

Jack's March report

The ANC met on February 21, and:

- * Endorsed a zoning variance application for 1865 Newton Street, a four-dwelling-unit building;
- * Protested the procedures employed for ANC redistricting.

The **zoning variance** resolution is for the multi-unit building at 1865 Newton Street that for years stood boarded up and vacant, not a very nice neighbor. The old man who owned it wouldn't restore it, and was clever at evading the District property tax law intended to prevent buildings from being left vacant for years on end. He died, and his sons immediately set about repairing the place and restoring it to productive use. I'm happy to support them at that undertaking.

The only zoning issue is a minor matter: R-4 zoning calls for 900 square feet of lot per dwelling unit, or 3600 square feet for four units, but this lot is a bit short of that, 3250 square feet. I don't see that it makes any difference to the neighbors whether the building consists of four units, versus three, especially since the lot has off-street parking. What does make a difference to the neighborhood is having the place nicely fixed up and occupied. My resolution in support of the variance passed by a 6 to 0 vote.

My resolution protesting the ANC redistricting procedures objected to (1) the composition of the ANC redistricting task force, and (2) the requirement that single-member-districts (SMDs) be formed first, and the ANC boundaries then made to follow.

Seven of the 11 members of the Ward One task force were from Columbia Heights, and only one from Mount Pleasant. Why should these people, who don't live here and don't know the neighborhood, be empowered to decide our SMD boundaries? I was compelled to be a bit disruptive, since the lone Mount Pleasant resident on this task force was definitely not representing the interests of the row-house owners of the neighborhood. As you know, we only barely fought off an effort to split Mount Pleasant in two, east and west, the row-house population to be sent off to a "Bantustan" mini-ANC, deprived of any voice in Mount Pleasant Street matters.

I protested also the Office of Planning insistence that SMDs should be defined first, then those SMDs (required to be 2000 in population, plus or minus 100) cobbled together to form "Frankenstein" ANCs. Advisory Neighborhood Commissions are supposed to represent *neighborhoods*, not arbitrary conglomerations of 2000-population SMDs. Happily, our Mount Pleasant ANC boundaries remain the traditional boundaries, but it was a huge fight getting there.

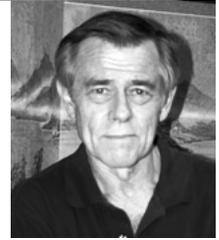
My resolution complaining about these redistricting procedures passed by a 4 to 1 vote, Gregg Edwards alone voting "no". Not that my resolution is going to change anything; by the time the next redistricting comes around, in 2021, it'll be forgotten. But I had to try.

Work on the renovated and expanded **Mount Pleasant Library** is to be completed by "the summer of 2012". The temporary facility on Mount Pleasant Street is planned to be vacated by the end of June, slipped from the end of May.

ANC 1D03 NEWSLETTER #114

Jack McKay, March 12, 2012

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Lately there's been a good deal of publicity about **robberies**, as people are discovering that this particular crime continues unabated, and afflicts folks over in ritzy Ward Three, not just us east-of-the-Park residents. "*Violent crime in DC surges in 2012*," shouts the Washington Times.

Well, no, not really. The Times reporters, and the MPD as well, insist on comparing this year to last year, and if this year's number is bigger than last year's number, then it's off to the presses with a brand-new "surge" in crime. But what if last year's number wasn't typical, but was unusually low? Then a mere return to normal will appear to be a "surge".

That's exactly the case with the Times's robbery count. Basically, last winter, and the winter before that ("Snow-mageddon"), featured lots of snow and cold, and that reduces crime, especially street crime. This winter has been extraordinarily mild – the mildest winter in 80 years! – so people are out on the street, strolling about, chatting and texting on cellphones, instead of huddling indoors and spending as little time as possible out in the cold.

So, in January and February of this year, there were 671 robberies, compared to only 429 last year. Is this a "surge" in robberies, or is it a normal count, given the spring-like weather? Well, in 2009 the robbery count in the District for these two months was 700, in 2008, 624. In short, this isn't a "surge", it isn't a "crime wave", it's just the count that's to be expected for a very mild January and February.

Of course, there's no decrease, either, as one might expect if Chief Lanier's police tactics were actually effective at reducing crime. The homicide count is decreasing, to be sure, here and pretty much everywhere else. That's not because of police tactics here, though Chief Lanier takes credit for it at every opportunity.

Then there's the matter of the 94% homicide closure rate, of which the Chief is inordinately proud. The Washington Post pointed out that this is a misleading number, because the count of closures includes those of earlier-year homicides, whereas the count of homicides is for this year only. That's not improper, as the prior-year closures should roughly balance the this-year homicides that will be closed in future years. But evidently the MPD has been putting special effort into solving old homicides, and those closures juiced up the calculated closure rate for 2011. That's nice, but that can't go on forever, and next year the homicide closure rate is likely to drop to a sustainable value, perhaps 75%. That's a respectable number, but it's well short of the 94% value, and what's the

Chief going to say when this happens, and gives the appearance of a decline in MPD crime solving?

