

Jack's February report

The ANC held its first meeting of 2012 on January 17. At this meeting, the ANC:

- * Elected officers for 2012.
- * Endorsed a zoning variance application for the Meridian Hill Baptist Church condominium development project.
- * Advised DDOT to proceed with the Harvard Triangle project (left turns from Kenyon onto Adams Mill).
- * Advised the Historic Preservation Review Board (HPRB) to have a public member who represents the general public, not just the preservationist community.

The ANC1D officers for 2012 are: “Stormy” Scott, chair; Laura Wilson Phelan, vice chair; and me, continuing as Secretary and Treasurer.

The **Meridian Hill Baptist Church**, a grand old (1917) structure on 16th Street, has stood vacant since 2007, for sale, no buyers. The fire from the Deauville fire of March, 2008, was the final blow to this exceptional building. What does one do with a 24,000-square-foot church, its congregation long ago departed for the suburbs? Bozzuto Homes, Inc., has devised a plan to build an eight-floor condominium building adjacent to the church, and put condo units inside the church building itself, while preserving the magnificent frontage. On December 15, the HPRB endorsed the conceptual plans by a 7 to 0 vote.

I'm impressed that they were able to design a condo building around this church frontage, while preserving that magnificent but impractical front, steps and pillars and all. It will benefit everyone to have that building occupied and productive. It will include 55 apartment units, and parking for the tenants. At this time the building produces zero tax revenues for the District. Occupied, the building will yield – my guess – around \$200,000 a year in property taxes.

The zoning issue referred to the ANC by the Board of Zoning Adjustment (BZA) was minor. Zoning calls for a 26-foot rear yard, mainly to provide light and air to any residences opposite that rear face. At the moment there's nothing but vacant lot there, but in time a replacement for the Deauville will be built. The current design calls for a 6-foot rear yard at the base of the building (which will be an outside stairwell, for parking garage access), and a 15-foot spacing above that ground level. The current rear yard spacing is a mere 5 feet, so this is a significant improvement. Together with increased rear-yard spacing for whatever replaces the Deauville, this seems to me to provide adequate light and air.

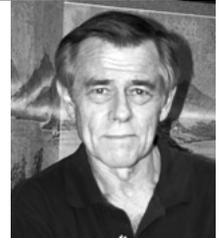
The ANC endorsed the application for a zoning variance by a 4 to 0 vote, Laura, Stormy, China and I voting “yes”. The BZA will hear the case on February 28.

The **Historic Preservation Review Board (HPRB)** has four “public members” (alongside six professionals), as the Board is supposed to reflect “the composition of the adult population of the District of Columbia with regard to race, sex, geographic distribution and other demographic characteristics”. I ask, who on this Board represents the homeowner, afflicted with costly preservationist demands? Surely these “public members” are supposed to do that, but they do not.

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These members are invariably chosen from the active preservationist community, which means that they're aggressive advocates of preservation, not defenders of homeowners. Nobody on the Board speaks for the homeowners! And somebody, I think, should. Furthermore, as is so characteristic of the preservationist community, these “public members” are high-income professionals, not representative of the whole population of the District. The historic preservation community is justly criticized as “elitist”.

Mayor Gray has appointed one Nancy Metzger to replace Tersh Boasberg as one of those three “public members”. Ms. Metzger is the archetypical preservationist, fanatical about preservation, and the owner of a million-dollar Capitol Hill house. She'll surely be another aggressive preservationist, and will speak for the preservationists, not for the public.

My resolution, passed 6 to 0 by the ANC, calls for at least one of these “public members” to be chosen from the public, not from the preservationist community. On January 18, resolution in hand, I testified in Councilmember Tommy Wells' committee hearing concerning the confirmation of Ms Metzger's appointment. Councilmember Wells was receptive to my testimony, and in his own questioning of Ms Metzger, asked if historic preservation didn't (1) contribute to gentrification and urban displacement, (2) conflict with “transit oriented development”, and (3) conflict with increased urban density. She was quite puzzled by these questions, evidently not having anticipated any serious questioning of historic preservation. Preservationists talk only to each other, and take for granted the notion that historic preservation must take priority over all other considerations.

Despite our complaint, the Council will surely rubber-stamp Ms. Metzger's nomination. But I intend to show up at HPRB hearings, if only to remind them that the Board is supposed to serve all the residents of the District, not just the historic preservationist community.

For nine years, since early 2003 – my first year as an ANC commissioner – I've been pushing for rebuilding the **Kenyon/Irving/Adams Mill intersection** to permit the (very popular, but illegal) left turn from westbound Kenyon onto southbound Adams Mill. By a 4 to 1 vote (Gregg voting “no”, Yasmin abstaining), the ANC passed my resolution calling for DDOT to proceed with this “Harvard Triangle” project, now that the final question regarding the location of the Kenyon/Irving bus stop has been resolved. That is the last hurdle, and DDOT hopes to begin work in May.

Mr. Concepcion Zavala, a 66-year-old resident of 1665 Lamont Street, was killed on February 8 while working at a construction site in Bethesda. His parked pickup truck began rolling, and he tried to jump in and stop it, only to be crushed to death against a wall.

