

Jack's May report

At the April 17 ANC meeting, the commission:

- * Affirmed our decision for Mount Pleasant to “opt out” of CM Graham's “enhanced” residential permit parking;
- * Endorsed the change to the Pupuseria San Miguel liquor license extending it to include the sidewalk cafe.

The April 13 counting of absentee and provisional ballots didn't change the outcome of the **April 3 primary election**. In the final count, at-large candidate Sekou Biddle got 708 votes in Mount Pleasant, incumbent Vincent Orange 162 votes, Peter Shapiro 110 votes, Ms Holness 37 votes.

Comparing Mount Pleasant to the eight wards of the District:

| | <u>Biddle</u> | <u>Orange</u> | <u>Shapiro</u> |
|------------------------|---------------|---------------|----------------|
| Ward Three: | 69% | 7% | 20% |
| Mount Pleasant: | 69% | 16% | 11% |
| Ward Two: | 59% | 14% | 19% |
| Ward One: | 56% | 24% | 12% |
| Ward Six: | 48% | 29% | 13% |
| Ward Four: | 41% | 39% | 9% |
| Citywide: | 37% | 40% | 11% |
| Ward Five: | 21% | 58% | 8% |
| Ward Seven: | 15% | 64% | 5% |
| Ward Eight: | 12% | 64% | 5% |

This stark west-to-east variation has been widely interpreted as a racial, white versus black divide, but I think it's more subtle than that. Biddle appears to me to be symbolic of the “new” Washington, young, mixed-race and multiethnic, while Orange represents the “old” DC, predominantly black, and older. Viewed that way, it's not surprising that Mount Pleasant, the home of diversity, would heavily favor Biddle.

Concerning that diversity, in 1990 Mount Pleasant was almost equally divided among non-Hispanic whites, non-Hispanic blacks, and Latinos: 35%, 36%, and 26%, respectively. That balance in diversity is slipping away, as the 2010 census changes those proportions to 50%, 19%, and 25%. We're still much more diverse than the neighborhoods just on the other side of Rock Creek Park: 79% white non-Hispanic, and just 5% black non-Hispanic, 8% Latino. I really don't want to see Mount Pleasant ever look like that.

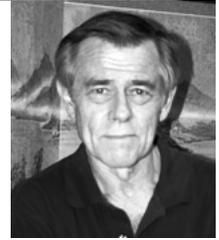
In that old-versus-new perspective, it's interesting to note the respective policies of Biddle and Orange concerning that ancient but undying issue, reopening **Kling Road** to automobile traffic. Biddle says no, “we've decided it already.” Orange says, simply, “yes”. Heck, it's been 21 years since Klinge was closed, so only we oldsters remember what a convenient route it was into Ward Three. (This month marks 38 years since Emily and I moved here.) I see Mount Pleasant becoming increasingly a part of Ward One (helped by the development on this side of Rock Creek Park), and decreasingly an eastward “suburb” of Ward Three.

This wasn't quite in our neighborhood, but any time a pedestrian in the area is killed by a vehicle, it's a concern. On the afternoon of April 2, **a pedestrian was crushed by a trash truck** backing out of an alley off Columbia Road, just this side of 14th Street. One naturally thinks of some poor pedestrian on the sidewalk taken by surprise by a truck

ANC 1D03 NEWSLETTER #116

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backing out at speed. But that wasn't the case here. It's reported that the pedestrian was actually trying to assist the truck driver, signalling to him that the sidewalk was clear to back safely out of the alley. Then, bizarrely, he failed to get out of the way of the truck himself. He was a homeless man, according to reports.

I have long protested the abuse of “**emergency no parking**” placards by District contractors. They buy these things in bulk, and fill them out by hand when needed, putting up as many as they want, for as long as they want, while we residents are supposed to meekly get our parked cars out of their way. A common practice is to reserve curbside space for a week, then show up for only one afternoon of that week, and sometimes, infuriatingly, not at all.

In 2006 a law was passed requiring these placards to state the identity of the posting company, and to provide a contact phone number. That was widely ignored. And these contractors rarely bothered with public space permits, so DDOT had no idea of when and where these companies were usurping our scarce curbside parking.

On May 3, DDOT announced a change to the rules: “hand-written ENP signs are no longer permitted in public space; they will be removed by inspectors”. These signs must now be computer-printed, and that will require also that the poster note the public space permit, or the DDOT contract number. As DDOT says, “this change will make it easier to track the posting of Emergency No Parking signs and help residents determine if posted signs are valid and properly permitted”. I'm hoping that this will also reduce the excessive use of these signs by contractors who care only about their convenience, not about yours.

Mayor Gray's FY2013 budget calls for extending the allowed hours for restaurants to serve alcoholic beverages, to 3 or 4 AM. Whatever its merits, this provision appears to be dead, due to strong opposition.

