

March report to constituents

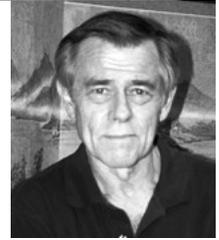
Here is news of the **March 4 and 18 meetings**, and other happenings in Mount Pleasant. The ANC:

- ◆ Prepared for the ANC Oversight Hearing of March 13. This took up most of the March 4 meeting.
- ◆ Advised the Fire and Emergency Services to reopen Mount Pleasant Street as soon as possible, even a single lane, which would restore bus service and truck deliveries (my resolution)
- ◆ Endorsed an “experimental informal community social event seeking to put aside controversial arguments between groups”, the first set for April 15
- ◆ Advised DDOT to offer enhanced visitor parking passes, and daytime-only employee parking passes, as an experimental program (my resolution)
- ◆ Advised DDOT to increase the width of the sidewalk in the 1600 block of Park Road, (1) to meet the ADA standard of 36 inches clearance, and (2) to up to 8 feet in width, where feasible
- ◆ Advised DDOT to promote a “traffic loop” consisting of Irving Street eastbound, 14th Street northbound, Park Road westbound, and Mount Pleasant Street southbound, thus linking Mount Pleasant with the Columbia Heights development
- ◆ Advised DDOT to permit left turns directly from northbound 16th Street onto westbound Park Road, eliminating the Pine Street roundabout that only complicates traffic, endangers pedestrians on 16th Street, and largely prevents pedestrian use of the park opposite the Sacred Heart church (my resolution);
- ◆ Rejected claims that “Mount Pleasant’s ban on the sale of single containers of alcohol is a legitimate approach to the problem of indigent alcoholism” (my resolution)
- ◆ Called for bus shelters to be installed at (1) the triangle park at 17th and Park Road, and (2) the north side of Park Road, just west of 16th Street
- ◆ Advised DC Public Libraries to keep ANCs informed concerning their plans for libraries, and advised that the renovations of the Mount Pleasant Library be “a systematic upgrade, not just a refurbishment”
- ◆ Called for removal of the treebox barriers along Mount Pleasant Street, they being tripping hazards
- ◆ Advised a study of “a greener environment”, especially large trees, for Mount Pleasant Street
- ◆ Advised a program to attract back street vendors to add diversity to Mount Pleasant Street
- ◆ Advised an expansion of the recreation area across 16th Street, adjacent to the Parks and Rec headquarters building
- ◆ Requested that the District investigate the possibility of an emergency access route behind the apartment houses lining Mount Pleasant Street

ANC 1D03 NEWSLETTER #67

Jack McKay, March 24, 2008

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Everyone knows now of the **devastating fire** that burned out most of the Deauville apartment house on Mount Pleasant Street on the night of Wednesday, March 12. The fire began in the basement, and spread quickly up the north wall. I speculate that this was an electrical fire, inside the wall, so it wasn't detected until it was well established. It was midnight, but everyone escaped, thanks to quick and courageous action by a trio of Mexican-origin residents on the first floor: “The fire began in the basement, right away our alarm sounded because the smoke came through the floor, we went running into the corridors and they were full of smoke. Almost unable to see, we manually activated the fire alarms. Then we went door to door, pounding. . . .” (My poor translation from the Washington Hispanic.) “**Vámonos, vámonos que esto se quema!**” (“Let’s go, let’s go, it’s on fire!”) At one in the morning, hundreds of residents of this apartment house, and those adjacent, found themselves on the street, in the dark and the cold. Don Juan’s and Haydee’s opened their doors to all, providing shelter through the night.

The fire spread to the Meridian Hill Baptist Church, on 16th Street, ruining its roof and stained-glass windows, and devastating the interior. Also in this church were an Ethiopian community center and a shelter for the homeless, adding to the community’s loss.

Residents lost everything in the blaze – their clothing, their savings, their papers. This catastrophe has been followed by an extraordinary outpouring of support from the neighborhood. Vast amounts of clothing and essentials, and many thousands of dollars, have been contributed to help the 80 families suddenly left homeless and destitute.

One of the things that make Mount Pleasant special is its welcoming of immigrants. Other neighborhoods resent and reject their immigrant communities. Here, immigrants are not only welcome, but have become part of the vital fabric of this neighborhood. This wouldn’t be Mount Pleasant without our immigrant residents, from dozens of countries around the world. May it always be so.

Councilmember Graham has put a provision for an experimental “pilot parking program” into a bill now at the DC Council. I’m proposing that this include a **revised visitor parking pass program** similar to that now in force in Ward Four. Instead of having to fetch 15-day passes from the police station for every visit, residents will be given permanent passes for visitors. Unlike current visitor passes, these will be valid for household employees, such as home cleaning and

after-school day care people. We have many residents whose full-jobs compel them to depend on such household help.

That much should be easily obtained. I'm proposing also that, unlike the Ward Four model, these visitor passes be given to all residents, not just residents of RPP-zoned blocks. You're a resident, so your visitors and household help should be able to park on any residential street.

