

Jack's January report

There was no December meeting of the ANC, as we were unable to muster a quorum of four of the six commissioners.

It's a new year, and time for a new start. On January 2 **two new Mount Pleasant commissioners, Adam Hoey and Phil Greiner**, were sworn in, along with three of us – China, Yasmin, and me – re-elected for the 2013-2014 session. The new commission has only five members, because the population of Mount Pleasant dropped from 11,794 in 2000 to 10,459 in 2010.

The final quarter of 2012 was frustrating, as two of the three monthly meetings of the quarter failed to have the four commissioners required for a quorum. Yes, we need a fresh start.

The principal issue on the agenda for the December meeting was the **application by Haydee's for 24-hour food service**, plus an additional half hour for alcohol and entertainment service, to 2 AM during the week, 3 AM on weekends.

As I noted in my December newsletter, I support the 24-hour food service, which would essentially allow Haydee's to offer early-morning breakfasts, whereas they currently may not open until 11 AM. I had worked out an agreement with other commissioners to advise approval of that food service, while not endorsing the additional alcohol/entertainment half hour. Without a quorum, though, the ANC could do nothing, so the December meeting was cancelled.

I had expected the MPNA to protest both aspects of the application, but evidently that organization did not. In the absence of any protest, and lacking any guidance from the ANC, the ABC Board will permit both.

Many times I've noted that a car with an RPP permit can park on an RPP block as close as **25 feet from the intersection** (this is *behind* the car, *past* an intersection). This additional bit of parking space came about in 2006, courtesy of a law sponsored by former Councilmember Carol Schwartz, passed with a bit of assistance from me.

But it's confusing because the no-parking-to-intersection signposts are placed 40 feet from the intersection, marking the closest parking for non-RPP cars, or non-RPP blocks. According to the new (in 2006) law, cars can extend up to 15 feet past those no-parking signposts, yet be legally parked.

Mostly the parking ticket people have figured this out, though both Parking Enforcement and MPD officers have had a really hard time with the notion that a car can extend beyond a "no parking" sign, yet be legally parked.

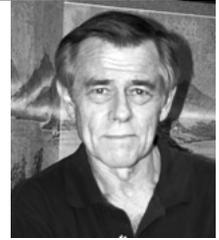
Recently a couple of Parking Enforcement officers (P. Garcia and A. White), perhaps new to the job, have been writing tickets for cars legally parked in this manner, past those no-parking signposts. If this happens to you, contact me, please, with the ticket information, and I can help with a denial of the ticket (by mail).

But note that this provision doesn't allow completely ignoring the distance to the intersection: it must be at least 25 feet. If your car is more than 15 feet long – a minivan, or an SUV – then the front bumper must be a couple feet on the "legal" side of that signpost, or you haven't left the required 25 feet.

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The MPD is insistent that those **speed cameras** generating millions of dollars in fines, and happily balancing the

District's budget, are all about safety, not revenues. ("D.C. Traffic Camera Revenue More Than Doubled in 2012", headlines WJLA news.)

But I can find no evidence to support the assertion that speed cameras yield greater public safety. As I've noted previously, if these MPD photo enforcement machines were compelling drivers to slow down and be more careful, then there should be fewer pedestrian fatalities; but no, there's no such decline. There should also be fewer collisions; but the modest decrease in collisions is far smaller than the decrease in traffic fatalities. The reduction in traffic deaths isn't due to fewer collisions.

Furthermore, speed cameras should, plainly, result in fewer *speeding-related* fatalities. But there's no sign of such a decrease, even as the traffic fatality count was dropping sharply: 44 traffic deaths in 2007, 8 speeding-related; 24 traffic deaths in 2010, 8 speeding-related. That 45% reduction in traffic deaths is evidently not due to any reduction in speeding.

All the evidence I can find supports the hypothesis that **the decrease in traffic fatalities in DC is entirely due to safer cars** -- air bags and the like -- increasing the likelihood that the occupants of a car involved in a collision will survive the crash. Speed cameras in the city, judging by all the data I can find, do not "save lives", not here in the city.

President Obama has said that the massacre of 20 little children at Sandy Hook Elementary was "the worst day of my presidency". Anyone who is, or has been, a parent of a small child understands that. It's our duty as parents to keep our defenseless little children safe from harm, and the horror of Sandy Hook thus exceeds that of Virginia Tech and Columbine.

When James Madison initiated the Second Amendment, in 1788, the state-of-the-art firearm was a single-shot musket, muzzle loaded, requiring even an expert 20 seconds to reload. Imagine how different the outcome at Sandy Hook, or Virginia Tech, or Columbine, or Aurora, would have been, had the shooter needed 20 seconds to reload after each shot. Could Madison have conceived of a rifle capable of firing a barrage of bullets as rapidly as the trigger could be pulled? If he had imagined such a weapon, would he have so readily endorsed a "right to keep and bear arms"? The "arms" of 1788 were hardly comparable to today's weapons of mass murder.

