

Jack's January report

At the December 17 meeting, the ANC:

- * Advised the Historic Preservation Review Board (HPRB) of its continued opposition to the Oakwood Terrace development (Adam Hoey);
- * Advised the HPRB of its objection to the proposed development at 1867 Park Road as too large to be compatible (Jack);
- * Endorsed the Local Resident Voting Rights Act, currently under consideration at the District Council (Jack);
- * Advised the Office of Planning that the zoning provision allowing an increase in allowed lot coverage upon conversion to an apartment house should be deleted (Jack);
- * Accepted the Mount Pleasant Library's conditions for ANC meetings at that location (Adam);
- * Advised the Board of Elections to approve the proposed voting precinct changes, but with 1D01 residents to vote at Bancroft, not at the Library (Jack).

I opposed **the moving of our monthly meetings from La Casa to the Library**, noting among other things that the Library closed at 9 pm, and that would compel our meetings to be terminated even earlier than that, even if we had more work to do. We were assured that the Library “will allow ANCID to extend the closing time by 1 hour if required”. Well, that turns out to have been inaccurate. Now we're told by the Library that they never offered to permit our meetings to run past 9 pm “merely by virtue of advanced notice”. Our meetings must end by 8:45, so that we can be out of the room, our equipment dismantled and stored away, by 9 pm.

I've found that half of our monthly meetings in the past have run past 8:45 pm. This will be a problem, just as I worried when I opposed the move to the Library. Our meetings will henceforth have to be kept short, presumably by imposing strict limits on public participation and outside presentations.

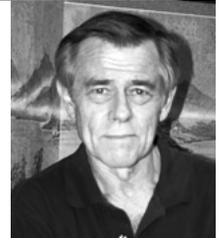
I had prepared another effort to get ANC support for **retrieving three of the four parking spots lost at the 18th Street alley entrance** when DDOT moved the no-parking posts up to 25 feet from that entrance. That resolution was bumped off the agenda again in December, for lack of time. I'm continuing to press this issue through Councilmember Graham, who is concerned about DDOT's elimination of curbside parking spaces in our hard-pressed neighborhood. DDOT argues that this increase in no-parking spacing adjacent to the alley was done on safety grounds. Okay, whose alley entrance will be next for the elimination of street parking? Who judges which alleys warrant such treatment, and which do not, and on what criteria? DDOT won't say, and the Councilmember has protested to the Director of DDOT about this high-handed treatment.

I'm a resident with an alley garage, and I know well the difficulty in exiting the alley with very limited visibility of traffic on the street. But I also know well how scarce parking is in this neighborhood, and what a hardship that is on people who don't possess personal garages, and must find on-street parking when they come home every evening. There must be an intelligent compromise for this situation. Mine is to

ANC 1D03 NEWSLETTER #135

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increase the spacing to the alley, but only for the critical direction, namely to the left, for a driver exiting the alley.

We've got to be attentive to the needs of residents who don't have personal garage parking. I believe I'm the only current commissioner who actually owns a car, and hence knows by personal experience the parking problems in Mount Pleasant.

Much attention was paid at the December meeting to the **proposed development at 1867 Park Road**, including a presentation by the architect of the proposed design. The commission, by a 5 to 0 vote, approved my resolution arguing that this development is too large, more than triple the size of the existing house, to be compatible with other houses along that row. The resolution notes also that its being a six-unit apartment house also makes this development incongruous.

I advise the unhappy neighbors that one cannot count on the HPRB to make any substantial changes to this design. The board members care only about the external appearance of the structure, and if the building is made enormous by an addition in the rear, out of sight from the street, they don't object. As in the Oakwood Terrace case, the HPRB isn't likely to do much but fiddle with the external details of this development.

This will be on the January 23 HPRB agenda, along with a revisit to the Oakwood Terrace matter.

Commissioner Adam Hoey offered another ANC resolution advising the HPRB to **reject the Oakwood Terrace development on grounds of “incompatibility”**. But the HPO staff advice is clear: “The HPO recommends that the Board find the project *not incompatible* with the character of the historic district and recommends clearance of the permit”.

The phrasing of this HPO advice corresponds to the historic preservation law concerning new construction (as opposed to “alterations”): “The permit *shall be issued* unless the Mayor . . . finds that the design of the building and the character of the historic district . . . are incompatible”. As for the ANC advice that the Oakwood Terrace design and the historic district are incompatible, well, the members of the HPRB know that their staff members are trained experts, whereas we on the ANC are most definitely not. Forget “great weight”, our advice will be ignored, and it's foolish and futile for an ANC commissioner to pretend expertise and lecture the HPRB on the decision they should make.

As for objections from neighbors, as well as the ANC, there is no provision in the law requiring, or even *allowing*, the

Board members to have their expert judgment be affected by whether the neighbors approve of a project, or not.

