

June report to constituents

Here is news of the **June 6 ANC meeting**, and other happenings in Mount Pleasant. At this meeting, the ANC:

- Agreed to reschedule the July meeting to Monday, July 10, because the regular date of the monthly meeting would be July 4, a holiday
- Agreed on a policy of making its audio, laptop/projector, and simultaneous interpreting equipment available to other neighborhood meetings
- Devised a policy for the ANC 1D Web site.

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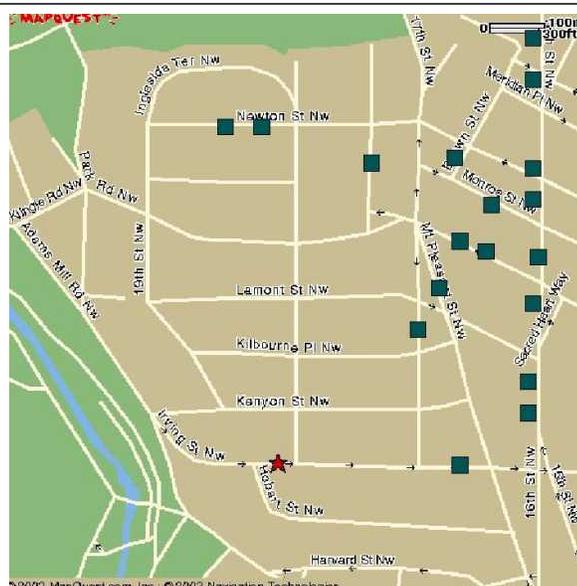
Jack McKay, June 29, 2006

Jack McKay, Tel. 462-8692
3200 19th St NW, DC 20010
jack.mckay@verizon.net
<http://DCJack.org>

The next ANC meeting: *Monday, July 10, 7 pm, La Casa Community Center*. The change from the regular schedule is forced by the July 4 holiday. I simply don't know what will be on the agenda.

Last January the ANC split three to three over the position of Chairperson for 2006. Wayne Kahn and Rich Wysocki supported my continuing in that role, while Stormy Scott and Mitchell Backfield supported Gregg. Given this unbreakable tie, I continued for half the year, and **as of July 1, Gregg Edwards takes over as Chair of this ANC**. I have considered this job as being the servant of the Commission, determining what the majority of the group wants, and facilitating that objective, whatever my personal preferences. We'll see how Gregg views this role.

ANC "letters of support" **for the use of Lamont Park** have been a matter of some dispute among us. Gregg Edwards says that, because the park is in his district, he can issue (or withhold) such letters on his own authority. I say that the full ANC should decide, giving the commissioners representing the neighbors adjacent to the park a say. Parks & Rec is pondering what their policy should be.



Locations of robberies in Mount Pleasant to date in 2006. Almost all occur east of 17th Street, within walking distance of Columbia Heights.

The District Office of Planning has been working at the development of a new **Comprehensive Plan** for the District, a plan that is supposed to guide development of the city. I'm dubious of the effectiveness of such documents, in the face of market and other forces. Nonetheless, the provisions of the plan may have some influence over future District policies.

On May 22 there was a review of the Ward One portion of the draft plan. I pointed out one shortcoming of the current draft, namely that it says nothing about traffic patterns in this area. Currently all the traffic lights on our north-south thoroughfares heavily favor that direction, giving the Maryland and downtown traffic lots of green-light time, while the east-west traffic sits and waits. The Columbia Heights Traffic Study noted this excessive favoring of commuter traffic over local. I suggested that the Plan incorporate this recommendation of **increasing the green-light time for east-west traffic, to reduce congestion on our crosstown arterials, such as Irving Street**.

In my December 2005 newsletter, I noted that **many of the robberies that plague our neighborhood are done by juveniles**. In a June 12 meeting with ANC commissioners, MPD Chief Ramsey said that 40 percent of the people arrested in recent months for robbery are juveniles. A Canadian study of career robbers found that they generally began their robbery at the age of 12 or 13, and that they usually were first arrested at just 15. They usually quit in their mid-twenties, perhaps when they realized that the penalties, as adults, would no longer be light. Here in the District, MPD officers report children as young as 9 or 10 doing robberies. Sometimes they use toy guns which, Chief Ramsey says, are completely indistinguishable from real guns, even for an expert eye. Sometimes they have real guns, and arrests of juveniles on weapons charges, as well as robberies, are up.

A serious risk in these juvenile crimes is the possibility of injury. Guns are just too readily available, and a child will pull the trigger when an adult would not. I'm pretty sure this is what happened to Gregory Shipe: a child robber, a gun going off, a victim dead. This is what happened in the case of the Dupont Circle waiter, shot dead in August, 2004, by a 15-year-old, enraged because the victim said he had no cash on him. (Ignore advice to "carry no cash"; better to have some, and to turn it over, than to make a crazed, gun-wielding youth think that you're holding out on him.)

No one knows what to do with such children. Child robbers are commonly returned to their parents, who are all too frequently part of the problem. The MPD reports one Columbia Heights 12-year-old who was arrested for robbery twice within days. A homeless shelter in the 1400 block of Park Road, a block away from us, is a notorious source of troublesome children.