I've proposed also that we experiment with **"employee parking passes"**, which would be valid only during the day, only on weekdays, when there's really plenty of parking available (on RPP-zoned blocks). This would be for the benefit of our school personnel, i.e., Bancroft, Stokes, Rosemount. Where are they supposed to park? Since we've got curbside space available during the day, why not let them use it, for a fee comparable to bus fare, the proceeds to be directed to community benefit? Our parking crunch comes in the evening, when the many residents who commute to work in their own cars come home. This provision is less likely to come to pass.

For eight years the sidewalk, and curbside parking, have been disrupted along Adams Mill Road due to **an unstable and dangerous retaining wall**. Excavation to build a new wall began some time ago, then stopped. I was very pleased to see a crew show up on March 10 and set about pouring concrete to build, at long last, a new wall, with the reinforcement and drainage that the original wall lacked.

Abruptly, a DDOT inspector showed up and brought the work to a stop. Someone complained, I understand, that the concrete-pouring equipment was interfering with automobile and pedestrian traffic on Adams Mill Road. The inspector said that the contractor didn't have a "traffic control" permit, and had to stop immediately, in mid-pour, concrete trucks waiting.

This is terrible. People and traffic were getting by well enough, and it was best just to let the job be done so that the heavy equipment, and the parking- and pedestrian-blocking jersey walls, could be taken away. Instead, the jersey walls remain, the construction mess remains, and work has stopped. Perhaps worse, the concrete pouring was stopped in the middle of the job, so a restart will result in a "cold joint", a weak point.

Residents want that wall replaced, the parking space restored, and the sidewalk reopened. It's hard to say when we'll finally get there. Eight years on, and we must wait some more.

The ANC passed, unanimously and without argument, my resolution **rejecting claims that the ban on the sale of single containers of alcohol in Mount Pleasant was a success**, and represented good public policy. Lately Ward Four, and H Street in Capitol Hill, have initiated such bans, and Councilmember Barry is proposing the same for Ward Eight. Mount Pleasant is invariably cited as an example of the benefits of these bans.

But everyone knows that a ban on the sale of singles, aimed at indigent consumers of alcohol, will not reform a single alcohol abuser. Either they will get their alcohol some other way, or they will take their bad habits into nearby neighbor-

hoods. No one will argue that this solves the indigent-alcoholic problem; at best, it just shoves it into a neighboring community. That's not valid public policy.

Recently Councilmember Graham has polled the ward for views concerning single-sales bans, and was surprised to encounter a largely negative reaction. Other Ward One ANC commissioners agree: the single-sales ban may please some residents, but is not a valid way to deal with the problem.

Mount Pleasant's single-sales ban will come up for renewal in October. In 2005, this ANC went along with a renewal of the ban only if a study was conducted to determine the real effects of the ban, determining how problem drinkers react to the cutoff of cheap singles. The ABC Board declined to support the study, but extended the ban anyway.

Since November 2006, residents with RPP stickers can park on RPP blocks as close as **25 feet from an intersection, versus the normal 40 feet**, where the "no parking" signposts are put. But it's been hard to get the MPD, and Parking Enforcement aides, to understand that a car can extend up to 15 feet beyond the no-parking sign, and yet be legally parked.

But on March 19, we got one. I put a note explaining the law on the car, parked in the same spot, hoping to educate this PE aide. Nope; she just put another ticket on the car, right next to my (ignored) note. Okay, I tracked the lady down, and tried explaining the law to her in person; nope, all she knew was that anyone parked past a "no parking" sign got a ticket, period. She knew nothing of this 25/40 feet stuff, and didn't have any idea why the "no parking" sign was put there. The sign means "no parking", and that's that. She called her supervisor, who was equally ignorant of the law.

Very frustrating. I've successfully denied two of these tickets, and now I've got two more to deny. Through Jim Graham's office, I'm trying to get this new aide, *and her supervisor*, instructed about our parking-to-intersection law.

Remember the **handicapped ramp** for the elderly couple on Walbridge Place? The District, and the historic preservation bureaucracy, have been forced to yield to their wishes. From Marc Fisher, of the Washington Post: "If the city approves a new set of plans now being drawn up, Lucas will get to build his ramp and will get a \$25,000 payment from the District's taxpayers -- compensation for the lost time and the frustration caused by the city's insistence on putting historic preservation ahead of either property rights or human dignity."

The Lucas couple will get a front-door lift for their use, and stairs for able-bodied access. The historic bureaucrats objected to the stairs, insisting that people could enter via an alley and a back door. Not good enough, says the Fair Housing Act: equal treatment for the disabled includes the right to receive visitors as one's neighbors do, at the front door.

A decision on **live music in Mount Pleasant restaurants** has been delayed until April 23. Then live music and entertainment will again be permitted in our restaurants. The only question is the hours to be allowed.

The next ANC meeting will be on **Wednesday, April 2, 7:00 pm**, La Casa Community Center, 3166 Mt. Pleasant St.