One of the bizarre claims made at the November meeting was that, back in 2010, I had kept the **Oakwood Terrace proposal** “secret”. Well, no. It was in my September 2010 newsletter, so the 17th Street neighbors certainly knew about it. And my advice to Carmel Greer, the developer, in October, 2010, was clear: *“If you have a historic preservation issue such that your application goes before the HPRB . . . then we should be consulted”*.

Carmel did show the ANC her plans at the November 2010 meeting. Afterwards I wrote to her, *“Let’s take another look as this goes to final HPRB review, by which time Laura [Wilson-Phelan] will be the commissioner for the area, and will take the lead”*.

The commission decided at that time to leave the historic preservation judgment to Historic Mount Pleasant, which has credibility at the HPRB, whereas the ANC does not.

An unfortunate number of **December newsletters** went undelivered. I did the delivery (residents are sometimes surprised to find that I do this all by myself, walking roughly 13 miles in the process) a few days after we got an inch or so of snow. That had turned to ice in many places, and I found numerous front steps ice-covered, on houses that face north and get no direct sun. Many residents use their back doors for entering and exiting their homes, and pay little attention to ice accumulation on their front steps. Painted wood steps are the worst – even a tiny coating of ice makes them slippery.

If your front steps aren’t safe, then, sorry, but I’ll pass on by, declining to risk my aging bones on slippery steps.

By the way, this is a good time to advise residents that **you’re legally responsible for clearing snow from the sidewalk in front of your house**: you are required “within the first 8 hours of daylight after the ceasing to fall of any snow or sleet, to remove and clear away, or cause to be removed and cleared away, such snow or sleet from so much of said sidewalk as is in front of or abuts on said building or lot of land”.

This applies to renters, too. If you live in the house, whether as owner or as renter, then clearing the sidewalk of snow is your legal responsibility.

The resolution endorsing the Council bill that would **permit legal residents to vote in local elections, even if not citizens of the U.S.**, was mine. People who live here, pay taxes here, and are subject to our laws, surely deserve a say in the actions of local government.

The **bitter cold of early January** – 7 degrees measured on my back patio, the morning of January 7 – set, perhaps surprisingly, no records. We’ve had mild winters for the past few decades, and this frigid period was simply typical of the winters of 30 years ago. There were burst-pipe problems all over the neighborhood. I think a lot of us have become complacent about such problems, because of this long period of mild winters.

That’s a reminder to all of us: do what you can to prevent your water pipes from freezing in such weather. Water does

terrible damage when it erupts into your house. If any of your pipes froze up this month, think of how much colder it can get in January in DC: 4 degrees *below zero* in 1985, and again in 1994. That’s 10 degrees lower than what we just experienced.

Two questions come up in talking about crime in Mount Pleasant: **is crime getting better, or worse? And how does Mount Pleasant compare to other DC neighborhoods?**

Do not believe simple this-year-versus-last-year comparisons. Two years cannot accurately define a trend. I have data for a decade, and some trends do become clear.

Robberies in Mount Pleasant have declined, from more than 80 a year ten years ago, to about 45 per year now. Most robberies here occur within two blocks of 16th Street, as the guys who do robberies tend to come from that direction.

The robbery rate here is about twice that of west-of-the-park neighborhoods. In proportion to the population, Mount Pleasant currently suffers about 4 robberies per 1000 residents per year. Compare the 2nd MPD District (west of Rock Creek Park), which has about 1.7 robberies per 1000 residents per year, less than half our rate.

But the robbery rate here is lower than anywhere else east of Rock Creek Park. In MPD District 3 (Columbia Heights and points east and south), the current robbery rate is 9 per 1000 residents per year. In MPD District 4 (north and east of Mount Pleasant), the rate is 6 per 1000 residents per year. The average for all of DC is 7 per 1000 residents per year, roughly twice our rate.

Thefts from auto, in contrast to robberies, have not declined here during the past decade: 100 to 150 per year a decade ago, the same today. The count this year, 162, is modestly higher than the 2003-2013 average of 138.

The rate of thefts from auto in Mount Pleasant, 16 per 1000 residents in 2013, is close to the average for the District. West of Rock Creek Park, in District 2, the rate is 10 thefts per 1000 residents, moderately lower than here. In District 4, north of us, the rate is 17 per 1000 residents, about the same as here. In District 3, to the east, the rate is 27 per 1000 residents, substantially higher than in Mount Pleasant.

In contrast to robberies, which occur mainly on the east side of the neighborhood, thefts from auto occur everywhere. The best defense is simply to have nothing worth stealing visible in your parked car. GPS navigation devices are especially favored by thieves, and I’m told that these guys look for the telltale rings on the windshield left where a GPS device has been suction-cupped.

Why is it that robberies in Mount Pleasant have decreased over recent years, but thefts from auto have not? I don’t know.

Numerous **Christmas trees** have been put out on the street for trash collection. But this year they’re supposed to be put out in the alley, if that’s where your trash is collected. Not on the street, as was past practice.

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| The next meeting of the ANC will be on Tuesday, February 18, 7:00 pm, at the Mount Pleasant Library. |
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