

Jack's December report

On November 17, the ANC did the following:

- Adopted the ANC FY2010 budget, with little change from its first showing, one month ago;
- Endorsed two bills in District Council for enhanced tenant protections;
- Advised the DC Department of Housing and Community Development to approve a bridge loan to the occupants of 3121 Mount Pleasant Street, for the building purchase;
- Supported proposals to exempt ANC Commissioners from the political activity restrictions of the Federal Hatch Act (my resolution).

On December 1, the ANC held an “informal” meeting, with focus on plans for improving the commercial strip.

I've certainly heard many complaints about **drug dealing on the 1800 block of Monroe Street**. This was hardly a unique problem in Mount Pleasant; I've known of drug busts on residences on 19th Street, on Park Road, and on Walbridge Place, and certainly there have been many more that haven't happened to come to my attention. In contrast to the open-air drug markets that flourish in the District, some just a few blocks away in Columbia Heights, the residential retailing that goes on here is pretty small stuff, neighbors selling to neighbors.

A resident of 1833 Monroe was arrested last December with 40 grams of crack cocaine, with a street value of several thousand dollars. On November 13, having pleaded guilty to “attempted possession with intent to distribute”, he was sentenced to five years of supervised release, a one-year suspended sentence, 100 hours of community service, 18 months of probation. One of the conditions of probation: “maintain or seek employment (defendant shall be working, enrolled in school or in trade school at any given time)”.

Unfortunately, drug dealing is easy money in the inner city, especially tempting when legitimate jobs are scarce. And there seems to be no shortage of customers. Some 23,000 District residents, about one in 20 of the 12-or-over population, reported “illicit drug dependence or abuse within the past year” (Office of National Drug Control Policy, 2008).

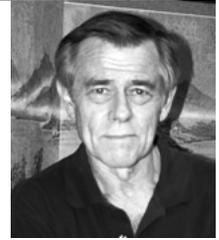
It's been a month since the **homicide in the Woodner**, Mount Pleasant's second homicide this year, and there are no suspects, not even any “persons of interest”. Forget the mythical crime-solving skills you see on TV. Of every 50 homicides solved, 49 are solved either by the perpetrator being known from the start, or identified by someone who knows who did it. In only one successfully closed case in 50 is the perpetrator identified by means of forensics.

In a similar vein, for years I've complained to the DC Government that the police record on **solving robberies** is substandard. Nationwide, urban areas close 26% of robberies by arrest. The District manages just 17%, and has never offered an explanation for this deficiency. The Metropolitan Police, and our downtown politicians, persist in addressing crime problems by throwing lots of uniformed officers onto patrol duty, e.g., the “All Hands on Deck” operations. The sight of all those uniforms may please residents, but it does

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little to prevent crime. Meanwhile, the work of tracking down robbers after the fact is neglected. The bad guys know that it's easy to do a robbery and get away with it.

Thanks to **Residential Permit Parking (RPP) zoning of the 1800 blocks of Monroe, Newton, and Ingleside**, there's now daytime parking available on those blocks. Unfortunately, the hardship imposed on people coming to work at Bancroft Elementary and the Stoddard Baptist Home is severe. For some people, driving is the only reasonable way to get to work (due to the design of suburbia for automobiles, not for public transit), and there's no commercial parking in Mount Pleasant. The under-utilized DCUSA garage in Columbia Heights is still thinking about allowing commuter parking. I continue to be an advocate for Daytime Parking Passes for employees of Mount Pleasant businesses and institutions. They have the need, we have the parking space during the day, and if they pay for it, that's a “commuter tax” to our benefit.

On November 18, Councilmember Graham held a “community meeting” specifically for the residents of the newly zoned blocks, to see if they were open to allowing Daytime Passes. Support for that notion is thin, and the people attending the meeting voted by the slimmest of margins, 8 to 7, to support these Passes.

Why 15 residents, neither selected by nor answerable to the public, should be empowered make this decision for the roughly 650 adults residing on these blocks, I don't know. I've never trusted the results of such meetings, because any handful of residents who show up can decide the outcome, whereas residents who do not or cannot attend the meeting have no vote. But the Councilmember places great faith in the outcomes of these meetings.

Now Councilmember Graham plans another, this time for all of Mount Pleasant, to be held in January, to decide for or against Daytime Parking Passes. The Councilmember won't do anything that he thinks lacks unpopular support. That the ANC has voted unanimously in favor of employee passes, four times, seems to count for little. I suspect that this larger community meeting will doom the Daytime Passes, as far as the Councilmember is concerned, because people living blocks away are likely to care little about the employees of Bancroft and Stoddard.

Some residents objecting to these Daytime Parking Passes assert that they would put the area into just as bad a parking situation as before. That's just not so. First, some 20% of the cars parked on these unzoned blocks were there because their

Mount Pleasant resident owners didn't want to register them in the District, so they couldn't get RPP stickers. Those cars are now gone, and aren't going to be brought back by daytime-only, Mount Pleasant employee-only parking passes. Second, Daytime Passes will not be free, and the employees of Bancroft and Stoddard objected bitterly to even a modest, \$2.50 per day, fee for parking. Evidently that's enough to persuade some of them to car-pool, or find other ways to get to their jobs. Third, the commuters who parked here and then took the bus or Metro downtown – yes, I've seen that myself, and numerous residents have reported that activity – won't be allowed to purchase these passes, and won't be permitted to park here. Hence, even with the Daytime Passes, there would be many fewer cars parked on these blocks.

