

Jack's January report

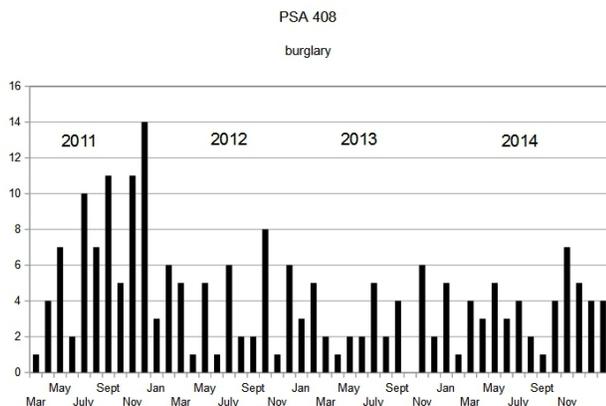
At the December 16 meeting, the ANC:

- Approved a fiscal year budget for the ANC;
- Considered, then tabled a proposal for another crosswalk across Mount Pleasant Street at the Kenyon intersection, in front of the Romero Apartments.

The **new 1D commissioners** were sworn in on January 2, officially beginning this new session. The outgoing ANC was, for me, very troublesome, easily the most contentious of the six Mount Pleasant commissions on which I've served.

Responding to recent complaints of **burglaries** in Mount Pleasant, the MPD put out special patrols. But it was an alert Kenyon Street resident, home during the day, not these patrols, who spotted two youths breaking into a garage and called 911. The police came promptly and found the two juveniles not far away, positively identified by the resident. Because they are juveniles, little more can be learned about them or what will be done with them. But this will put a stop to their activities for a while.

The burglary rate here is a little above the average of recent years, but it's been much worse:



In December, the District Council passed a new law that is intended to compel better respect for the existing law requiring everyone to **clear ice and snow from their adjacent sidewalks**. The new law provides for a \$25 fine for residents who fail to clear their sidewalks “within the first 8 hours of daylight after the ceasing to fall of any snow or sleet”, and a \$150 fine for businesses that don't.

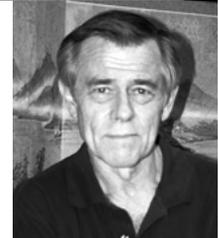
I doubt that this will have any effect on our residential streets. There are a few residents who just won't bother, perhaps because they access their homes from the back, and hardly notice conditions out front. The law also exempts renters from the obligation, barring “written agreement” making renters responsible for the task. (Previously the law applied to renters and owners alike.) So I expect just as many icy sidewalks in our residential areas as before, despite the \$25 penalty. Like most laws, this should be respected as a matter of civic obligation, not out of fear of a fine.

Residents over 65 are exempt, and if we have elderly neighbors who can't do it themselves, then we should volunteer to help them out. Snow shoveling is notorious for

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causing heart attacks, so we really shouldn't expect oldsters to be out shoveling sidewalks.

Residents should note, please, that the requirement is for clearing all the sidewalks adjacent to your house – along the side, as well as in front, if you're on a corner lot. I clear the sidewalk along 19th Street adjacent to the 1900 Lamont park, as well as the space right in front of my home. The District Government is the worst offender when it comes to leaving sidewalks ice-covered.

The resolution calling for an **additional crosswalk across Mount Pleasant Street** at Kenyon was my suggestion. In general, where a sidewalk ends, a crosswalk begins. But there's none at the end of the sidewalk on the south side of Kenyon. No doubt it's a short walk across Kenyon to the north side, and the crosswalk there. But in reality, people will cross where it is convenient for them to cross.

The opening of the Romero Apartments increases the number of residents who will likely be crossing Mount Pleasant Street south of the Kenyon intersection. A crosswalk would make it clear that drivers must yield to these pedestrians. (The law providing for an unmarked crosswalk wherever a sidewalk ends is ambiguous here, because there is no continuation of the Kenyon sidewalk on the east side of Mount Pleasant Street.)

Having introduced the proposal, I moved also that it be tabled until the January meeting. The downside of a marked crosswalk is the loss of one or two parking spots on the east side of the street, and there's always someone who thinks that parking, of which there is never enough, is more important than a crosswalk. So I want the incoming ANC, including Rosa Rivas, whose district includes the apartment dwellers on Mount Pleasant Street, to vote on this proposal.

Speaking of crosswalks, the question has been asked, **how close does a pedestrian in a crosswalk have to be to require a driver to stop?** Initially the stop-for-pedestrians law seemed to say “anywhere in the crosswalk”, even if on the far side of the street. The law has been clarified to say “when the pedestrian is upon the lane, or within one lane approaching the lane, on which the vehicle is traveling or onto which it is turning”.

I think everyone is dismayed to see **Heller's Bakery** close. Back in the 1970s there were Sunday-morning traffic backups outside Heller's, as people came from all over the city to buy their pastries. The Hellers left in 1983, the bakery went bankrupt in 2004, and Aleks Duni bought it in 2005. I

speculate that the problem is increased competition from upscale supermarkets offering high-quality baked goods, putting a lot of retail bakeries out of business.

