

## Jack's February report

On February 17, the ANC did the following:

- Asked the National Park Service to extend the weekend Beach Drive closing hours “ until approximately sunset on Sunday evenings”, instead of closing at 7 pm (my resolution);
- Approved the project to rebuild the Kenyon/Adams Mill/Irving intersection to, among other things, permit left turns from Kenyon onto southbound Adams Mill (my resolution);
- Asked DDOT to include Mount Pleasant in the next round of installation of SmartBike stations.

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At the beginning of the month, **this ANC was a victim of check fraud**, some guy in Alabama passing three checks, totalling over \$1000, on our account. It's an easy scam, requiring only materials available at any office supply store, check-writing software, and a bogus identity. That they hit our checking account number was, I think, pure chance.

Fortunately I caught this scam quickly, because I have on-line access and check into our account frequently. I put a stop to this within three days, whereas if I had waited for our monthly statement to arrive, this guy could have been passing checks on our account all month long. The bank has refunded to us the money taken by this fraud.

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Residents of RPP blocks have received notices that **permanent visitor passes** will shortly be distributed. Residents of unzoned blocks get nothing, of course, despite my request that all residents be included in this program. These visitor passes can be used for household employees and contractors, so there'll be no more RPP violation tickets for people coming to work in our homes.

The **daytime-pass program** is still in development. Recall that this will allow employees of Mount Pleasant businesses to purchase passes allowing them to park in RPP zones, as a substitute for a commercial parking lot. The cost will be \$160 a quarter, which amounts to a very modest \$2.50 per day.

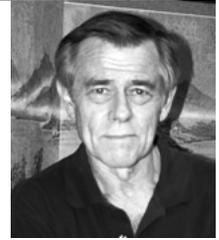
Residents of the 1800 block of Newton Street currently bear much of the burden of non-permit parked cars. The Traffic Study found that this block was 95% occupied during the day, whereas our RPP streets are just 64% occupied. More than half of these cars on Newton have non-DC tags. Clearly the block is a magnet for cars that don't qualify for RPP, as well as being used by Bancroft and Stoddard staff. If any block in Mount Pleasant now merits being designated RPP, it's this block of Newton Street.

Of course, if Newton becomes zoned for RPP, then those cars will simply migrate to Monroe, and Ingleside, unzoned blocks which already have daytime parking problems (93% and 85% occupied during the workday, respectively). Even though the fee for the daytime parking permit is modest, people will naturally choose free parking, rather than paying \$160 a quarter for a daytime permit. Hence, what makes sense is for *all three blocks to go RPP promptly*. I've been waiting for this daytime permit program to go into effect, so that people working at Bancroft and Stoddard will not be left unable to park anywhere in the area. Now it's here, and it's

## ANC 1D03 NEWSLETTER #78

Jack McKay, February 23, 2009

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time. I intend to request RPP zoning for these three blocks, hoping to bypass the petition process.

Some residents disagree, I know. But with the visitor-permit system now in place, and allowing use of these passes for household employees, there's little inconvenience to having one's block designated RPP. It's the only way to clear out those cars belonging to residents who won't register their cars in the District, and cars belonging to people who park here, then take a bus or the Metro to their jobs. I've even found cars from 16th Street apartment houses, and Columbia Heights residents, parked on Monroe and Newton for weeks on end, because the law allows them to park there for free, for as long as they want. Only RPP zoning can put a stop to that.

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Many residents have complained to me about **morning traffic speeding along Newton Street**. Some of these are commuters, using Newton as a cut-through to bypass congestion on commuter routes. The Traffic Study counted 500 cars entering Newton during the morning rush. Half of these cars come up 17th from Piney Branch, perhaps to avoid delays at the Beach Drive stop sign. One-third come from Columbia Heights, crossing 16th Street. The remainder come south on 16th and turn right on Newton.

How many of these cars are commuter cut-throughs, and how many have legitimate destinations in Mount Pleasant? I'm doing car counts to find out how many. Commuters should be confined to commuter arterials, and shouldn't be on residential side streets.

I have yet to identify a solution to this problem. One possibility would be a prohibition on left turns from Piney Branch onto 17th during the morning commuter hours, but how many of those 250 cars are going to destinations in Mount Pleasant, e.g., Bancroft? I don't want to inconvenience them. But I also don't want commuter traffic racing by Bancroft, as children are arriving at school on foot.

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On February 5, some residents of the **2000 block of Park Road** met with DDOT to consider suggestions for reducing traffic speed on that block, running from the Klinge/-Walbridge intersection to the Piney Branch overpass. DDOT is suggesting road narrowing with medians -- “chokers” -- to slow traffic by reducing the “wide road” appearance.

Residents of the block will have the first say in what makes sense. There are conflicting objectives of traffic slowing, bike lanes, and buffer space between parked cars and traffic.

