

Jack's June report

At the May 20 meeting, the ANC:

- * Passed a resolution concerning "School Attendance Zones";
- * Passed a resolution concerning "parklets" for Mount Pleasant Street;
- * Advised the BZA to approve a zoning "special exception" application for 1809 Kenyon St.

The resolution about "**School Attendance Zones**" dealt with the current notions for revising public school boundaries, and student selection procedures – the "Committee on School Assignment" "Policy Examples", which have gotten many residents quite upset, because these proposals would have meant that children attending Bancroft Elementary would no longer have a guaranteed track to Deal Middle School, and thence to Wilson High School.

The fact is, nothing of the sort is actually going to come to pass, for several reasons, which I listed in an internet posting on May 16:

- These "Policy Examples" are not yet even recommendations, but have been put out by this Committee merely as trial balloons, for discussion only.
- The public reaction to these notions has been what the Northwest Current described as "a gale of criticism". The Committee will consider this reaction and, when their actual recommendations appear ("late during the week of June 9"), I expect those hot-button proposals to be gone.
- The final decision will be in the hands of Mayor Gray, already an enfeebled "lame duck" mayor, as his term in office approaches its end.
- Whatever Mayor Gray might decide will surely be negated by his successor, whether David Catania or Muriel Bowser. Both Bowser and Catania have called for a halt to this school-assignment process, to give the next mayor control of it.

In short, what people have been very worried about will not happen, and was never going to happen. Rather than worrying about this Committee and its proposals, residents should now be considering what the candidates for mayor have to say about our school assignment policies.

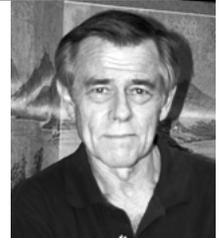
The ANC nevertheless felt it necessary to take some action, if only to establish points that any next-year school boundaries and assignment process ought to consider. The resolution endorsed the recommendation (not part of the three "Policy Examples") that the southern boundary of Bancroft be shifted to Harvard Street, matching the traditional boundaries of Mount Pleasant (currently the southern boundary is Irving Street). The resolution asserts that "Bancroft should be a feeder school to Deal Middle School"; and, somewhat redundantly, that the Bancroft school boundaries should be entirely included within the Deal and Wilson boundaries.

Everyone knows that parents in-boundary for Deal want intensely to stay that way, because Deal is perceived as so much better than other DC middle schools. That's understood, and there's not much to gain by repeating that point, which tends to highlight the benefits for families in "privileged" neighborhoods, while tacitly minimizing access to Deal for

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out-of-boundary families. This point is also contrary to our ANC oath of office, which requires us to judge matters "from the viewpoint of the best interest of the District of Columbia, *as a whole*", not just what's best for our own neighborhood. In the District, only we ANC commissioners are sworn to judge matters that way.

Hence, I inserted a point of broader significance, namely that any cutting of the connection between Bancroft and Deal would result in great harm to Bancroft as our neighborhood elementary school, as many Mount Pleasant parents would then surely work to put their children into west-of-the-Park schools, in order to assure a Deal connection. Everyone agrees that neighborhood elementary schools are a good thing in any neighborhood, and it's been a long, hard struggle to make Bancroft Mount Pleasant's neighborhood school. I would hate to see any regression towards the days, not so long ago, when few Mount Pleasant parents would send their children there.

Something I didn't know: here's an excerpt of ratings by Jay Mathews of the Washington Post's of "**American's Most Challenging High Schools**", noting each school's "challenge index", that is, the number of college-level tests given at a school in the previous calendar year divided by the number of graduates that year. The purpose of the rating is "to identify the schools working hardest to challenge average students with Advanced Placement, International Baccalaureate and Advanced International Certificate of Education courses and tests, good preparation for both college and the workplace. This is in contrast to the usual ranking of schools by test score averages, which is more of an indication of how affluent the parents are than of how good the school is."

School Without Walls: 5.37
Bethesda-Chevy Chase: 4.85
Benjamin Banneker: 4.28
Columbia Heights Education Campus (CHEC): 3.76
Woodrow Wilson HS: 3.64
McKinley Tech: 2.28
KIPP College Prep: 1.69
Cesar Chavez – Capitol Hill: 1.68
Washington Latin: 1.51
Thurgood Marshall Academy: 1.47

I include Bethesda-Chevy Chase because that's where my onetime Bancroft child is now attending school, her mother being one who moved to Montgomery County for access to better schools. What's striking is to see Columbia Heights EC right up there with the top schools, a hair ahead of Wilson in

terms of this “challenge” index. From a CHEC description: “CHEC’s mission is to prepare 100% of our students to be successful in college. We focus on our multicultural make up as an asset, and focus on fostering students who are cultural ambassadors and global citizens.” This is, of course, Bell Multicultural with a new name.

