

Jack's June report

At the May 26 meeting, the ANC:

- Advised the HPRB to permit the demolition of the gymnasium/auditorium at Bancroft Elementary, rather than accepting the staff recommendation to disallow it;
- Reviewed, without comment, notions for a new condo/retail development on the site of the Mount Pleasant Auto Service;
- Advised DPW that any “aerosol art” for the graffiti-plagued 17th Street wall of Don Juan’s Restaurant be subject to approval by the residents across 17th Street;
- Advised DPR to remove the ANC from the permit process for Lamont Park for a trial period of six months.

Schools across the District are being modernized, and our **Bancroft Elementary**, a conglomeration of aged buildings and disorganized design, is on the list for a \$66M modernization. Of course, Mount Pleasant being a “historic district”, any changes require approval by the Mayor, advised by the Historic Preservation Review Board (HPRB). The Historic Preservation Office (HPO) staff has studied the proposed revisions, and has recommended that the HPRB “find the overall concept inconsistent with the DC Historic Landmark and Historic District Protection Act”, specifically because the modernization plan includes the demolition of the gymnasium/auditorium building, constructed in 1938.

The architects have designed for us a brand new elementary school, now arranged for educational effectiveness, and their design requires that the old gym/auditorium go. Pressed for a design that kept the old building, the architects found that “no viable option appears to exist that could meet ADA requirements, reinforce the [historically significant] central entrance, and address the critically important need to improve circulation” while preserving the auditorium/gymnasium.

Even Historic Mount Pleasant (HMP) agrees that keeping this building, which is not visible from the street, is not warranted by historic preservation considerations: they “support the proposal to demolish the existing 1938 multipurpose space (gymnasium) . . . which we feel does not in [itself] hold any significant historic value to either the property or the community, and which by demolition allows for better circulation within the building and throughout the site” (e-mail from HMP to HPRB, May 22).

My resolution (passed, 5 to 0) advised the HPRB to permit the demolition of the old gym/auditorium building, to allow the modernization of Bancroft Elementary, as expeditiously as possible. Even the HPO agreed that this was probably the wisest choice, though apparently contrary to the District’s rigid historic preservation law. But a negative judgment by the HPRB would require this issue to be appealed to the so-called Mayor’s Agent, who would have to judge the change warranted as a “project of special merit”.

On June 4, the HPRB reviewed the project, generally favorably, but assumed that the gym demolition matter would have to go to the Mayor’s Agent, because the District’s historic preservation law requires retention of all “properties which contribute to the character of the historic district”, and that description includes everything of Bancroft Elementary built before 1950.

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The Bancroft project has already been slipped from a 2016 start to 2017, due to District budget limits. Mount Pleasant needs a new, up-to-date elementary school, and now, not years from now.

Recognizing the importance of the gymnasium demolition issue, the HPRB has scheduled a hearing dedicated to that aspect of the Bancroft design. I’ll prepare a resolution advising the HPRB to approve the demolition, on grounds of the great public benefit. For way too many years, Mount Pleasant residents have avoided sending their elementary-age children to Bancroft, either moving out of the neighborhood, or ferrying their children to schools west of Rock Creek Park. The modernization of Bancroft is an essential element in **making Bancroft our neighborhood school**, where all our children can go. If there was ever a demolition that was justifiable on grounds of “special merit”, this is it.

Speaking of the **Bancroft modernization schedule** – I had prepared, for the May ANC meeting, a resolution advising the District Government to stick to its original, fiscal-2016 schedule, rather than letting this slip by a year. In May, Councilmember David Grosso’s Education Committee ranked schools throughout the city according to a quantitative measure of need, to put the neediest schools first on the schedule, rather than having the schedule defined by political pressures. On that scale, Bancroft ranked near the top, 10th, out of the 104 schools evaluated. Bancroft’s score for modernization need was higher than those of any of the elementary schools currently scheduled for FY2015 funds.

Plainly Bancroft should be funded for modernization just as soon as possible, and my resolution called for a return to the schedule as of January, with work beginning this summer. Unfortunately, due to our moving ANC meetings from La Casa Community Center to the Library, we are forced to stop our meetings by 8:45 pm, and be out by closing time, 9 pm. We had lots of things to do at the May meeting, and we didn’t get to my Bancroft resolution. It was likely to have been too late, anyway. Still, I’m dismayed that the ANC failed to make a statement in support of Bancroft modernization.

Alberto Ferrufino, proprietor of Don Juan’s Restaurant, has a problem of too-frequent **graffiti** on his back wall, facing 17th Street. The Department of Public Works (DPW) is attempting to deal with such frequent graffiti targets by putting up what I call “good graffiti”, which they prefer to call “aerosol art”, or murals.

That’s worth a try, I’m sure, and I’d like to help Alberto solve his graffiti problem. But I’m worried about what this so-

called “aerosol art”, done by youths under the nominal supervision of some actual professional artist, will be. The residents across 17th Street from this wall are going to be faced with this “aerosol art” product every day, and it seems only fair that they ought to have some say in what is put there. Hence, my resolution to that effect (passed, 5 to 0).

