

Jack's July report

At the June 19 ANC meeting, the commission:

* Requested that DDOT put “sharrows” on the pavement of Mount Pleasant Street, to indicate that bicycles are permitted to share the lane with cars.

The only resolution passed at the June meeting was a request for “**sharrows**” (those bicycle-and-pointers symbols) to be painted on the pavement of Mount Pleasant Street, to indicate that the road is to be “shared” with bicycles. That's preferable to trying to squeeze in a bike lane.

At the meeting, Laura introduced a resolution calling for a **crosswalk** linking Lamont Park to the businesses across Mount Pleasant Street. This was at the instigation of Adam Hoey of Mount Pleasant Main Street, which had included a proposal of that sort in its Transportation Enhancement Grant request of 2009.

Laura's resolution failed to pass, on a two to two vote (Laura and China voting “yes”, Gregg and I, “no”). This is an illustration why the ANC declined to support Main Street's grant application: ideas that sound good, superficially, may prove to be problematic when examined in detail.

A crosswalk sounds like a nice idea; we do want to promote safety for pedestrians, don't we? Yes, but crosswalks don't necessarily make crossing the street safer, sometimes providing only an illusion of safety, not the reality. Quoting one source: “Research undertaken in New Zealand showed that a zebra crossing without other safety features on average *increases* pedestrian crashes by 28% compared to a location without crossings. . . . A five-year U.S. study of 1000 marked crosswalks and 1000 unmarked comparison sites found that on most roads, the difference in safety performance of marked and unmarked crossings is not statistically significant, unless additional safety features are used.”

In short, simply painting a crosswalk on the pavement isn't really any help to pedestrians, and can actually be harmful, tempting pedestrians to step out in front of oncoming cars. But the crosswalk would eliminate one or two of the already-short supply of metered parking spots on Mount Pleasant Street. Would the merchants there not mind the loss in customer parking? Would they accept this as a reasonable price to pay, in exchange for some enhanced access by pedestrians? That doesn't sound like a good bargain to me.

The Main Street TEG grant application comprised numerous such measures which required detailed consideration, not just an offhand approval.

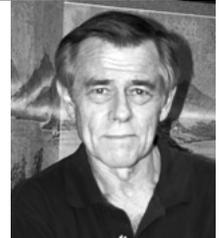
Concerning that grant, this ANC took some criticism in 2009 for declining to endorse it. After all, it was good stuff for Mount Pleasant Street – crosswalks, benches, trees, lights – why wouldn't we endorse it? This matter of the crosswalk shows why we did not, protesting at the time that we had too little detail about the several things proposed, and too little time to investigate them, to be sure that they really made sense, and would be acceptable to everyone affected.

I noted last month that the ANC passed my resolution calling for **allowing liquor retailers to be open on Sunday**, if they

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chose, and on June 12 I testified to Councilmember Graham's committee to that effect. This reform is included in a bill introduced by the Councilmember on June 26. Whether Sportsman's or Lee-Irving would choose to operate on Sunday or not I don't know, but let's have that be a free choice by the business owner, responding to customer demand, rather than being dictated by the DC Government.

The bill would also implement numerous reforms of the “voluntary agreement” process, addressing many of the abuses that have taken place here, such as the live music ban. Members of a “group of five” protestant group would have to live within 400 feet of the applicant being protested, and neighborhood organizations protesting the liquor license application would have to notify the applicant prior to the meeting at which the organization decides its protest, and would have to give the applicant an opportunity to address the protesting organization.

Mr Graham's bill does not propose to modify the DC Code to permit Mount Pleasant retailers to apply for exceptions to the single sales ban, as is permitted in other single-sales-ban areas. I'm going to ask him to add that.

There's a new **Parking Enforcement** officer in the neighborhood, one “Hunter, G”, who seems to be bent on writing just as many parking tickets as is physically possible, for any violation, however small. He nailed me for \$50, as my Prius, parked in front of La Casa as I hauled our equipment there for the June 19 meeting, projected a few feet into a loading zone. I wasn't interfering with any use of the loading zone, and it was 6:25 pm, just five minutes until the loading zone expired. But he pounced, ignoring my “Official Business” placard.

Then he nailed a Kilbourne Street resident with two totally bogus tickets. There's a signpost near the alley just east of 19th, indicating no parking to the west of that signpost, i.e., within 5 feet of the alley. Five feet on the other side of the alley, parking is legal again, of course. But this numbskull thought that that no-parking sign meant *all the way to the end of the block*, not just to the alley, and hit the resident with two \$30 tickets for his legally parked car.

Officer Hunter's tickets didn't indicate the actual parking violation, presumably because he didn't himself understand why there is a no-parking sign there. He used the classic P055 dodge, which allows him to write the ticket without figuring out the actual violation. P055 means simply “no parking anytime”, and is abused by Parking Enforcement and MPD officers alike, when they're too lazy or confused to figure out why there's a parking prohibition at any location.

