

Jack's January report

At the December meeting, the ANC did the following:

- Advised ABRA that this Commission has no objection to a “stipulated license” for the Addis Paris Cafe, allowing entertainment and extended hours of operation;
- Advised against an element of the Comprehensive Plan that would call for “a marketing campaign to promote Mount Pleasant businesses to District residents outside the neighborhood” (my resolution);
- Considered, then tabled, a resolution asking DDOT to study the possibility of speed humps on several neighborhood streets;
- Advised the Mayor and the District Council to provide full funding for the “Birth to Three” program;
- Advised DDOT to convert the intersection of Kilbourne Place and 17th Street to a four-way stop.

The **Addis Paris Cafe** is filing for later hours and live entertainment. I'm confident that, should there be any consequent disturbance to nearby neighbors, the Cafe will take appropriate measures.

Not so long ago, Mount Pleasant Street was deserted after dark, even on summer weekends. I recall being threatened with assault on the Street one night, and escaping only by going to Don Juan's Restaurant and asking for help from the restaurant security man. Now, Mount Pleasant Street is active and populated well into the night, making the street safer for everyone, including people just passing through on their ways to and from the bus stops and the Metro station.

So, if Addis Paris draws a few more late-night patrons with its later hours and entertainment, it's to the benefit not just to the restaurant, but to all residents on the Street late at night. Mount Pleasant Street is not going to become an all-night noisy traffic jam, like Adams Morgan too often is. Our restaurants are too small to produce such a result.

Now, activity on the street is a good thing, but surely we don't want to try to attract a lot of automobile traffic to Mount Pleasant. Unfortunately, that's what a proposed amendment to the **Comprehensive Plan** seems to ask for.

The District's Comprehensive Plan is the sort of thing that only a handful of people pay attention to – it seems like meaningless bureaucratic “planning”. But it's not meaningless; future decisions concerning zoning and housing may be guided by the provisions of the CP. It's up to ANCs to pay attention to this document, and to make sure there are no unhappy surprises buried in it.

In this current Amendment to the Plan, there is a provision which I think is troublesome. The new text would have Mount Pleasant “coordinate a marketing campaign to promote Mount Pleasant businesses to District residents outside the neighborhood”. This was a product of the “revitalization” of the Mount Pleasant commercial district studied in 2010.

I objected to this proposal then, and I object to it now, because drawing customers from “outside the neighborhood” means, surely, people coming in cars to patronize Mount Pleasant businesses. That's what Adams Morgan has, which

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Jack McKay, January 13, 2020

Jack McKay
3200 19th St, Tel. 462-8692
e-mail: jack@dcjack.org
<http://DCJack.org>



may make some businesses more prosperous, but which can turn the street into traffic jams, and which would sacrifice neighborhood parking for these incoming patrons.

At the time of that “revitalization” study, the ANC also had a marketing study done. This study came to the clear conclusion that Mount Pleasant should not attempt to draw customers from outside the neighborhood, for lack of infrastructure – parking, mainly – to support such patronage. The marketing study advised that Mount Pleasant should focus on the large number of residents within walking distance in this high-density neighborhood. Rather than trying to draw customers from far away, we should encourage more residents of the area to shop on Mount Pleasant Street.

The ANC passed my resolution calling for that proposed amendment to the **Comprehensive Plan** to be deleted.

A resolution requesting assessment of **speed humps** on several streets was introduced, and then, at my suggestion, tabled for further study.

DDOT has had a procedure for determining whether or not to implement speed humps on residential streets. The first step has been a petition from the residents of a block, signed by at least three-fourths of the block households. The petition is followed by a DDOT engineering assessment, requiring in particular that the 85th-percentile speed of traffic on the block exceed the posted limit by at least 25%.

There was, I believe, an effort for a speed hump on 18th Street, between Newton and Monroe, some years ago. Evidently this request failed because the traffic speeds were not high enough to meet that 25% criterion (31 mph).

Rumor has it that DDOT is abandoning that formal procedure, and essentially wants ANCs to dictate where speed humps should go. This would make the decision entirely political; if residents of a block want speed humps, and can persuade their ANC to ask for speed humps, then they get speed humps, whether traffic criteria are met or not.

That's a prescription for speed humps on every block. Who doesn't want a speed hump? Everybody complains about traffic speeds, and speed humps seem to be the magic bullet solving the speeding traffic problem.

The original proposal was for a speed hump on the 1700 block of Newton, another on the 1800 block, and one on the 3300 block of 18th. Then, as word of this effort got out, Ingleside Terrace was added, by popular demand. Then the

1800 and 1900 blocks of Kenyon were added. And a resident of 19th Street asked for one near Monroe.