It seems unavoidable that historic preservation should be at odds with **solar energy installations**, because solar panels were obviously not part of the original architecture of Mount Pleasant, nor can they be made to look as if they were. They're also naturally installed on rooftops, and historic preservationists are pretty rigid about demanding that anything new put on rooftops – e.g., decks – be *totally invisible* from the street. Historic preservation permit applications will require a “flag test” to prove that whatever is planned won't be visible from the street. That's practically prohibitive for solar panels.

Personally, I would argue that concern for the environment – global warming, air pollution, and coal and oil extraction consequences – should take priority over the esthetics of historic preservation. Nobody was thinking about solar energy back in 1986, when Mount Pleasant was declared a historic district, despite a good deal of opposition in the neighborhood. The historic preservation law, passed in 1978, allows for no exceptions on “public good” grounds of energy conservation or renewable energy.

This comes up because the president of Historic Mount Pleasant, at the Historic Preservation Review Board meeting of December 18, asserted that “Solar panels are a blight on the neighborhood. They're really bad”. Well, that is of course HMP's priority, and that's what the Historic Preservation Office will say, too. I don't agree, but the law, written by historic preservationists, is on their side.

Also on this topic of historic preservation: the owners of 3240 19th have some plans for home improvement, including a modest **roof deck** on the back of their house. Nearly all of the deck would be concealed by the front of the house, but a bit might be visible from the south side, because this is the end of a row, and the entire side of the house is exposed.

When Mount Pleasant agreed to become a historic district, the idea was to prevent “incongruous” development, mainly the razing of row houses to build modernistic structures, like the open-garage building on 18th at Park Road. Fair enough. But being a historic district also requires that any *alterations* to an existing house be “compatible with the character of the historic district”. Well, what is “compatible”, and what is not? That's a judgment call, and that judgment tends to be in the hands of our local historic preservationists, who quite naturally favor a strict historic preservation view.

Concerning roof decks, the preservation guidelines offer some flexibility, permitting some visibility if the visible elements are “compatible with the proportion, scale, materials, color and other character-defining elements of the building”. That seems fair. But dedicated preservationists ignore this exception and demand total invisibility. I think that goes beyond what residents wanted in 1986, and what residents want today, from historic preservation.

The January 4 Washington Post Magazine included interesting numbers about **DC area residents who are**

foreign-born. The District, with 13.8%, is a hair behind Maryland, with 14%. In the metro area, the jurisdiction with the highest proportion of foreign-borns is Fairfax, with 29.5%. How does Mount Pleasant compare to these? We're higher than any of them, with 34%.

Our ANC is now 60% foreign-born. I love it! It's been hard to persuade members of the immigrant community that they should participate in our ANC. I believe Oliver Tunda, in 2008, was Mount Pleasant's first, and Yasmin Romero-Latin, in 2010, our second. Now the message is clear: *members of Mount Pleasant's immigrant communities are welcome to participate in this local component of the District government.*

Our web site, anc1d.org, now has “meet your commissioner” pages for all of us, including the three newcomers, Rosa Rivas, Frank Agbro, and Arturo Griffiths.

Plans are being developed for a major **redesign and reconstruction of Bancroft Elementary**. The buildings are old, and the physical layout haphazard. Early plans include moving that new soccer field from the 18th Street (west) side of the school to the Mount Pleasant Street (east) side.

I have been pleased to see Bancroft gradually becoming our neighborhood school, and not just an elementary school that happens to be located in our neighborhood. It wasn't so long ago that many Mount Pleasant parents refused to send their children to Bancroft, and mornings here featured a little rush hour of parents driving their children to west-of-the-Park schools, like Eaton, Murch, and Janney. The statistics tell the story: in 2003, Bancroft was 66% limited- or non-English-proficient, and a stunning 94% “linguistically and culturally diverse”. Since Mount Pleasant at that time was only about 34% foreign-born, plainly the native-born children of our neighborhood weren't attending our neighborhood school. As a former head of the Bancroft PTA said to me, only a few neighborhood “radicals” would send their children to Bancroft back then. (I'm ever so pleased that my “honorary” granddaughter attended Bancroft, 2002 through 2004, and benefited enormously from the experience.)

That is changing, as ever more Mount Pleasant residents are happy to send their young children to Bancroft. But Bancroft is still just 10% white non-Hispanic in a neighborhood that is now 50% white non-Hispanic. I imagine that modernization of the aged buildings, classrooms, and playgrounds will help make Bancroft more appealing to residents uncertain about sending their children to that school. That said, we do have to be concerned about consequences of this redesign for the closest residents, e.g., noise, lights, and parking.

January is when the lowest temperatures of the year come about. **January snow** is awful, because it sticks around for days, and turns to ice. Getting into and out of our alleys can be seriously challenging, and trash collection has been interrupted here because of icy conditions in our alleys. The only good thing to be said about winter is that it makes one really appreciate spring, when spring finally comes!

The next meeting of the ANC will be on Tuesday, February 17 or 24 (TBD), 7:00 pm, at the Mount Pleasant Library.