The Washington Post recently quoted Jim Sebastian, the District manager of bicycling policy, as saying that “under District law, **when a lane is 11 feet wide or less, cyclists are allowed to occupy the entire lane rather than stay to the right side**”. That was news to me, though I follow bicycling regulations pretty closely. I've got the printed DC Municipal Regulations (DCMR) chapter on bike regulations, and it's not there. I downloaded the current on-line version of the bicycling chapter of the DCMR from the District Office of the Secretary Web site, and it's not there, either.

Well, but it's true. It turns out that in 1996 – yes, 13 years ago! -- the District Council, at former Council Chair and Mount Pleasant resident Dave Clark's instigation, passed a law with regulations concerning lane use by bicyclists, including this 11-foot-lane provision. And more: the bicyclist is required to ride “as closely as practicable to the right-hand curb”, *except* “when preparing for a turn”, *except* when necessary to avoid “vehicle doors that are or may open”, *except* “when necessary for the bicyclist's safety”.

Until recently, the “official” DCMR has been the 1995 edition, and one had to laboriously research all amendments since 1995 to find out what the current text might be. For these bicycling regulations, for example, one would have to dig up a 1996 issue of the DC Register to discover the changes, a pretty unreasonable demand. However, as the Office of the Secretary of the District recently announced, all of the titles of the DCMR “are now current”. But this portion of the DCMR is, for some reason, lacking some (but not all) the provisions of that 1996 law. Why the omission? The Office of the Secretary has been unable to provide an answer.

But this is indeed the law: a bicyclist may, when he or she considers it necessary for safety, ride out in the middle of the lane, not up against the curb. For that matter, few lanes in Mount Pleasant exceed 11 feet in width. Park Road, nine feet eastbound, ten feet westbound; Walbridge Place, ten feet; Adams Mill Road, coming up from the Zoo entrance, nine feet; Park Road through Rock Creek Park, 11 feet. On all of those roads, bicyclists are *not* required “to remain near the curb or edge of the roadway”, and haven't been, since 1996.

Beginning January 1, District businesses that sell food or alcohol must **charge a nickel for each disposable paper or plastic carryout bag**. The District Government really wants us to use our own reusable cloth bags, to cut down on the

number of those non-biodegradable plastic bags finding their way into the environment. Emily and I have been using cloth bags for a couple of years now, and they're much better than those flimsy plastic things. Each bag holds a lot more than the plastic bags do, the handles are much easier to grip, and the bags won't break and spill your stuff out onto the pavement.

I continue to press DDOT to do something about **that steel plate in the middle of the Park Road/Klinge/Walbridge intersection**. Pepco says it's not theirs, and by the way, “The plate is bent and could cause a flat tire”. DDOT claims that it's not theirs, but I think it is. There seems to be no record of who dug up the street and covered over the pit with that steel plate, eight months ago, and walked away from it.

The **Mount Pleasant Forum** went down in early November, and the new administrators (no longer Laurie Collins) seem to be having a problem “fixing” it. (What's broken?) Initially, it was supposed to be back up in a few days. A month later, and now it's supposed to be back in operation by early December, i.e., any day now. 'Tis hoped.

I know many residents won't use the Forum, because they have found unpleasant attitudes there. Nasty posting is commonplace on Internet discussion boards. That said, the Forum is much better, much more civil, than it used to be. I've also made it the principal ANC resource for communications with the neighborhood. All ANC resolutions, meeting minutes, and announcements are posted there, and these newsletters, too. I also make heavy use of the Forum to discuss countless ANC and neighborhood matters with residents. It is the best way to find out what's going on in the neighborhood. Or will be, when it's back in operation.

Residents have complained to me about **the traffic lights on either end of Klinge Road**. The light at the Walbridge end goes red less than 10 seconds after the light on the Adams Mill end goes green, so eastbound drivers stopped for the first will inevitably be stopped for the second, as well.

I was pleased to have DDOT agree to investigate this light timing and fix the problem. Silly me, I figured that “fix” meant “synchronize”, so that drivers released by the Adams Mill light going green would find a nicely timed green light at Walbridge. But no, DDOT thinks that “fix” means “time lights to stop every car at every light”. So now the Walbridge light goes red the instant the Adams Mill light goes green, guaranteeing that you'll be stopped by both. That this encourages impatient drivers to cut through the alley to bypass these intentionally badly timed lights seems not to have occurred to the DDOT traffic engineers.

If you agree that these lights ought to be synchronized to allow cars moving at safe speeds to proceed without being forced to stop for both, please write to Councilmember Graham. He's heard so many “make traffic stop” complaints that he's surprised by the notion that these lights should be synchronized for smooth, legal-speed traffic flow, not to stop cars as frequently as possible.

The next ANC <i>business</i> meeting will be on Tuesday, December 15 . The ANC's next <i>informal</i> meeting, if held, will be on Tuesday, January 5, 2010 .