That's the problem with putting us elected officials in charge of speed humps. How does one ever say "no"? And, if speed humps are emplaced anywhere, drivers may shift their paths to blocks that don't have speed humps. Or, worse, they can cut through our alleys to bypass the things, as is too often done now, to bypass traffic lights.

Do we really want to have speed humps on every residential block in the neighborhood? (They're not permitted on our "arterial" streets, such as Park Road, which are the principal speeding-traffic problem.)

My position is that elected officials, whether ANC commissioners or District Councilmembers, should not make such decisions. The DDOT procedure is difficult, and perhaps it should be moderated, but it does provide an objective, quantitative, non-political prescription for speed humps.

Converting the intersection of **17th Street and Kilbourne Place** to a four-way stop was an easy call. It's confusing – most such crossroads intersections in the neighborhood are all-way stops, so drivers may expect this one to be as well, and may be very unhappily surprised to discover that, for the Kilbourne direction, there's no stop.

This uncertainty is common enough that there's a sign on 17th warning that "cross traffic does not stop". The very fact that such a sign is needed is evidence that the intersection ought to be a four-way stop.

There's a rumor that Don Juan's Restaurant could lose its lease. I don't believe there's anything to that rumor. In any case it's not an ANC matter. It's up to the restaurant, and the property owner, to come to an agreement. The ANC has no say in this negotiation.

That brings to mind another notion being considered for the Street, namely the **conversion of the laundromat at 3215 Mount Pleasant Street** to a higher-income use, with expansion of the building to support retail and residential use.

Two factors are driving change on Mount Pleasant Street, both associated with the increasing property values here. One factor is higher property taxes; the annual tax bill for the laundromat has increased to about \$24,000. The other is the possibility of increasing the revenues of any property through conversion to higher-value uses. A property owner cannot be criticized for wanting to maximize income from a property.

In my opinion, the effort to "upscale" the laundromat will fail, because of the restrictions of historic preservation. What the owner will do, then, if the laundromat is losing money – well, that's his call. The property is zoned for mixed-use, residential and commercial. But what can be done with the property, given historic preservation restrictions, is uncertain.

The historic preservation aspect of this conversion is coming before the ANC. However, our influence at the Historic Preservation Office is minimal. We can "advise" what we want, but it's up to the HPO, and the Historic Preservation Review Board, to decide what is "compatible" with our historic district, and what is not.

The laundromat building is indeed a bit "historic", if not the least bit architecturally distinguished. It's one of the first commercial buildings in Mount Pleasant, built in 1906, just three years after the streetcar line arrived here, establishing the foundation of our modest commercial strip.

People ask, legitimately, what does the ANC actually do? What's its purpose?

What **the ANC is not is the neighborhood government.** We have no authority over any resident, nor over any business. We exist to speak for the residents, offering our "advice" to DC Government agencies.

DC agencies are supposed to notify us of any upcoming work in our neighborhood, and then we're allowed 30 days in which to "advise" said agency about their plans – yes, go ahead, or no, please don't, or, okay, but let's change something. The agency then can accept or decline our advice, depending on how well we make our case.

For example: last year DDOT made extensive design changes to the last block of Park Road, just before entering Rock Creek Park. The proposed work included a stop sign at the intersection of Pierce Mill Road and Park Road – as if anyone would be silly enough to charge out onto Park Road without looking for coming traffic.

I persuaded DDOT that the stop sign was unnecessary, because that one-block road is more akin to a driveway than to an intersecting street. DDOT agreed, and, by deleting the proposed stop sign, retained the half dozen parking spots that would have been lost.

That's what the ANC does: it "advises" District agencies concerning their projects in our neighborhood.

We do attempt to deal with other problems that come up in the neighborhood. Not long ago the Stoddard Baptist Home installed **new lights in its little parking lot.** They turned out to be super-bright, much to the annoyance of Monroe Street residents across the alley from the Home's parking lot.

Well, I took this up with the management of the Home, and I made some light-level measurements that showed that the illuminance of their parking lot was much greater than needed. They contacted the contractor who installed the lights, and he turned the lights down, cutting the light level in half. That left ample light in the parking lot, and substantially reduced the light shining on nearby residential windows.

The Stoddard Baptist Home has to be thanked for their prompt response to the bright-lights complaint. The ANC has absolutely no authority to insist on a cooperative response; this was entirely voluntary, by Home management, as they showed respect for the concerns of their neighbors.

Just 9 **burglaries** were reported in Mount Pleasant in 2019. Only a few years ago, we were averaging 40 to 50 a year. What explains the substantial decrease? I don't know, but I'm certainly not complaining.

The next meeting of the ANC will be on Tuesday, January 21, 7:00 pm, at the Mount Pleasant Library.