

## May report to constituents

Here is news of the **May 2 ANC meeting**, and other happenings in Mount Pleasant. At this meeting, the ANC:

- Agreed to support having the annual Latino Family Fiesta in Mount Pleasant. In recent years, this has been held at Cardozo High.
- Agreed to provide its audio, laptop/projector, and simultaneous interpreting equipment to meetings of the Woodner Tenants Association in May.
- Endorsed the creation of a safe pedestrian passageway from the Harvard Towers driveway to the Irving/Kenyon bus stop, despite the (temporary) loss of the bike lane, and some parking.

The next ANC meeting: *June 6, 7 pm, La Casa Community Center.*

Visit my new Web site: **DCJack.org**

## ANC 1D03 NEWSLETTER #45

Jack McKay, May 30, 2006

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**The 3100 and 3200 blocks of 19th Street** are in dreadful shape, even by DC's low standards. Reconstruction of the street has been on the DDOT schedule for several years, but has always been postponed because of plans for jobs that would tear up the street again, e.g., the streetlight project. Most recently the repaving was held up because DDOT found that the road was not built with a proper base. But DDOT assures me now that the "mill and repave" job will begin quite soon, **by July.**

Lately there's been renewed concern about **traffic speed and red-light-running problems on Park Road**, between the Klingle/Walbridge intersection and Rock Creek Park. One problem is that drivers misunderstand the traffic light, and think that the solid green means "go", despite the red arrow that says "don't go". They run the red arrow, a grave threat to pedestrians crossing Park Road during their "walk" cycle. The second problem is simple speed: seeing the wide road, and the Park ahead, drivers hit the gas. I've measured speeds of 40 mph on that 25-mph road.

While working on this specific traffic problem, I revived a longstanding call to DDOT for a **neighborhood-wide traffic study**. Mount Pleasant is crossed by two east-west "minor arterials", Park Road, and Adams Mill/Irving. The links between these two arterials, Klingle Road and Walbridge Place, are also afflicted with speeding traffic and noisy, heavy trucks. With the development of major shopping in Columbia Heights, these problems may well grow worse. We really need to evaluate our traffic patterns, and determine how best to handle this through traffic.

We were promised a thorough traffic study in 2002, but that got derailed by being incorporated in the Columbia Heights traffic study, which in fact neglected our neighborhood. This ANC renewed the request for a Mount Pleasant traffic study in May, 2005. DDOT hasn't replied.

My stirring of this pot, supported by Councilmember Graham, has finally gotten us our traffic study. DDOT told me that the traffic study has been on their list, but wasn't funded, until this flurry of e-mails. **Now it's assured that the Mount Pleasant Traffic Study will be funded (\$400,000), and we will have our neighborhood traffic study**, later this year.

Don't expect any miracles: we're still going to be crossed by the only two east-west arterials in the area. But perhaps we can find means of mitigating our traffic afflictions.

We have a **new Lieutenant supervising our PSA. Lt Moses Vines**, a lifetime DC resident, is Mount Pleasant's fifth Lieutenant in four years, an unfortunate turnover rate. Lt Vines intends to be here for the long term, which would certainly be an improvement. I spent some time with him this month talking about the special problems of policing in in our very atypical neighborhood.

Due to a current MPD manpower shortage, **our foot patrols have been cut back**, in favor of keeping the squad cars fully manned. I told the Lieutenant that our foot patrols have, in the past two years, done invaluable service, improving conditions on and around Mount Pleasant Street, where *disorder* (rather than serious crime) is a problem. It is distressing to go to the Street and be confronted by unruly groups of youths, or drunks passed out on the sidewalk, or men urinating in public. This is small stuff by the MPD standards, because they want to focus on "real" crimes, like robbery and burglary. But these problems of disorder are serious issues for us, and we're pleased to see foot patrol officers impose an atmosphere of discipline that *prevents* such bad behavior. The dilemma of policing is that, if officers are very effective at *preventing* such activities, then there will be no arrests made, and their statistical scorecard looks bad. The higher-ups at the MPD want to see lots of arrests, and have no way to measure "deterrence". The practice of counting only arrests rewards, paradoxically, failures to deter criminal activity. This unfortunate approach has cost us some very good officers, including Scott Faucett.

I don't believe that suppressing disorder on Mount Pleasant Street will reduce real crimes in Mount Pleasant, because the people who do the robberies and the automobile break-ins aren't the same ones who are behaving badly on the Street. **Nonetheless, the reduction of disorderly behavior on Mount Pleasant Street, to make the Street a more pleasant place for all of us, is a vital objective, and we will insist that the foot patrols continue.**

I hear that a resident filed an “abandoned auto” complaint about **the old white Mercury** that has sat in the alley between Walbridge Place and 19th Street for many months now, tires flat, collecting leaves and grime.

