

Jack's December report

At the November 16 ANC meeting, the ANC:

- Advised the District Council to pass the Council resolution approving the Small Area Action (“revitalization”) Plan for Mount Pleasant;
- Advised the Historic Preservation Review Board (HPRB) to approve the plans for 3324 18th Street;
- Advised the DCRA that the Deauville apartment building, lately purchased by the tenants, should not be subjected to a punitive “vacant property” tax rate.

Yes, my **December newsletter** is coming out early. I try to deliver these the week *before* the ANC monthly business meeting, for the benefit of anyone who might actually consider attending one of our sessions. The December business meeting would ordinarily take place on the third Tuesday of the month, the 21st, so my newsletter should appear around the 14th. But the 21st is uncomfortably close to Christmas, so the regular “informal” ANC meeting, scheduled for the first Tuesday, December 7, will instead be our business meeting, and there will be no December 21 ANC meeting. Hence, an early newsletter.

The Board of Elections has released **the final ANC election results**, including the write-in results for 1D01, where there was no candidate on the ballot. The *certified* election results:

- D01: Yasmin Romero Castillo, 33 votes; write-in, 89
D02: Laura Wilson Phelan, 195 votes; write-in, 19
D03: Jack, 461 votes; write-in, 35
D04: Gregg Edwards, 110 votes; Phil Greiner, 99; write-in, 6
D05: China Terrell, 384 votes; write-in, 18
D06: Angelia D. Scott, 150 votes; write-in, 72

My 461 votes is the largest total for any ANC commissioner in Ward One, for which I am grateful to my constituents. There were also 35 write-in votes in my district, meaning presumably “anybody but Jack!” One constituent posted angrily that she was going to write in her cat's name for ANC. Hey, that's okay. Can't please everybody.

The **Small Area Action Plan**, otherwise known as the “revitalization” plan for Mount Pleasant, came up for ANC evaluation. There was intense pressure on us to endorse the plan, without argument; after all, who's opposed to “revitalization”? But there were problems, and my vote for the ANC endorsement came only after it was made explicit that the plan is a flexible guide to the future, not a legally binding document.

My principal concern about the plan is that it calls for drawing customers to Mount Pleasant Street from outside the neighborhood. This is directly contrary to the advice of the market study performed for this plan, and contrary to the wishes of many Mount Pleasant residents. How many times have people said that they don't want to see Mount Pleasant transformed into another Adams Morgan, with noisy crowds and heavy traffic at all hours?

The market study noted that Mount Pleasant does not have the infrastructure, namely streets and parking lots, to handle customers coming from distances, and warned also that such

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an approach would compromise the special character of Mount Pleasant.

The market study contractor said that “the foundation of the street’s prosperity would almost certainly be compromised by clogged roadways and parking lots,” so the Street should *not* attempt to become a “destination”, but should concentrate on serving the walking-distance population, as a neighborhood shopping area. Why the OP plan proposed actions entirely contrary to this excellent advice I do not know. But no way was I going to sign up to the notion that Mount Pleasant should become a “destination”, drawing customers from far and wide, in cars.

The ANC resolution considered on November 16, and my testimony to the DC Council earlier that day, spelled out our concerns about the revitalization plan. Council Chair Vincent Gray assured us that the plan is a “work in progress”, not a fixed, binding document. With that assurance, the resolution of support was passed by the ANC, on a 4 to 0 vote.

On November 17, the ABC Board held hearings concerning **petitions by Haydee's, and Don Juan's, for termination of their “voluntary agreements” with the Mount Pleasant Neighborhood Alliance (MPNA)**. Haydee Vanegas and Alberto Ferrufino are willing to sign new VAs, with the ANC. What they don't want is to continue to have their businesses under the thumb of the MPNA.

The MPNA led by Sam Broeksmit is far more reasonable than it was under Laurie Collins. But still, the MPNA wants to keep its tight grip on entertainment in Mount Pleasant restaurants, fearing that live music would bring crowds of people to Mount Pleasant. But Haydee's and Don Jaime's have had live entertainment now for well over a year, and nobody's seen any such development. Allowing entertainment up to closing time, instead of terminating it a couple of hours earlier, as is now required, won't change that. These restaurants serve customers from walking distance around the neighborhood, not people in cars from far away. Evidently there are Mount Pleasant residents who want music and dancing until one or two A.M. That's certainly not my choice, but the essence of diversity is respect for different lifestyles.

The ANC supported these petitions for VA termination with a resolution passed last June. But I'm quite sure that the ABC Board will not agree to termination.

I mentioned in my November newsletter that **the grand, but deteriorated, mansion at 3324 18th Street** was being purchased with plans for conversion into condominiums. The Historic Mount Pleasant (HMP) folks took note, and the ANC

resolution in support of the developer's historic preservation plans was passed only after hearing from them.

