

Jack's January report

At the December 7 ANC meeting, the ANC:

- Advised District agencies to explore new techniques for better trees along Mount Pleasant Street, reducing the amount of sidewalk taken up by treeboxes;
- Advised the District Council to remove the exclusion of ANCs from the Open Meetings bill currently under consideration. (my resolution).

There was no December 21 meeting, due to Christmas. On January 4 the ANC met in "informal" session, for dialog with residents. Councilmember Graham attended, and performed swearing in of the commissioners who hadn't gone to the Convention Center ceremonies on January 2.

Well, here comes the new year, with three brand-new ANC commissioners, and, coincidentally, my one-hundredth newsletter. Perhaps it's time to remind people that **no ANC or DC Government funds go towards my newsletter**. Yes, it costs me a bit, about \$60 each month. And I've spent many hours going door to door hand-delivering my 700-plus copies. It's well worth it, I think. Also, I run into the nicest people, as I hike around the neighborhood doing my monthly delivery.

The "**Open Meetings**" bill mentioned above sets new requirements for meetings of District Government agencies, with the stated purpose of providing "full and complete information regarding the affairs of government and the actions of those who represent [the people]". Well, but ANCs (and the DC Council) are exempted from these requirements! That's wrong, I say. We can live with these requirements, with perhaps a few minor exceptions, such as posting meeting notices in the DC Register. The Commission agreed with me, and passed my resolution calling for the ANC exemption to be removed, and ANCs to be covered by the bill. That won't happen, but as long as I'm commission Secretary, we'll voluntarily follow these rules.

In 2006, I helped then-Councilmember Carol Schwarz with a bill allowing **parking on residential streets to a distance of 25 feet from an intersection**, as compared to the standard minimum distance of 40 feet (where the no-parking signposts are placed). This does result in a confusing situation, where a car parked beyond a no-parking signpost can be legally parked. It's been quite a struggle to get the Metropolitan Police and the DPW Parking Enforcement officers to understand this.

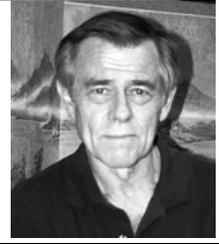
To date, I've gotten seven tickets for being parked according to this 40/25-foot law. (Emily comes home from work late, and there's never any curbside parking left.) The most recent of these tickets was in July, and in December, I received the DMV dismissal of that ticket, my sixth successful denial. I'm still complaining about that seventh ticket, the one denial that failed, an outcome that the DMV Appeals Board upheld, in a June 2010 decision displaying its ignorance of the 2006 law. In December, the DMV agreed to re-examine that decision, and maybe this time they'll get the law right.

On December 31 I came across a Kenyon Street resident's car with one of these bogus tickets. This ticket was issued by DDOT, the first one of those I've seen. So it seems that

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there's yet another parking enforcement group to educate about this law.

In July, the ANC passed my resolution calling for parking tickets to show explicitly what parking regulation was being violated. Parking tickets don't specify the DC regulation violated (my ANC resolution of last July advised that they should). There's just a little three-digit code, and the runaway favorite code among the parking enforcement people is P055, "no parking anytime". They like that because then they don't have to think about *why* parking is prohibited at any location. Just check the box, and move on to the next victim.

Now I've discovered a serious problem with that simple-minded ticket-writing. P055 is *not* the simple, universal, "no parking anytime" regulation that the enforcement people think it is. On the contrary, this refers to parking bans only on three specific streets in the District, namely Woodley Road NW, Okie St NE, Branch Avenue SE. So if you're not parked on any of those three streets, you cannot possibly be in violation of P055. And that means that *any such ticket written in Mount Pleasant is totally invalid*. I've notified officials of this problem. Meanwhile, if you get one of those P055 tickets – feel free to deny it.

Speaking of parking tickets: a restroom door at Haydee's Restaurant broke on New Year's Eve (at midnight, no less), and Haydee called her brother to come make emergency repairs. He parked his truck outside her restaurant, and, when he returned to this truck to fetch some tools, he found a police officer writing him **an absolutely enormous parking ticket: \$1000**. Yes, a thousand dollars, for parking a truck "in front of a residence". (Haydee's Restaurant is a residence?) Now, if you drive 50 mph in a 25 zone, you're liable for a \$250 ticket. Hit a pedestrian in a crosswalk, and it's \$500. But park a truck in front of a residence, and it's twice that, \$1000. Guess that shows what the District Council's priorities are. I'm helping the poor guy fight that ticket, and I've asked the District Council why this fine is so horrendous.

A fair number of drivers don't understand the traffic lights on westbound Park Road at the Klinge/Walbridge intersection. The red arrow means "don't go", even if the solid green is lit. But the sign advising motorists of that, "right turn on green (arrow symbol) only" is evidently confusing. I guess people just see "green", and ignore the arrow symbol. Most drivers have figured this traffic light out, but too many have not, and they're hazardous to any pedestrians attempting to cross Park Road with the "walk" light.