<p>I have long been a fan of our very own neighborhood school, Bancroft Elementary. A number of residents have been considering Bancroft for their young children, and have formed a listserv for their discussions. This testimonial, from a Bancroft parent, appeared there, and is repeated here, with the parent's permission. Her experience is similar to ours: Bancroft manages to get some wonderful teachers.</p> <p><i>"My daughter is finishing her first year at Bancroft this coming Wednesday. She does not want to leave her pre-K teacher, Sr. Ormazabal (aka Sr. O), she's so happy with him. She can write her name and the months and days of the week, she recognizes all the letters, she's made great strides ... We're very pleased with Bancroft and we LOVE Sr. O. Cannot say enough good things about him. He's very affectionate with the kids, but also stern when he has to. The children who came into his class with no Spanish in September are now chattering away with their classmates in both English and Spanish. Every Monday morning she's ready and eager to go back to school...I hope it works as well for your child as for ours. It's a nice, caring community at Bancroft."</i> – Lydia Pines, Columbia Heights (http://groups.yahoo.com/group/MtPParents/)</p>	<p>On my new Web site, DCJack.org, I've added a detailed report on the shotgun stalker nightmare of 1993, which may be especially interesting to people who were not here to experience that terrifying affair. Over a period of just two months, he shot 11 people, killing four, in Columbia Heights and Mount Pleasant, picking victims at random, firing on them from his car as he happened across them on the street. Why? He thought he was being directed by the spirit of Malcolm X, who told him to go to Washington, to "the civil rights side of town", and kill people. Two Mount Pleasant residents were shot, one fatally, as she innocently walked her dogs in a Mount Pleasant alley.</p> <p>As long as people were being shot in Columbia Heights (he favored the vicinity of Holmead Place, near the new Giant), police dismissed the shootings as routine drug-war conflicts, and discounted the victims' assertions that they were not involved in drugs. Only when people in Mount Pleasant became victims did the police understand that this was something very different, not a routine dispute about drugs, but a lunatic gunning down utterly innocent people.</p> <p>Caught by good luck (he ran a red light on Sherman Avenue, in view of an off-duty MPD officer), and found not guilty by reason of insanity, he remains locked up, at least as of 2005.</p>
<p>I tried to get the District to leave Mrs Johnson, and the long-disused car behind her Walbridge Place home, alone, on grounds of simple compassion for a resident coping with a great family tragedy. No such luck; Council-member Graham wrote simply, "the law requires you [DPW] to act". Mrs Johnson has been forced to make arrangements to dispose of the car. She's quite distressed that a neighbor would complain to the authorities about her car. She's been the finest of neighbors here in Mount Pleasant, for some 50 years.</p>	<p>Last January I testified to City Council (as a resident, not for the ANC) that the proposal for escalating Residential Permit Parking fees (\$25 for the first permit, \$50 for the second, \$100 for the third, and no household allowed more than three) was not going to do any good for our parking space shortage, and would just be another city tax burden on residents. I am happy to report that this portion of the proposed parking legislation <i>has been deleted</i>.</p>
<p>On May 23 the Mount Pleasant Neighborhood Alliance (MPNA) held an annual meeting at the Mount Pleasant Library. Some 15 residents attended, rather far short of the membership of 600 households sometimes claimed by the MPNA. I was surprised that there was no discussion at this meeting of the selection of MPNA officers. How those officers are chosen, by whom, and for what terms? For months I've been pressing Laurie Collins for the MPNA by-laws, with no reply.</p> <p>The MPNA revealed its budget numbers for 2005, and 2006 to date. The claim of \$9300 in 2006 revenues corresponds to a maximum of 465 memberships, at the minimum annual fee of \$20 per household. That's less than 9% of the 5200-plus households in Mount Pleasant.</p> <p>The 2006 budget to date includes an expenditure of over \$5300 in "legal fees", well over half their annual revenues, with no explanation given (there were no such fees in 2005). I have asked the MPNA what was the purpose of these legal fees, who approved this expenditure, when, and by what vote. There has been no reply.</p> <p>The MPNA imposes a number of rules on the residents of Mount Pleasant, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No live music of any sort in any restaurant, no matter how modest and quiet (e.g., an acoustic guitar player); • No live entertainment (e.g., karaoke, popular in Don Juan's Restaurant); • No disk jockey (i.e., the Marx Café); • No pitchers of beer (i.e., Radius Pizza); • No dancing, and restaurant owners must stop their customers if they try to move furniture to create space to dance. <p>As the last item illustrates, these rules are impositions on the patrons of our restaurants, not just on the restaurant owners. Whether one agrees with these strictures or not, I think the MPNA owes the people of Mount Pleasant some explanation of their reasoning, and some openness in their decision-making process. A number of people have now asked the MPNA, via the mountpleasantdc.org Internet bulletin board, what the reason is for prohibiting live music (it's not about noise, which must not be audible outside the premises, whether live or recorded, by District law). The MPNA has not divulged their rationale behind these prohibitions.</p>	