Two years ago, the ANC passed my resolution calling for parking tickets to identify the actual parking regulation violated. It seems only fair, anyone receiving a ticket ought to be given some explanation why, and what actual law he is charged with having violated. In this case, if this officer had been required to specify the actual parking violation, he might have realized that the sign meant only to the alley, not the whole block.

Councilmember Graham has agreed with me that it's only fair that tickets should indicate the regulation violated. But the District refuses to budge.

There's been considerable publicity about the MPD's expansion of the "photo enforcement" system. I don't think anyone can reasonably object to red-light cameras, nor to new technology that is claimed to detect crosswalk or stop-sign violations. But **speed cameras** are a different story, and I've been pressing MPD hard on this topic.

Three important principles ought to be observed by the MPD and their speed cameras: (1) speed limits ought to be reasonable, not arbitrary; (2) speed cameras ought to be put where there are numerous safety hazards, such as crosswalks and cross traffic; and (3) speed-camera revenues should *not* be just another way to extract revenues from residents.

One reference I've found offers this prescription for speed camera legislation: "*No portion of any fine collected through the use of automated traffic law system may be utilized as general revenue of the implementing jurisdiction.*" But the District not only plows the ticket revenues into the general budget, but depends on an assumed \$30M in such revenues to balance its FY2013 budget. It's impossible now to refute the allegation that these speed cameras are about revenues, not safety.

The notorious Porter Street speed camera is an example of that misguided use of speed cameras. On July 5, I toured the area with Lisa Sutter, the MPD bureaucrat in charge of photo enforcement. Why, I asked, is the Porter Street camera placed down where the road opens out into a four-lane highway, where there are no residences or crosswalks, instead of a block farther west, where there are actually residences, and crosswalks, and driveways, and other traffic hazards? Well, she said, the bottom of the hill is where drivers reach top speed. In short, the camera is placed for maximum tickets, not for maximum public safety benefit.

This camera wouldn't be a problem if the speed limit there were something more reasonable than the posted 30 mph. How, I ask, was that speed limit determined? On what basis is it the "maximum safe speed"? DDOT replies only that that's what it's always been, and nobody today knows why. It just is what it is, and DDOT can offer no collision history or engineering analysis to justify that speed limit. The American Automobile Association says that this speed camera "flunks" as a valid speed enforcement measure. The MPD, with its speed camera, buys blindly into this posted limit, without examining its validity. They assume that somebody, at some time, had good reasons for setting that speed limit, even if nobody today has any idea what those reasons might have been, or if they're still valid today.

What I told Ms Sutter is that we want speed controls on our residential streets, not out on that unpopulated highway. I've asked why our 2009 request for speed cameras on Park Road was ignored. She doesn't know, though it was in her in-box that our request died. As for the law requiring the MPD to respond in writing to such ANC requests, well, the MPD is better at enforcing laws than at obeying them.

Maybe we'll get something done now about Park Road, and perhaps Newton Street as well, as I pointed out the speeding-commuter problem we have on Newton, used by commuters to bypass traffic slowdowns on Park Road and on Piney Branch Parkway. We'll see what comes of this. Let's put speed cameras where they might actually promote the safety of Mount Pleasant residents.

Seven robberies were officially recorded within the Mount Pleasant PSA (Police Service Area) in June. One of those was actually in Adams Morgan, the PSA boundaries being a bit different from the ANC/neighborhood boundaries. The six actually in Mount Pleasant fit the usual pattern of robberies: three on 16th Street, two on Mount Pleasant Street, one in the 1700 block of Harvard Street. That is, all of them were east of 18th Street, and all but one, east of 17th Street.

As for the total number of robberies, the steady decline in crime in Mount Pleasant continues. Some statistics for the first six months of past years: In 2002-2005, an average of 42 robberies in the first six months of the year; in 2007-2010, 27 robberies; in 2011-2012, 18 robberies. The current count is less than half the rate of a decade ago.

Thefts from auto are also much lower than in the past. In 2002-2005, an average of 75 thefts from auto between January 1 and July 1; in 2007-2010, 71, not much different; but in 2011-2012, an average of 45, a significant decrease.

Pay no attention to the naïve crime analyses published in the Washington Post, most recently (July 1) this: "A steep increase in robberies that alarmed District authorities and residents in early 2012 has eased at the midyear mark. Police credit a range of tactics for helping slow the rise."

The facts: the "steep increase" was simply a consequence of this year's very mild winter weather, compared to last year's much more severe weather. Cold and snow keep robbers and victims indoors, and that caused the robbery count to drop to extraordinarily low values in 2010 and 2011, some 100 robberies fewer than the winter-season average. This year, with mild winter weather, the robbery count returned to a level close to the wintertime average. Hence, the "steep increase", simplistically comparing this year to last year, and ignoring anything before last year.

As for comparing the spring of 2012 to the spring of 2011, there's no such drastic weather difference, so of course the robbery count showed little change (a 2% decrease). Both the Post report, and the MPD claim of credit for overcoming the "steep increase", are nonsense. It's about the weather, not about any successful police "crackdown" on crime.

The next meeting of the ANC will be on Tuesday, July 17, 2012, 7:00 pm.
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