Apparently this has been troublesome at other such intersections, and DDOT has come up with a **much bigger and better “turn on green arrow only” sign**. You can see such a sign on 15th Street at Florida, for example. I've asked DDOT to post one of those improved signs at the Park Road intersection. CM Graham endorsed my request: “What Jack suggests makes a lot of sense!” he wrote. So I hope to see an improved sign soon.

On December 29, we received a message from Casey Trees that disease-tolerant elms would be planted in several wards of the District, including Ward One. I relayed that message to the Mount Pleasant Forum, then forgot about it, because there was nothing in it about Mount Pleasant specifically. I was taken by surprise when, just eight days later, Casey was here and the trees were being planted.

Well, that's nice, everybody likes elm trees. But I was dismayed at the very short and vague notice, so the ANC had no opportunity to review the locations chosen. DDOT, as is its practice, had spoken to just two Mount Pleasant residents, and called that “working with the community”.

Sam Broeksmit, MPNA president, asked me if the tree planted on Adams Mill Road at Kenyon was compatible with the plans to rebuild that intersection to permit left turns from Kenyon onto Adams Mill, as well as bike lanes, a safer turn from northbound Adams Mill onto Irving and Kenyon, and better sidewalks. Close examination of the DDOT plans revealed that **this elm tree has been planted precisely where DDOT intends to install a new street light** – “pendant pole with luminaire”, i. e., cobra – for better lighting of the intersection.

We don't want to have this intersection plan upset by the placement of the tree, and it's not good for a large tree to be planted right next to a big streetlight pole. DDOT has replied (January 11) that they “will arrange with Casey trees to transplant the tree elsewhere”.

Back in 2005, **the start time for our ANC meetings** was changed from 7:30 to 7:00, to suit a resident with young children. Now we've got a newly elected commissioner with two infants, and a child-care schedule that doesn't work with our 7:00 meeting start time. So, at my request, the start time for our January 18 meeting will be 7:30 pm. Question for the neighborhood: which is better, 7:00 or 7:30? Once this need for a 7:30 start time is past, should we revert to 7:00, or not?

On November 30, concerned Ingleside Terrace residents met with the Metropolitan Police at Bancroft Elementary to talk about disturbing incidents along that block, **break-ins and attempted break-ins**. Coincidentally, on December 9 a Lamont Street resident was assaulted by two young men at the corner of Walbridge and Lamont. These appear to be examples of a longstanding problem in our neighborhood, that of rough youths prowling our area in search of an easy theft or robbery. Most of these incidents take place towards the Columbia Heights edge of Mount Pleasant, but occasionally such incidents occur on or near Adams Mill Road, another easy route into Mount Pleasant.

Chief Lanier stated recently that “we're failing when it comes to juvenile violence”. No doubt about it. She said that juveniles accounted for just 7 percent of overall arrests, but 46 percent of arrests for robberies and carjackings in the District. This is the crime problem that seems insoluble: badly behaved youths, looking for trouble, unworried about any penalties if caught, and much tougher than us residents.

Our crime rates, by way, show nothing unusual lately. In December, there were two reported burglaries; our average is two per month. There was just one reported robbery, vs. the monthly average of four. There were 10 thefts from auto, vs. our monthly average of, yes, 10. There's nothing unusual going on; this is just an unhappy aspect of life in the District, especially east of Rock Creek Park.

Many times I've said that the nicest thing about our neighborhood is its roughly even mix of ethnicities, so no one group of people feel as if they're outsiders in somebody else's neighborhood. As recently as 2000, Mount Pleasant was a marvelously balanced mix: **white non-Hispanic 35%, Hispanic 31%, black non-Hispanic 27%**.

In December, the Census Bureau released the most recent American Community Survey data about our neighborhoods. The results for Mount Pleasant are startling. According to the recent data, this ethnic balance is slipping away. The most recent numbers: **white non-Hispanic 51%, Hispanic 20%, black non-Hispanic 17%**. Not surprising, I guess, but I liked the old numbers better.

In July, 2009, I wrote about **a problem property, 3225 Walbridge**. The front porch had been allowed to deteriorate and collapse, a vivid example of “demolition by neglect”. The Historic Preservation Office is legally mandated to prevent that, but they don't. They'll harass anyone who attempts to *improve* their properties, insisting that our neighborhood should look no better than it did in 1935, and they'll punish anyone who makes improvements without their permission; but the HPO ignores residents who let “historic” properties be destroyed by weather. Seems to me they have their priorities wrong.

As for 3225 Walbridge, the property was sold last October to an investor for \$440,000. The District recovered \$38,000 in back property taxes, and the renovated house is now on the market for \$750,000.

For a long time, there have been **weak odors of natural gas** around the lot in front of 1900 Lamont. One bitter cold night in December, a Washington Gas crew showed up to try to find that leak, somewhere in the gas line that runs under that lot. They brought in a backhoe to excavate the frozen ground, and fixed a break in the gas line. This of course left the lot a dreadful mess, in worse shape than it was before. They've promised to restore the vegetation (such as it was), but I've advised them that, before doing that, they should take care that there are no more leaks. People still report odors of gas on occasion in that area.

The next *business* meeting of the ANC will be on **Tuesday, January 18, 7:30 pm**. The next *informal* meeting will be on **February 1**, the start time to be determined.