Points to consider:

- Judging by experience elsewhere, median “chokers” will reduce the 85th-percentile traffic speed by a mere 2 mph, from 34 mph to 32 mph.
- The parking lanes put in by DDOT to make space for the bike lanes are just 7 feet wide, narrower than the usual DDOT minimum of 8 feet. Many parked cars don't fit, and protrude into the bike lanes, making those lanes dangerous for bicyclists.
- The bike lanes, put in at CM Graham's request for the purpose of slowing traffic, have failed totally in that respect. Traffic speed is utterly unchanged.
- The bike lane and parking lane combination, 12 feet total, falls short of the AASHTO (safety) guideline of 13 feet for roads “where there is substantial parking”. The squeezing of parking lanes, bike lanes, and traffic lanes into this 44-foot road has come under heavy criticism in other cities, because the result is hazardous to bicyclists.

What makes sense to me is to put in parking lanes of proper 8-foot width, put in a single 5-foot bike lane on the uphill side, mark a 3-foot buffer zone between parked cars and traffic on the downhill side, and mark the downhill lane with “sharrows” for shared bike-automobile use, as will be done for the rest of Park Road. That does nothing about traffic speed, but then the DDOT proposal doesn't do much for traffic speed either. Let's request a speed camera, towards the bottom of the hill.

The fundamental problem of that block is that traffic coming westbound on Park Road, around the curve, is not visible, and comes into view only when it's almost upon someone trying to park, or exit a parked car. There's just no good fix for that, other than to enhance visibility by prohibiting parking close to that curve, a measure that would surely be unpopular. The DDOT proposed median barriers would prevent those oncoming cars from swinging wide to give space to someone in the street, and so would increase the hazard to residents at their parked cars.

It's beginning to feel like spring is close at hand. Since January 1, we've gained about 40 minutes of daylight in the morning, 60 minutes at sunset. **On March 8, we switch to Daylight Saving Time**, and sunset will come after 7 pm. Nobody likes dark mornings, but sunshine into the evening is certainly nice.

Many residents like to use the weekend-closed portions of Beach Drive for walking, bicycling, and general pleasure, as the days get longer and warmer. But Beach Drive is opened to automobile traffic at 7 pm on Sunday evenings, even when it's light until 9 pm. Recreational users are then suddenly confronted with cars on the road. I've renewed my appeal to the National Park Service **to extend that Sunday closing time to better approximate sunset**, to avoid that dangerous situation. Yes, I've seen children on bicycles on Beach Drive, suddenly face-to-face with oncoming automobiles, whose drivers don't expect to find children bicycling and people walking on the road. I've rounded curves on Beach Drive on my bicycle and found myself head-on with oncoming cars. Our priorities ought to be with the vulnerable people on the street, not with the automobile drivers, who can easily take

16th Street, or Connecticut Avenue, at that hour, leaving the Park free for Park uses.

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Many of us have complained of **high heating bills** this winter. How much of the increase is due to colder weather than last year, and how much due to higher rates? Checking my electric bill (heat pump), my January bills were up over last year by 29% due to increased consumption, and by 22% due to higher electric rates. My gas consumption was also up by 21%. It was a colder January than last year.

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**Street robberies in Mount Pleasant** have suddenly become a problem again: 11 in January, twice our average count. Most of these robberies have been in the northeast area, north of Park Road, east of 18th Street. The police suspect that the perpetrators are a pair of young men who live in that area, or have a “safe house” in that area, so they can pull a robbery and quickly disappear.

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I'm having a bit of a tiff with the Metropolitan Police about their simplistic use of **crime statistics**. Recently an Adams Morgan lieutenant received an award for a dramatic reduction in crime, property crime being down by a claimed 87%, compared to a year ago. I protested that that statistic is impossible. Following up on my objections, the MPD has confirmed that that number was supposed to be 57%, not 87%. (A better analysis reveals that the decline is 28%, half the amount claimed.)

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The **Mount Pleasant Library** has plans for expansion, including the construction of a big glass “cube” next to the old building. This proposal has aroused the ire of almost everyone in Mount Pleasant. Historic Mount Pleasant, the MPNA, Hear Mount Pleasant, and the ANC, as well as other residents, met with Councilmember Graham on February 19 to solicit his support in opposition. The Committee on Fine Arts, which reviewed the plan on February 19, agreed that it's a bad design, and declined to approve it.

I've proposed that this expansion structure, which will be primarily for meeting space, be located in nearby Columbia Heights. That obviates the architectural dispute, and would extend the services of the “Mount Pleasant” Library into our neighboring community. This is the only library in Ward One, and it should better serve more of Ward One.

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It appears that the **Rosemount Avenue** couple who were under orders from Historic Preservation to rip out their brand-new windows and replace them with “historically correct” types have won their battle, and will be required to replace only four of their vinyl-frame windows. The Historic Preservation Office is recognizing, I think, that their regulation has been too demanding. The law requires only *compatibility*, not *authenticity*, and if neighbors think the result is “harmonious”, then it should be allowed. The recent rejections of historic district designation by Lanier Heights and Chevy Chase have sent a strong message to the HPO: lighten up, because this regulation has become too onerous.

The ANC will have an *informal* meeting on **Tuesday, March 3, 7:00 pm**. This will be mainly for community dialog. The next ANC *business* meeting will be on **Tuesday, March 17, 7:00 pm**, La Casa Community Center.