As for Mount Pleasant, the robbery rate here has been fairly steadily decreasing in recent years, from 76 in 2005 to 49 in 2011. In February there were six robberies reported in Mount Pleasant, all but one of them on or within a block of 16th Street. The one robbery that wasn't on the eastern edge of our neighborhood was on Harvard Street, near the Zoo gate.

On three occasions, I've noticed that the **recycling collection** has been handled by the contents of the recycling containers being dumped by the collection crew into our Supercans, followed by a single trash collection. No doubt this has happened more often than that, and it's only times when I by chance happened to be in the alley between the recycling and trash collections to notice. I'm working with Bill Howland, the superb head of Public Works, to put a stop to this. Our recyclables should *not* be dumped into the trash.

An Ingleside resident complained that repairs to his sidewalk employed ugly gray concrete, not the nice sand-brown concrete that is currently in place. Here's the story behind our **sand-colored sidewalks**.

In 2006, the curbs of our streets were replaced with granite blocks, which were taller than the original concrete curbs, and so required replacement of our sidewalks to match the height of the curbs. Our original sidewalks were of a sand-like texture and color. Where the curbs are still the low, concrete curbs, the sidewalk remains that original type.

I asked if we could not have the new sidewalks resemble the old style, lighter in color and earth-like in appearance, not that grim industrial gray. An extraordinary DDOT engineer, Mike Jelen, was able to arrange for the light brown color of the new sidewalks, instead of the ugly gray. I thought that was a marvelous improvement, our sidewalks now being consistent with the historically correct style, looking more like earth than the industrial-gray stuff, as well as being lighter in color, and hence more visible in the dark.

But that was a one-time deal. Engineer Jelen has long since left DDOT, and this light-brown concrete for our sidewalks has been forgotten. So replacement slabs will be that dreadful gray. I tried to get Historic Mount Pleasant to endorse the light-brown color, as a much better match to the original sidewalks than the industrial gray, but they showed no interest.

Last December 17 there was a **home invasion robbery** on the 1600 block of Irving Street, the resident "pistol whipped and bound with duct tape". This is the sort of incident that really frightens residents. Could these criminals show up at their home?

This was not a random invasion, but was targeted at a specific individual. In this case, the perpetrator had reportedly purchased marijuana at this home, and so had some idea that the resident had drugs and cash in his home. (Which he did.) This is characteristic of such home invasions: they're rarely random attacks, but are generally based on some knowledge of the victim by the perpetrator, and a belief that the resident has large amounts of cash, and perhaps drugs, in the home.

On February 25, two men were arrested and charged with this crime.

The **DC primary election** is on April 3. We ANC commissioners are not on primary ballots, because we're supposed not to be associated with political parties.

The November election will, of course, include ANCs. There will be some significant differences this year, due to ANC redistricting to account for population changes determined by the 2010 census. The population of Mount Pleasant dropped by 1335 residents, mostly in 1D01 (Yasmin), 1D04 (Gregg) and 1D06 (Stormy), all along the 16th Street edge of Mount Pleasant. Those three SMDs, with a total population loss of 1500 residents, must be merged to become just two. My district, which gained by 20 residents, will be changed a little bit, as I will lose one block, but gain another, as was necessary to bring my district's population up close to the average for Mount Pleasant, 2100 residents per SMD.

The **Klingle Road** dispute goes on, seemingly forever. Recall that in 2008 the District Council declared that the roadway should become a pedestrian and bicycle trail, abandoning its 2003 position that the road should be rebuilt for automobile traffic. An Environmental Assessment declaring "No Significant Impact" was approved on February 28, 2011.

But the automobile-road advocates haven't given up the fight. In November, 2011, a couple of ANC 4A commissioners filed suit in Federal court, asserting that the Environmental Assessment (EA) failed to consider the harm done their neighborhoods (Crestwood and Shepherd Park) by their being deprived of this short-cut to Georgetown. On February 13 of this year, the District and Federal governments responded with a motion to have this suit dismissed, on a number of legalistic grounds, in particular that the "harm" done the plaintiffs was done by (1) the closing of Klingle Road to automobile traffic in 1991, and (2) the act of the District Council calling for the bike/hike trail in 2008, and was not brought about by the EA finding of "no significant impact".

It's been 21 years since Klingle Road was closed, due to severe storm damage, and the reluctance of DDOT to repair a road that was just going to be washed out again and again. The road advocates won their battle, totally, in 2003, and yet the road did not get built, due to Federal Government resistance. I believe it's the National Park Service that just doesn't want another automobile highway in Rock Creek National Park. They're not happy about Beach Drive having become a heavily used commuter route, an unintended consequence of the construction of the tunnel past the Zoo in 1966. When Klingle Road advocates claim that the road would handle a lot of traffic, thousands of cars every day, the National Park Service shudders. More heavy commuter traffic in Rock Creek Park is the last thing they want to see.

Whatever the outcome of this court case, Klingle Road isn't coming back. In 2008, the District Council voted by 10 to 3 to give up on the road and build the bike/hike trail. They're sick of the Klingle Road wars, and want this issue gone.

The next *business* meeting of the ANC will be on **Tuesday, March 20, 2012, 7:00 pm.**