Robberies are unfortunately frequent in DC – roughly four thousand, every year – but most, two-thirds or more, are perpetrated without the use of guns. Suppose robbers get the notion that their victims might be armed and surprise them with a gun, ready to do a Clint Eastwood and shoot them dead in self-defense. Are they going to cease doing robberies? Or will they just get guns themselves, just in case? Given the ready availability of guns, the latter seems the more likely, and that's not going to make the streets safer for you and me.

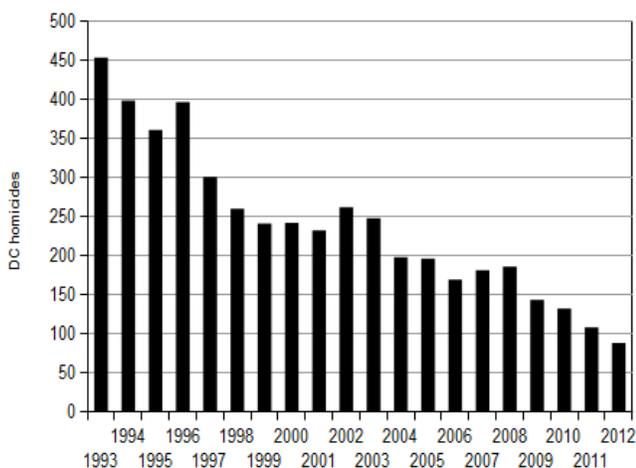
This brings to mind the never-solved murder of Gregory Shipe, shot dead on Irving Street in 2005, presumably in a “robbery gone bad”, believed to be at the hands of a juvenile with a gun.

Speaking of homicides, **the MPD is making much of the decline in homicides to 88 in 2012**, far below the 400-plus counts of the early 1990s. Chief Lanier implies that this is due to effective police work: “By focusing on gangs, guns and investing in technology in recent years we have made a real impact on violent crime.”

The trouble with that explanation is that the decline in homicides began 20 years ago – see the chart, below -- and the current decline is merely a continuation of that two-decades trend. Whatever caused the decline of the dreadful homicide counts of the 1990s began years ago, long before any changes introduced by Chief Lanier.

Furthermore, similar declines are noted across the United States, not just here in DC. There have been more studies lately correlating the decline in homicides and assaults with the phasing out of leaded gasoline 40 years ago, with a time delay of 21 to 23 years, as children exposed to environmental lead reach the young-adult age, when violent behavior becomes most common.

Another problem with the MPD implication that their police efforts are to be given credit for the decline in homicides is that robberies have not declined, even as homicides did. Between 2000 and 2012, while the homicide count *decreased* by 64%, the robbery count *increased* by 20%. How is that consistent with the notion that improved police work has “made a real impact on violent crime”?



An MPD “cold case” bulletin brought to mind the way Mount Pleasant used to be: “On Thursday, April 12, 1979, Donald Jerome Shipp, Jr. was **shot to death while in a car with a friend in the 3300 block of 19th Street NW**. The Metropolitan Police Department seeks the public’s assistance in gathering information regarding this incident.”

Curiously, I don't recall that incident at all, a block from our home. I do recall, vividly, the young guy shot dead, executed, his body lying in the alley exiting onto 19th Street between Kenyon and Kilbourne, around that same time. To this day I cannot walk across that alley entrance without that image coming to mind. Those were violent times, and Mount Pleasant was on the fringes of the violence.

When we moved into our Mount Pleasant house in the spring of 1974, the Pittsburgh friend helping us with the move looked around and said, worriedly, “Jack, do you know what you are doing?” I don't know that we did, but we've never regretted making our home here. And today, Mount Pleasant has the lowest crime rate in all of Ward One. Police here now complain that they have little to do but hassle residents for running their dogs off leash.

The rapid expansion of the speed camera network has led to recognition that **many DC speed limits are set unreasonably low.** Mayor Gray addressed that in part by increasing limits on some commuter routes by 5 mph. The District Council objected, insisting that speed limit setting was their domain, overriding Mayor Gray's reductions.

Professional advice concerning speed cameras is clear: “For automated speed enforcement locations, the program director should ensure that the speed limit is clearly communicated to approaching drivers, set based on an engineering study, and appropriate for the location” (National Cooperative Highway Research Program, Automated Enforcement for Speeding and Red Light Running, 2012). In the District, there's no evidence that any speed limits have been set by “engineering studies”. Politicians seem to be deciding our speed limits.

Concerning that big project **tearing up Adams Mill Road between Kenyon and Harvard** – the project is proceeding on schedule, and Adams Mill should be reopened to two-way traffic by the end of March.

That speed cameras don't reduce traffic fatalities in the District is contrary to intuition, of course. Here's a similar case where what is intuitively true isn't necessarily so. The Federal Government requires a **nationwide minimum age of 21 for consuming alcoholic beverages**, on the assumption that that will reduce drunk driving, and hence traffic deaths, by young people. But a recent Harvard/Yale study found that the law does not in fact reduce traffic fatalities among the young. “The purpose of the Federal Uniform Drinking Age Act, when it was written in 1984, was to reduce teen traffic fatalities. Many claim it has achieved its goal. However, a less myopic view of the data, one that takes other variables into account, reveals that its impact on fatalities has been slight – if not non-existent.”

The next meeting of the ANC will be on **Tuesday, January 22, 2013, 7:00 pm.**