successors. Our quarterly reports to the District auditor were late, financial records vanished, and disbursements were made without the legally required invoices or receipts.

Last May the commission made me Treasurer, and I've imposed a new regime of strict and complete documentation of expenditures and prompt quarterly reports to the auditor.

The next ANC meeting will be on **Tuesday, January 6**, 7:00 pm, La Casa Community Center, 3166 Mt. Pleasant St.