Mr Zavala was a Latino immigrant with recent US citizenship. He died just doing his job, trying to do the right thing for his employer. Phil Greiner, his neighbor, describes him as “an extremely friendly and kind gentleman.” Councilmember Graham is working on this to see what help his office can provide for his widow. Such a tragedy!

From the Washington Post: “**Betty J. Ayomike** – Departed this life on January 3, 2012.” Betty, and her parents, James and Margie Stoddard, have been good neighbors to us for all of our 40 years here. Such a pity, and I wish the best to Bawo and BJ, who lost her at such an early age.

The Northwest Current quoted **MPD Chief Cathy Lanier** saying that “violent crimes in 2011 fell by double-digit percentages for the third consecutive year”. I disputed that assertion, because it certainly didn't jibe with my statistics. Her office later said that she was misquoted: it is only “gun crimes” that are down, not “violent crimes” in general. I think it's a mistake for the Chief to cherry-pick statistics that reflect favorably on her performance, while ignoring statistics that don't.

Robbery, whether a gun is used or not, is a crime of violence, and robberies in DC are definitely not decreasing. Chief Lanier speaks all too often about the decline in homicides, and claims credit for it: “Our positive results can be attributed to proactive patrol measures and a collaborative approach with partners in the community and the criminal-justice system.” I must point out that (1) homicides are down everywhere, not just in DC, and (2) if more effective policing were responsible for this decline, then surely robberies should decrease as well – but there's no such decrease. Here's the annual count of DC robberies, beginning with 2006, the last year before Chief Lanier's tenure as chief of police:

2006: 3604
2007: 3985
2008: 4154
2009: 3998
2010: 4325
2011: 4056

Robberies are not decreasing, which says to me that the Chief's police tactics are no more effective at preventing violent crime than those prior to her arrival, despite her repeated claims that the homicide reduction is her accomplishment. (If that is the case, then the absence of any decrease in robberies must be her failure, right?) Crime rates in fact are governed by many factors over which the police have no control, and the MPD should neither claim credit for the decline in homicides, nor be blamed for the absence of a decline in robberies.

Robberies in Mount Pleasant have declined in recent years, from 76 in 2005 to 49 in 2011, a consequence, I believe, of gentrification. (One of our novice commissioners naively

gives Chief Lanier credit for this, but does this commissioner hold the Chief responsible for the simultaneous *increase* in robbery rates in Columbia Heights? I don't think so.)

The per-capita robbery rate here is about one-third of that in Columbia Heights, and about three times that which prevails west of Rock Creek Park. Almost all robberies in Mount Pleasant occur between 16th and 17th Streets. Hence, east of 17th Street you have about as high a chance of being a robbery victim as you would around 14th Street; whereas west of 18th Street, your chance of being a victim is about as low as on Connecticut Avenue.

Two years ago this month we were buried in Snowmageddon. This year, there's been **hardly a snowflake**. On February 2, a record-high *low* temperature for the date was set, 48 degrees, about 20 degrees above the normal low, and three degrees *higher* than the normal *high* for the date. Weird weather.

Spotted on a Mount Pleasant sidewalk: a young mother, carefully teaching her very small child to **stop before crossing an alley** and look for cars before crossing. Not a street, for which the child was surely too young, but an alley! Our alleys have become our most dangerous pedestrian crossings, because way too many drivers fail to *stop before the sidewalk*, instead just barging on out to the street, blindly assuming that there will be no pedestrians on that sidewalk. Visibility when exiting alleys is commonly very poor, and it's not easy to make certain that there's no one coming on the sidewalk, especially a small child.

DC law requires drivers to stop *before* the sidewalk, when exiting an alley. Good sense demands the same: stop and make *certain* that there's no small child skipping along the sidewalk, as you make your way out to the street. Our children ought to be able to run and play and skateboard and bicycle on our sidewalks in safety.

There was an **attempted carjacking on Park Road** reported at 14th Street at 3 AM on February 5, close enough to Mount Pleasant to worry some residents. But this was no routine carjacking. Such robbers generally accost drivers in gas stations or at intersections, on foot (hence their desire for your car). In this case, three cars cut off the target car, a Lexus, and four men jumped out, two of them carrying handguns, to confront the three people in the Lexus. Well, the two men in the Lexus fought back, and the assailants fled.

I questioned this incident, which greatly worried at least one Mount Pleasant resident: “It means that things have gotten so bad, that in the heart of Columbia Heights there was little concern of three cars of crooks to collude together in an attempt to commit this crime”. Well, no. *This turns out not to have been an attempted carjacking at all, but a road rage incident that turned into a street brawl*. The offenders weren't “crooks” out to steal a car, but hotheaded young men taking offense at some traffic incident. There are not, in fact, gangs of men in cars out on our streets trapping innocent drivers and “jacking” their cars.

The next *business* meeting of the ANC will be on **Tuesday, February 21, 2012, 7:00 pm**. There will be no more of the first-Tuesday informal meetings with the ANC.