

Jack's March report

Because the February issue was late, appearing after the February 16 ANC meeting, and the March ANC meeting hasn't yet happened, there are no ANC actions to report here. The ANC did hold its monthly "informal" meeting on March 2, where the dominant topic was the night club liquor license application by Haydee's Restaurant. The director of ABRA, Fred Moosally, attended, and fielded questions.

The matter of a **night-club license for Haydee's Restaurant** continues. The Mount Pleasant Neighborhood Alliance (MPNA) has offered a different means for giving Haydee's the later dance and live music hours, with a "tavern" license (the Raven Grill has this category of liquor license) and an entertainment endorsement allowing a dance floor. The MPNA admits that the central problem is simply the name, "night club", and they're content with a "tavern" that would accomplish much the same.

Well, this is not your MPNA of previous years, objecting to live music, dancing, karaoke, disk jockeys, and anything else that suggested that a restaurant might be a place for entertainment, and not just sitting at a table quietly eating one's dinner. I'm impressed with this new openness to the concept of a restaurant combining good food and entertainment. (Haydee's after 9 pm is today a cheerful and noisily lively place. As Fred Moosally noted, Mount Pleasant got live music, "and the skies didn't fall".)

Haydee's is, however, unyielding in its insistence on a night-club license. The tavern license would leave them bound by MPNA-imposed restrictions, and the long and unhappy history of the MPNA's antagonism to Mount Pleasant restaurants causes them to object strenuously to the MPNA approach, perhaps simply because it is "the MPNA". Not only does Haydee's want the night-club license, refusing to consider the tavern alternative, but they want their "voluntary agreement" with the MPNA terminated. For the MPNA, it's all about the "night club" term; for Haydee's, it's all about their history with the MPNA of old.

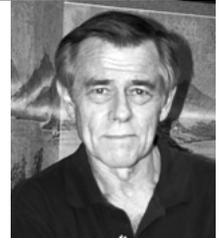
Neither side is budging, so I guess the ABC Board will have to sort this out. The hearing is scheduled for March 22.

Mount Pleasant residents who were here in 1991 will recall the rioting that followed **the shooting of a Latino by a police officer who spoke no Spanish**. My rough translation of a *Washington Hispanic* newspaper description of the event: "In an inexpert manner, this [novice officer] decided to arrest Daniel Gómez, accusing him of being in a group that consumed alcohol in the streets. Gómez, a Salvadoran, apparently intended to reply. The response was the sound of a gunshot." Mr Gómez was wounded, not fatally, but rumors that a Latino had been killed by a police officer in Mount Pleasant led to two days of near-riot disturbances and a police lockdown of the neighborhood. Quoting Wikipedia on the event: "the community's Hispanic population had perceived oppression from the police force for some time. In the time leading up to the riots, residents often complained that police were stopping Hispanics and asking them for immigration papers for petty offenses that were ignored when committed by whites. . . . After the riots, the city agreed . . . not to ask

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witnesses or crime victims about their immigration status, so that more people would come forward to cooperate with authorities to make the community safer."

Well, 19 years on, this division between the MPD and our Latino neighbors continues. In 2003, long after these supposed reforms by the MPD, the lieutenant in charge of this neighborhood was seen verbally assaulting a Latino for illegal parking on Mount Pleasant Street, demanding that he "speak English", and refusing to allow the man's daughter, in the back seat of the car, to translate. From a report on the incident at the time: "Ten-year-old Laura says she then told the officer 'my father doesn't speak English.' The officer told Laura to 'shut up.' She says the officer then returned her attention to Mr. Muñoz, and started laughing at him while putting his license in front of his face, saying: 'This license is in English, not Spanish. You're supposed to speak English!'"

That was during my first month on this ANC, and I'm pleased to say that this group of six newly elected commissioners played a role in the prompt removal of that lieutenant from Mount Pleasant. But still, I hear too many cases of police officers treating Latinos rudely, even the victims of crime, when the Latinos speak little English, and the impatient officers know no Spanish.

Our PSA (Police Service Area) meetings have done nothing to heal this divide, having been conducted entirely in English, and attracting few Latino residents. But our new Lieutenant, Micah Pate, arranged for a **Latino Liaison officer, Ana Casiano**, to attend the January meeting, and that brought about a remarkable new dynamic, as Spanish speakers were able to talk about their problems in Spanish with a Spanish-speaking officer. We've had attempts at interpretation before, but that is not at all the same as having Spanish-speaking residents communicate their concerns directly, in rapid-fire Spanish, without the delays of Spanish-to-English conversion. There was a dialog between the MPD and our Latino residents at that meeting such as I've never before seen.

I made sure that Officer Casiano came to the February PSA meeting, and Lieutenant Pate also sent a Spanish-speaking officer new to Mount Pleasant, Orlando Torres. The meeting became almost entirely in Spanish, while we limited-Spanish-proficient folks watched and tried to decipher what was going on. (That's an instructive turnabout, putting us in the position of Spanish speakers trying to follow fast conversation in English.)

