

Jack's February report

At the January 18 ANC meeting, the ANC:

- Elected officers, and set the meeting calendar, for the year;
- Agreed to join in a motion for the Board of Zoning Adjustment to overturn the ruling of the DCRA Zoning Administrator to grant a building permit allowing the expansion of the existing Mount Pleasant library.

On February 1, the Commission held a meeting for informal dialog with residents.

Every January, we must **elect officers for the year**. The Commission decided to proceed without changes: Gregg as Chair, Stormy as Vice Chair, Jack as Secretary and Treasurer.

Prior to the meeting, Gregg and I agreed that it was time to begin a transfer of our officer positions to newer (younger) commissioners. With three novice commissioners, it's not practical to make the changes now. So we'll continue this year with the same officers as last, but, come January 2012, there will surely be changes.

I mentioned last month that this newsletter **costs me about \$60 a month**, for printing the 720 copies I distribute to my constituents. A very generous resident offered me a donation to help pay these costs. I had to decline that, though I am very grateful for the offer. I can't legally accept donations. Elected officials in the District may not accept cash donations. Campaign contributions, yes. (My campaign expenses are zero, so that's irrelevant.) But cash contributions, no.

As for requesting ANC funds to cover my newsletter expenses, I won't ask for, and would not accept, ANC funds. I don't want anybody thinking that I'm using public funds for my personal benefit. Also, I don't want anybody on the Commission thinking that they have any right to tell me what I may or may not write in my newsletter.

I'm happy to provide my newsletter as my service to my neighbors, and its cost is not a burden to me. My reward is the expressions of gratitude I get from residents who like it. That's been ample reward, indeed.

On January 12, DDOT and the Federal Highway Administration released the **Klingles Valley Trail Final Environmental Assessment**, which will be open to public review through February 15. The "preferred option" is a 10-foot-wide multi-use (bike/hike) trail using water-permeable pavement.

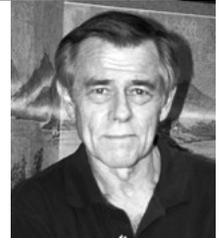
It's been 20 years since the 1991 closing of Klingles Road due to stormwater damage, yet some residents still bitterly mourn the loss of that short-cut to points west. (Emily and I used it too, bypassing the long delays at the Porter crossing of Connecticut.) Some still want to blame Councilmember Mary Cheh, or residents adjacent to Klingles Road, for the closing of the road to cars. But it's not their doing.

In 2003, the road advocates won the political victory in the District, totally, with a line item in the FY2004 budget stating that the road "shall be re-opened to the public for motor vehicle traffic". Period, end of discussion, and occasional complaints from the opponents of the road people were received with this sort of thing: *"Klingles Road was decided a long time ago by a vote of the Council . . . surely you respect*

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the law, right? no need to rant about that or debate any more, it has been exhaustingly debated for years. Game over." (Laurie Collins, December 2, 2007.)

Well, "game over" it was not. For the following four years, the District struggled to get an Environmental Impact Statement accepted by the Federal Government. Every attempt was rejected. In 2008, then-Mayor Fenty and Councilmember Graham decided to forfeit the 90% Federal funding and have the District pay the full cost of restoring the road. "The handwriting is on the wall," said Councilmember Graham, namely that the Feds were simply stonewalling the project, no doubt because the National Park Service objected to an automobile-only road through this fine portion of Rock Creek Park.

But the District Council was not about to come up with \$11M for the road. Councilmember Cheh proposed that the area become instead a recreational area, for pedestrians and bicyclists. Not only would this cost less, but presumably this would be acceptable to the Feds, who would pay most of the cost, and the bitter battle over the road would finally come to an end. The Council voted 10 to 3 for Cheh's line item in the FY2009 budget calling for "environmental remediation of Klingles Valley and construction of a pedestrian and bicycle trail". Councilmembers Graham, Bowser, and Schwarz were the sole holdouts for the road.

The Environmental Assessment estimates the total cost of the project at \$4.6M to \$7.0M, depending on details. Diehard road advocates now hammer at that seven-million-dollar figure, as exorbitant for a bike/hike recreational trail. But a most of that sum is for remediation of the Klingles Creek environment, the construction of stormwater controls, and the construction of a truck access road to utilities in the valley. The cost for the trail itself is far less than \$7M.

So, despite the total victory of the road advocates in 2003, the automobile road is no longer an option, so it's the bike-hike trail or nothing. Nobody on the Council wants to go back to 2003 and start over again. Perhaps Laurie Collins' tart assertion of 2007 -- "game over" -- is applicable today, but referring to the recreational trail, not to the automobile road.

Construction would take, according to the Assessment, 8 to 12 months. I think this bike/hike trail will be a valuable addition to the District's modest bike-route mileage (50 miles of bike lanes, 1200 miles of automobile roads), linking the Woodley Park residential areas to the Rock Creek Park bike trail. The trail will also be a fine place for pedestrians to enjoy the woods without the automobile noise that plagues other hiking trails in Rock Creek Park.

On the morning of February 4, the Alante Financial micro-finance center on Mount Pleasant Street was **robbed by two gunmen**, dressed in police-style outfits. Shortly afterwards, police were intensively searching Ingleside Terrace for something associated with that robbery. The robbery on Mount Pleasant Street is not, sadly, so unusual, but why would the trail of the perpetrators lead into our neighborhood? That's not usual. I'm investigating that.