Some neighbors are understandably unhappy about the prospect of the place being subdivided into 12 modest condos, and especially what this means for demand for curbside parking in the area. The law is, however, entirely on the developer's side. The area of the lot, 12,400 square feet, permits up to 13 dwelling units. Our R-4 zoning calls for one off-street parking spot for every three dwelling units, but because Mount Pleasant is a historic district, the developer doesn't have to provide any off-street parking at all. The developer is proposing four parking pads off the alley, and I've suggested that one of those spots be set aside for Zipcar.

This went to the Historic Preservation Review Board (HPRB) on November 18 for "conceptual" review. The HPRB had some complaints, intent on preserving the appearance of the building, despite the cost to the livability of the individual units, in particular the below-ground-level condos. The developer will have to return to the HPRB with a refined design, but approval seems to be assured.

I would like to see that deteriorated old mansion become a renovated, occupied, well-maintained building, providing a number of modest-cost condominiums in our neighborhood, and about five times as much annual property tax revenue to the District as it does now. We might prefer to see some multimillionaire move in and restore it as an enormous, single-family mansion, but that's not in the cards.

Readers may recall my unhappiness with the lack of specifics in the **Transportation Enhancement Grant (TEG)** won by Mount Pleasant Main Street. The ANC endorsed the project in June, over my "no" vote. I wanted to see *exactly* what was proposed, not just vague generalities. Trees and benches, sure – but where, exactly?

Main Street got a lesson in the need for specifics in November, when DDOT began expanding the treeboxes on Mount Pleasant Street, without warning or consultation with anybody. Residents complain that the larger treeboxes make walking, and opening parked-car doors, harder. DDOT asserted that this project was part of the TEG plan. Main Street protested that no, that wasn't at all what they had in mind, and DDOT hadn't told them of any such plans. It seems that DDOT has decided that the TEG grant is *their* money, to use as they see fit, without bothering to talk to anyone from the ANC, or from Mount Pleasant Main Street.

Maybe there's good reason for the expanded treeboxes, but residents should be included in the decision process. What is going to be done, why, and exactly how? It's our neighborhood, and we're the ones who have to live with whatever DDOT chooses to do.

As for the TEG proposal for more trees along Mount Pleasant Street, any additional trees really must be planted only with the agreement of the adjacent business. Councilmember Graham reports that business owners on 14th Street are unhappy about trees being put in front of their establishments. Trees are nice, but they may conflict with access to or visibility of commercial establishments, or bicycle parking, or sidewalk cafes, or other worthwhile uses of our limited

sidewalk space. These tradeoffs ought to be considered before putting in a tree.

During my first couple of years on this ANC, it issued **grants to neighborhood organizations**, which seemed to be a good thing to do. But in May of 2004, an audit of this ANC disallowed 80% of our grants (and 88% of the grants awarded by our ANC predecessors in 2001-2002), for lack of the legally required grant documentation.

That experience convinced me that this ANC should not do grants. They're troublesome, they make us subject to charges of favoritism, and they can be hard to manage. (Once the grantee has his grant, he's reluctant to write reports or respond to requests for needed documentation.) Other ANCs that award grants have similar problems, and half the ANCs in the District have the good sense not to. There's no requirement that an ANC offer grants, and for several years, this ANC didn't.

But in 2007-2008, Commissioner Jane Zara was insistent that we revive a grants program, and she was able to persuade a majority of commissioners to agree. So a "micro-grants" program was established, and in 2008, 22 small grants, totalling \$5000, were awarded. Already at this point in the program, I was unhappy with the grant award procedures, and I'm pleased to be able to report that *I did not vote for these awards*. Jane ever since has accused me of attempting to sabotage her grants program. No, I just didn't want to be a part of it.

A key element of this new grants program was the hiring of a person to manage the program. Good idea, but we've been through four grants program managers, each one abruptly leaving, long before the completion of the program. The fourth manager quit suddenly a year ago, and the program has been stuck on hold since then.

Not a penny of grants funds has been paid out, so the grant awardees are understandably unhappy. As ANC Treasurer, I insist on seeing (1) receipts for the uses of our grants funds, (2) reports from the grantees on their use of the funds, and (3) explicit approval from the commission for paying out the grants. None of these requirements have been met for any of the 22 grants, so no funds have been disbursed to any grantee. I'd rather have the grant awardees displeased, than have the District Auditor again declare our grants "disallowed".

This program has turned out to be a dreadful embarrassment to this commission, and confirms my view that ANCs – this ANC, anyway – should not offer grants.

Last August I wrote of a Mount Pleasant resident, Melinda Jelbaoui, **grievously injured by a District trash truck** at the intersection of 17th and Lamont. Four months later, Melinda is still in a hospital, suffering through repeated surgeries, and painful therapy, to repair the damage done.

Donations to the family continue to be needed and welcome. Checks can be made out to Melinda Jelbaoui, and dropped off at Curves on 17th Street, or mailed to Curves of Mount Pleasant, P.O. Box 5423, Takoma Park, MD 20913.

The next *business* meeting of the ANC will be on **Tuesday, December 7**, and the next *informal* meeting on **January 4**.