Well, I for one did not know that our school right across 16th Street was rising to such levels. Here’s another remarkable comparison: 39% of CHEC graduates have passed one or more college-level exams; at Wilson, that count is 38%. It appears to me that our nearby middle school/high school is becoming a reasonable alternative to Deal/Wilson, and adds the bonus of Spanish fluency.

This is especially significant because it is now very clear where this schools-selection process is going: instead of attempting to ration access to Deal/Wilson, Bowser and Catania favor improvement of east-of-the-Park schools, so that parents will no longer insist on access to Deal and Wilson. That’s what’s coming, and the current question for Catania and Bowser is exactly how they would go about improving our Ward One middle and high schools.

China Terrell announced at the May meeting that she will not be a candidate for **re-election to the ANC** this fall. I expect another of the five current commissioners also to decline to run, so at least two new members will be needed. It’s not too soon for residents to consider running for ANC. (Even against old Jack, who will file for re-election.) Petitions, just 25 signatures needed, are due by August 6.

I mentioned last month that my thesis is that “Mount Pleasant should be a welcoming home to anyone – black, white, Asian, or Latino; wealthy, or not; gay, or straight; immigrant, or nth-generation American”. Well, make a list like that, and someone is sure to be left out. A caller noted that I had omitted **Native Americans** from my list. Okay, consider this group added!

How many Native Americans are there in Mount Pleasant? I was a bit surprised to discover that the 2010 census lists 77 residents claiming “American Indian and Alaskan Native” ethnicity.

Tonic, on Mount Pleasant Street, has closed – no, I don’t know why – and will be replaced, late this summer, by **Goodall’s Bistro**, a venture undertaken by Kilbourne Place resident Will Warren. Will’s restaurant will be a “venture in organic, locally sourced cuisine”, and will feature “a seasonally rotating menu of the freshest foods from locally sourced organic farms, and free range ranches in the Mid-Atlantic region. . . dinner seven days a week from 5-10pm, and brunch on Saturdays and Sundays from 10-3pm”. I hope it does well. I’ve assured Will that the ANC will be fully supportive.

Mount Pleasant is plagued with cut-through commuter traffic, especially during the morning rush. Eighteenth Street, between Newton Street and Park Road, is one street troubled by **commuters rushing through at excessive speed**. That was the reason for residents requesting an expansion of the no-parking zones adjacent to the alley above Park Road

exiting onto 18th from the west. I have objected to that loss of parking spots, because many Mount Pleasant residents depend on curbside parking, and have a really tough time finding parking if they come home late. Every curbside space is valuable, and we residents blessed with personal parking garages should want to have our scarce curbside parking preserved, despite the notorious difficulty of exiting an alley with visibility limited by cars parked close to the alley.

I’ve advised that a better solution to the 18th Street alley-exit problem is a speed hump, ideally positioned just before that troublesome alley exit. An 18th Street resident asked me about that in May, and I’ve guided her to the procedures for residents requesting “traffic calming” on that block. I’m also continuing to press DDOT for a restoration of three of those four lost parking spots.

Many of our streets now feature “**sharrows**” – those arrow-and-bicycle symbols painted on streets to indicate that the lanes are to be “shared” between motorists and bicyclists.

What is the legal significance of the “sharrow”? Essentially, it declares that a bicyclist has the right to bicycle as far out from the curb as the sharrow extends, rather than keeping to the right, where car-door opening can be hazardous. Motorists must allow the bicyclist to use the lane, and are not to attempt to squeeze close by to pass the bicyclist, the law requiring motorists to give bicyclists at least three feet of clearance.

The recently released draft “MoveDC” plan calls, by the way, for a substantial expansion of bike trails and lanes, to encourage bicycling as a serious mode of transit in DC. This comes a little late for me; I was bike-commuting back in the 1970s, long before anyone in the DC Government was willing to give bicyclists any rights. Only the Rock Creek Park bike path made my bicycle commuting feasible. Fifteen years ago there was less than three miles of bike lane in the District. Today that’s up to 57 miles of bike lane (sharrows don’t count) – still, just 4% of the 1500 miles of roadway in DC.

The “MoveDC” plan proposes a vast increase, by 213 miles, of “bicycle infrastructure”. The problem, of course, is that space to be set aside from bicyclists has to come from the existing roadway, since our roads can’t be widened. Automobile drivers resent paying the price, either in narrower lanes for cars, or lost parking spaces (consider the dispute over the M Street bike lane, downtown). But if we’re going to make bicycling a practical mode of commuter transit, including for bicyclists who aren’t athletes, then this has got to happen.

As a bicyclist, I’ve always argued that bicyclists have to respect traffic laws, if they’re to have the respect of motorists. The reckless, lawless bicycling seen all too often in DC seriously damages the image of bicyclists here. And all too often, when there is a collision with a car, the bicyclist is assumed to be at fault, simply because so many bicyclists violate traffic laws right and left. That’s got to stop.

The next meeting of the ANC will be on Tuesday, June 17, 7:00 pm, at the Mount Pleasant Library.