When I discussed this with the Public Works person in charge of the work, she became a bit upset when informed that the location was in Mount Pleasant. This neighborhood has a reputation for being hard to deal with. I'm reminded of a 2009 mural project proposed for a blank wall of 3125 Mount Pleasant Street, to be done by Mount Pleasant resident Byron Peck, a professional creator of excellent urban murals. That project was abruptly terminated when no one could agree on the proposed artwork. I'm afraid DPW will decide against trying this “aerosol art” thing here in Mount Pleasant for fear of such a controversy.

A developer is considering purchasing the lot where the **Mount Pleasant Auto Shop** is located, 3054 Mount Pleasant Street, and converting the place to a four-story condo building with ground-floor retail shops. A representative of the architectural firm commissioned by the prospective buyer showed the ANC the design planned.

The ANC expressed no opinions, and took no position on this development. The investor is, I think, testing the waters to see how much opposition he might have to deal with here.

Personally, I understand that losing the auto shop would be a significant loss to residents. The auto shop people have a good reputation, and it's certainly convenient to have repairs done within walking distance of home. But the property owner has a right to profit from the sale of his lot to the highest bidder. My once-favorite auto body shop, Petrovich Repair, on 14th Street, closed in 2005 for the same reason, to be replaced by a condominium building. Lower-value property uses like an auto repair shop are, like it or not, moving out to less-expensive suburbs.

As for sampling opinion here for potential opposition, strong opposition will surely come from Historic Mount Pleasant, which objects to a multistory apartment house on the west side of Mount Pleasant Street. The conceptual design is set to be reviewed by the HPRB in June or July.

With time running out at our meeting, I wanted to deal with the officers' reports, including a request to purchase repair parts for the Mount Pleasant Main Street “gum buster”, a machine to remove chewing gum from sidewalks. But the chairperson insisted that we instead take up the matter of **the ANC's role in permits for the use of Lamont Park**.

In fact the ANC has only a minimal role in permits for events at Lamont Park. If, and only if, an event will potentially cause upset to neighbors, due to noise or parking or traffic or the like, the Department of Parks and Recreation (DPR) asks the applicant to get a “letter of support” from the ANC for the event. That's essentially so that, if there are complaints about the event, the DPR can pass the blame onto us.

ANC policy, established in 2013, has made these occasional “letters of support” quite easy to get, requiring only that the applicant promise to abide by, specifically, sound level rules,

to avoid blasting neighbors with too-loud music. No one has ever actually had to attend an ANC meeting to get such a letter. And no one has ever been denied a letter, given the requested assurance that the neighbors won't be disturbed.

But this spring there was the Farmers' Market fiasco, where three of the five commissioners, all first-term commissioners, misunderstanding the park permit system, objected to the issuance of the ANC “letter of support”. This caused quite a bit of upset in the neighborhood.

The new resolution essentially advised the DPR to leave the ANC out of the park permit process “except in cases where the event disturbs the peace and order of the neighborhood”. But that is exactly the process right now: only if an event might disturb the neighborhood does the DPR request this ANC “letter of support”. In my opinion, this resolution changes nothing, and DPR will ignore it. But it passed, 4 to 1, over my lone “no” vote.

Traffic speed has long been a problem on Park Road, especially that last block between the Klinge Road-/Walbridge Place intersection and Rock Creek Park. In 2009 residents worked with DDOT to find ways to slow traffic. Limited by the status of the road as a “minor arterial”, not a neighborhood street, the best DDOT could do was offer three narrow-the-roadway concepts. These were of uncertain effectiveness, and could compromise the safety of residents exiting their cars parked on Park Road, so those were dropped.

There remains the possibility of a speed camera, which I've sought since 2009. I've even pointed out to the Metropolitan Police (MPD) where a camera could be put, with a clear view of vehicles up and down that hill into and from Rock Creek Park. The MPD continues to promise us that camera.

Perhaps it's time for my assurance to residents that **no ANC or DC Government funds go to the publication of this monthly newsletter**. It's paid for out of my own pocket, roughly a thousand dollars a year. And I deliver it myself, in person, some 760 copies, to every residence in my district. Some residents have offered to contribute funds to cover the cost, but I decline those offers, with gratitude. I can afford it, and personal funding gives me full freedom to write what I want.

There's a Federal law against my putting newsletters in residential mailboxes. If you've got a mail slot, great. (Though I hate those down at ankle height.) If not, I tuck them against doorknobs. But sometimes there's just no good alternative, and I use mailboxes, as a last resort.

My newsletters are always posted on my web site, <http://dcjack.org>, and links to them posted on the Mount Pleasant Forum.

Robberies – the taking of things from you in person, by force – in Mount Pleasant have declined markedly over the past decade. In 2005, there were 76 robberies; in 2014, just 19. To date this year there have been 10, roughly matching last year's rate.

The next meeting of the ANC will be on Tuesday, **June 23, 7:00 pm, at the Mount Pleasant Library**.