While that was going on, I was downtown testifying to Phil Mendelson's Council Justice Committee concerning **bicycle safety**. Bicycling in traffic is dangerous, and two Mount Pleasant bicyclers have been killed by trucks on city streets, Alice Swanson in 2008, Constance Holden in 2010. In both cases, the truck drivers were not found to be at fault. They just didn't see that bicyclist they were about to run over. I think they just weren't watching for bicyclists.

What's needed for bicycle safety, I testified (as a resident, not for the ANC), is greater awareness of bicycles on the streets, and recognition by drivers that they have a legal right to be there. If we're going to replace the mutual hostility between bicyclists and drivers with respectful coexistence, each has to respect the rights of the other to the road. Yes, both ways. But it's hard to be a docile, law-abiding bicyclist when impatient drivers rudely cut you off, denying a bicyclist any right to the road, as happens all too frequently.

The common notion that bicyclists are to keep to the far right, and must stay out of the way of cars under all conditions, is not so. There's a law giving bicyclists the right to the traffic lane under certain conditions, e.g., when the lane is less than 11 feet wide (as is the case all over Mount Pleasant), or when approaching a turn, or to keep a safe distance from parked cars. That 1996 law has, curiously, never been added to the Office of Documents compilation of Municipal Regulations. Councilmember Mendelson instructed Assistant Chief Patrick Burke to fix that.

The Metropolitan Police have a significant pro-automobile bias. In the case of Alice Swanson, run over by a trash truck making a right turn across a bike lane, the MPD report asserted that she had hit the truck, crashing into the right-side door of the truck, and somehow flew forward, falling under the right front wheel. Trust me, if a bicyclist hits the side of a truck, she's going to go over the handlebars head-first into the side of the truck, then go straight down onto the pavement, not six feet forward. Ms. Swanson's mother testified that the MPD incident report made her feel that she had been victimized a second time.

The left turn from eastbound Klinge onto northbound Park Road has been prohibited, for as long as anyone can remember. Anyone coming across Rock Creek Park on Porter/Klinge has a problem, if they want to get to that block of Park Road, or Pierce Mill. One rather hazardous option is to turn right onto Adams Mill, left into the alley, through the alley parallel to Klinge, left onto Walbridge, then straight on Park. Why, I asked, is the left turn from Klinge banned? Surely that's less hazardous to traffic and pedestrians alike than the cut through the alley.

I think the left turn was prohibited because eastbound drivers on Klinge can't see moving traffic in the right lane of westbound Park Road. But that lane has a red light during the Klinge green, so that shouldn't be a problem. Yes, there are the occasional drivers who don't understand that the red arrow means "stop", and I've requested an enhanced sign telling drivers that. The existing sign is small and ambiguous.

In November, 2008, I got a resolution from this ANC calling for the left turn to be allowed. Well, the left turn is now allowed, and even facilitated, with a left-turn arrow phase, stopping westbound Park Road traffic. I see no need for that, and that phase cuts into the green-light time for westbound Park Road traffic. DDOT was nervous about simply allowing the left turn, as we requested. Unhappily, that reduced green-light time for westbound Park Road is causing serious morning traffic backups. I'm working on fixing that.

People always want to know, **is crime increasing, or decreasing, in Mount Pleasant?** Much publicity has been given to homicide rates, which are decreasing everywhere, not just in DC. That's nice, but how about the crimes that most concern us, namely robberies and automobile break-ins?

I don't buy the police claims that crime is down. The MPD always look only at this year versus last year, and if this year's number is smaller, then that's it, they claim "success". But crime statistics are more complicated than that, and simply comparing this year to last year isn't adequate.

Consider robberies: 46 for the year 2010 in Mount Pleasant, compared to 57 in 2009. Decreasing, right? Yes, but look a little further: there were only 40 robberies here in 2006, so compared to that year, robberies are up. Similarly, automobile break-ins totalled 121 in 2010, a modest decline from the 136 reported in 2009. But in 2005, there were only 106 such break-ins. It's really impossible to say that these crimes are "increasing", or "decreasing". I prefer to say that they simply *continue*, sometimes more, sometimes less.

A resident called with a **bedbug problem**. That's not at all surprising, bedbugs having become a nationwide plague in recent years, appearing in the best of homes and hotels.

On February 2 and 3, a Federal "Second National Bed Bug Summit" was held here. This followed a DC Department of Health conference on the problem on January 20. The problem is, there's no simple and effective means of eliminating an infestation. Exterminators using pesticides may reduce the population for a while, but 100 percent suppression is extremely difficult. Current pesticides don't do the job. One novel technique is the heating of infested rooms to an extreme temperature, over 110 degrees, to kill the insects wherever they may be hiding.

I personally would try diatomaceous earth, poured into every furniture and floorboard crack and crevice, to try to deal with an infestation. Would that work? Fortunately, I haven't had to try anything, yet.

The next <i>business</i> meeting of the ANC will be on Tuesday, February 15, 7:30 pm . The next <i>informal</i> meeting will be on March 1, 7:30 pm .