This helps at several levels. First, our Latinos learn that the MPD does indeed care about their problems. Second, Latinos can tell the MPD what's going on in the Spanish-speaking community, things that the police would otherwise not know. Third, Spanish-speaking victims of crime may be more likely to come forward. Much crime against Latinos goes unreported, because they fear the police, either because their Central American background leads to a distrust of authority, or because they worry that their coming forward will expose friends or family members who may lack documents.

It's clear that this dialog in Spanish is essential for building trust between the MPD and Mount Pleasant Latinos. It's a bit awkward for us limited-Spanish-proficiency residents, and we'll have to work on providing interpreters to help us follow the dialog. Right now, we're making progress on the problems that caused Mount Pleasant so much harm in 1991.

The Fenty administration is not helping. **The MPD in November signed up for the Federal "Secure Communities" program**, under which anyone arrested by the police, even before being charged with any crime, may be subjected to a Federal investigation of immigration status. This is an invitation to abuse, including the possibility of arrests made as a pretext for investigating an immigrant's documentation. Worse, it threatens a return to the fear of the police by all immigrants, as the MPD make themselves a branch of ICE, "la migra".

One MPD spokesman said this: "We're excited, It's going to enable our officers to have real-time information about the individuals they have in custody and to help facilitate the removal of dangerous felons from our communities." Since when is anyone without proper immigration papers perforce a "dangerous felon"? (Illegal immigration is a civil offense, not criminal.) And why do we need deportation to remove "dangerous felons" from the streets? I'm appalled that this has come about in DC with no visible discussion of the consequences, and appalled by that statement from the police.

Anything that re-opens the division between the Latino community and the MPD degrades the effectiveness of the police at dealing with real crime. I want the police to worry about burglaries and robberies and automobile break-ins, not whether that fellow with limited English, and committing some minor violation, has immigration papers or not.

Daylight Saving Time begins on Sunday, March 14. Spring begins on March 20, at 1:30 in the afternoon. The end of this exceptionally harsh winter is in sight. The only good thing to be said about winter is that it really makes one appreciate warmer weather. Where I grew up (California, Hawaii) there wasn't any winter, really, so one hardly noticed its end. Here, it's such a pleasure to be able to go outdoors and walk and run and bike, and not have to bundle up to face bitter cold.

Street sweeping, suspended during the winter months, resumes on March 22. There isn't much street sweeping in Mount Pleasant, so why mention this? Well, people frequently ask, can't we have our streets swept, to pick up the dirt and grime and trash that collects in the street. There is a street sweeper that comes through, but it can't do a thorough job because of the parked cars.

Now, if we had "real" street sweeping, those cars would have to be moved, and the sweeper could do a better job of it. That's done across 16th Street in Columbia Heights, for example. The trouble is being compelled to clear one side of the street, one day a week, of parked cars. DPW won't do just one block or two; if they're going to have thorough street sweeping, then many blocks have to have one side cleared of parked cars during the day. Cars not moved on the specified day of the week get \$30 tickets, and may be towed.

Is that practical in Mount Pleasant? I think not, because it would be a real hardship for all residents for several blocks to have to find parking on just one side of each street. Better to put up with partial street sweeping, I think, than a wave of \$30 parking tickets. But if residents are willing to do that, finding adequate parking space on just one side of each street, clearing the opposite side for the street sweeper, then we can consider that. It's got to be a decision widely accepted in the neighborhood.

I've heard plenty lately about the problem of **un-scooped dog poop**. There seems to be more of it than usual, maybe because the stuff stays there forever in cold weather. This has also gotten attention in John Kelly's column in the Post. His complaints: (1) dog owners who ignore their pet's droppings; (2) owners who plastic-bag it, but "think your trash can, not theirs, is the best place for it"; (3) owners who bag it, then drop the bag anywhere, "as if it will be picked up later by forest sprites".

This problem used to be much worse, so bad that one had to walk with one's eyes on the ground, watching for the piles of poop. I've had to hose my shoes clean countless times. In recent years, residents have gotten quite good about picking it up; but clearly there are some who don't. Respect your neighbors, clean up after your dog, plastic-bag it and take it home to your own Supercan, please.

Those **permanent visitor passes** for residents of RPP-zoned blocks are due to expire on March 31, when Councilmember Graham's trial program ends. I've asked the Councilmember to seek a continuation of that program. It's a great convenience to residents, not having to go to the police station to fetch visitor passes, and there hasn't been very much abuse of it. Some, yes, as residents, especially renters, with out-of-state tags use these passes to avoid having to register their cars in the District. But that abuse is not sufficient, I think, to warrant terminating the program.

Lamont Street resident Byron Peck has offered to paint a **mural on the north-facing exterior wall of 3125 Mount Pleasant Street**. In December, my motion for this ANC to provide a letter of support for that effort failed, on a 2 to 2 tie vote (Oliver Tunda and I voted "yes"). Byron has modified his proposal to address certain objections (too complicated, not bright enough), and this will come up again at the March meeting, with Dave Bosserman taking the lead. I'll be voting "yes" again, and I think this time the motion will pass.

The next ANC *business* meeting will be on **Tuesday, March 16**. The next *informal* meeting will be on **April 6**.