Here’s the background of that car. On November 30, 2004, Mr. John Johnson, its owner, innocently on his way in another vehicle to the Washington Hospital Center to fetch his sister home from work, was hit broadside by a car running a red light at an estimated 80 mph, that driver fleeing police. Mr. Johnson died that night. His family, still suffering from the grief of that tragedy, have been unable to deal with the disposal of his old Mercury. So it sits, disused and deteriorating. But it’s on private property, it’s in no one’s way, and let’s just let it be.

Two recent serious **fires** have occurred here recently, both due to human error. On the afternoon of April 5, an apartment occupant at the Harvard Towers, attempting to light a faulty stove burner, lit her sweater on fire. She ripped the sweater off and stamped the blaze out, then – augh! -- tossed the sweater on a bed and returned to her kitchen. The fire wasn’t fully out, of course, and before long the bed was in flames, and then the whole apartment. They’re lucky that only one apartment was seriously damaged.

On the evening of April 26, the basement unit at 1833 Monroe caught fire. This was, I’m told, due to burning incense falling from a shelf onto a couch, setting that on fire. The fire spread to flammable posters on the walls of the apartment, even as the occupant attempted to extinguish the blaze. The fire department arrived very quickly and put out the fire. However, as they set about making certain that the fire was not continuing, hidden within the walls, they broke open walls and the roof, causing serious damage to the main part of the house, and forcing the residents to go into hotels for several days. The fire department takes row-house fires very seriously.

**About rats**, which have proliferated throughout the District, in part due to a mild winter: “Trapping is an effective method of control. *It is the preferred method in homes, garages and other structures where only a few rats are present.* Trapping has several advantages: 1) it does not rely on inherently hazardous poisons; 2) it permits the user to determine if the rat was killed and 3) it allows for disposal of rat carcasses, thus eliminating odor problems that may occur when poisoning is done within buildings. However, trapping is useless if the procedures to prevent reinfestation are not followed.

“The simple, inexpensive snap trap is effective and can be purchased in most hardware and grocery stores. Bait traps with peanut butter, chocolate candy, dried fruit or a small piece of hot dog or bacon tied securely to the trigger. Set them so that the trigger is sensitive and will spring easily. Set traps close to walls, behind objects, in dark corners and in places where evidence of activity is seen. Place them so that rats will pass directly over the triggers as they follow the natural course of travel, usually close to a wall. Traps can be set on ledges or on top of pallets of stored materials if rats are active in such locations.” (From the Illinois Department of Public Health)

Don’t count on the city to come out and solve our rat problems for us. The District does only poisoning, not trapping, and is severely limited in where it can put its poisons. Our neighborhood has, unfortunately, countless rat harborage and feeding places. Get rid of the rats in one yard, and quite soon they’ll be back, replenished from the populations in nearby yards.

Set traps in your yard to control your population, and don’t let your household garbage become a rat feeding site. Don’t like to handle traps, and dead rats? Seems to me like an opportunity for some young neighborhood entrepreneur.

I gather that **the Raven Grill** is a “Cheers” sort of bar where neighborhood folks get together to socialize over drinks, where “everybody knows your name”. It was a surprise to see that the Raven had been called before the ABC Board this week to explain the circumstances of a **knife assault by one patron upon two others**. Shades of the notorious U Street fights!

It turns out to be a whole lot less than that. One of their regulars seemed to be suffering some sort of medical problem, and behaved badly towards women participating in a late-night birthday party. The Raven’s manager, Mark O’Flahavan, escorted him out, and deposited him on the doorstep of his apartment house nearby. Some time later the women left, only to find the man waiting for them on the sidewalk, now armed with a knife.

It got ugly, but male friend of the women quickly subdued and disarmed the assailant, and held him on the ground while the police came (summoned from that well-known MPD hangout, the 7-11, across the street). The women suffered only minor cuts.

Mark explained to the ABC Board that this was very unusual behavior by a long-time patron, who remains today banned from the Grill, though he is now very apologetic for and ashamed of his behavior that night. The Board agreed that this was an “extremely odd and rare” occurrence for the Raven, and that the Raven management had handled the situation as well as was possible. They were impressed that the Raven has *zero violations* on its record. They agreed to end the matter by merely putting the Raven “on monitoring” for a while -- that is, investigators will occasionally come by and observe.

Mount Pleasant’s only tavern sounds like a fine, friendly, well-run place. It’s not my kind of place, to be sure, since I neither drink nor smoke. But I’m happy that it’s in our neighborhood.