Entirely independently, an ABC Working Group formed by Councilmember Graham to recommend changes to District liquor laws advised allowing retailers – liquor stores, such as Sportsman's, and Lee-Irving, here – to be **open on Sunday**. (The District Code currently does not permit liquor retail stores to operate on Sunday.) I think it's time we abandoned this vestige of Sunday “blue laws”. Whether our liquor retailers would choose to be open on Sunday or not I don't know, but let's let them and the marketplace decide that. I plan to introduce an ANC resolution supporting that change.

Our “permanent” **visitor-parking passes** expire in July. DDOT is already making arrangements for new ones to be mailed out to Mount Pleasant households.

In 2009, I got the ANC to pass a resolution asking for **speed cameras** on Park Road. We didn't get them, despite support from Jim Graham, and my badgering of DDOT. All DDOT would do was build a “raised crosswalk” at 19th Street, a measure intended to prevent “drifting” through the stop sign, with no effect whatsoever on midblock speed. I wanted a red-light camera as well, at the Walbridge intersection, where westbound Park Road makes a right turn, and too many drivers ignore the red arrow prohibiting that turn, seeing only the solid green light. We didn't get the red-light camera, either, DDOT objecting that trees blocked the camera's view.

Now DDOT is back with a plan for a substantial expansion of its speed- and red-light camera system. Or, rather, Mayor Gray's FY2013 budget assumes an additional \$25M income from traffic tickets, due to a \$6M investment in new “photo enforcement” devices, i.e., speed and red-light cameras. I've been asked to have our ANC endorse this expansion of traffic cameras, in the belief that this will enhance pedestrian safety.

But this push for more traffic cameras seems a little contrary to the denial of our requests for speed and red-light cameras. One has to ask, is this expansion of photo enforcement really being done for public safety, or is it just about revenues? There is, as many residents by now have discovered, a speed camera installed on Porter Street, at the bottom of the long hill from Connecticut Avenue, and this camera has been a bonanza for the DC budget. Initially it was issuing one ticket every four minutes, 175 a day. Now that most drivers have discovered that that gray box adjacent to the road work site is a speed camera, they've slowed down, and I understand that the ticket rate is down to a mere “two or three an hour”.

As everyone who's driven this route knows, Klinge Road across Rock Creek Park (becoming Porter Street when it crosses over Beach Drive) is a four-lane, limited-access, divided highway, so of course drivers hit the gas. (Not me, I'm a pokey oldster, hugging the right lane to get out of the way of the faster drivers.) Putting the speed camera there creates a very lucrative speed trap. Could it be that the speed limit, 30 mph, is unreasonably low for such a bit of highway? Does it really matter that traffic has generally exceeded that speed, the 85th-percentile speed being 41 mph? Is this photo enforcement machine about safety, or is it about extracting speeding fines from drivers unaware of the speed camera?

Okay, traffic is slowed, but this is in a place where there are no homes, no businesses, and very few pedestrians and bicyclists. Is anyone's safety really enhanced by a 30 mph speed limit? Who decided that that was an appropriate speed limit, and on what grounds? I think most of our speed limits were decided many years ago, and now nobody questions them. But if a speed camera is catching over 350 speeders every day, as was the case for one on Foxhall Road, one has to ask if the legal speed limit for that road isn't unreasonably low.

Why can't speed cameras be put where we wanted them, where the people are? Why is the speed camera put where

people aren't? If safety is the objective, you would think that Park Road through our neighborhood would have full priority over Porter Street through Rock Creek Park.

OK, so I'm skeptical about the Mayor's current push for more photo enforcement machines. I think this is all about issuing tickets and collecting \$25M in fines, not about public safety, despite the strong denials from Mayor Gray and Chief Lanier.

Photo enforcement includes red-light cameras as well as speed cameras, and supposedly devices that can sense crosswalk violations, too. For those I say fine, placing such devices at intersections inherently puts them where there are pedestrians, and bicycles, and cross traffic, so let's do it. But speed cameras, placed outside residential areas, combined with unrealistically low speed limits, are clearly about ticket revenue enhancement, not safety.

Word reached me of residents complaining about **rats in the vicinity of 18th and Newton**, and one specific residence that seems to be infested with the rodents. I could only direct them to the Department of Health, which deals with rat problems, and I understand that some measures have been taken. It's been an extraordinarily mild winter, and that means that there will be more rats than usual this summer.

Ingleside Terrace resident Karen Loeschner pulled off a remarkable feat, arranging for several **food trucks** to set up shop at Lamont Park on April 26. I tried to get some city support for this event, without a bit of luck. Despite that, the event was a great success, as a good number of people showed up to patronize the trucks and have a little picnic in the park. I hope she'll do this again, and residents will make the park a neighborhood gathering and socialization place.

A discussion on the Prince of Petworth blog brought up the matter of residents' **bushes extending out into the sidewalk**. Mount Pleasant was specifically named as a place where there are places where pedestrians have to dodge the bushes as they walk along the sidewalk. Here's the regulation: *“Hedges on parking shall not exceed three feet in height, nor project more than six inches over the sidewalk.”* (Yes, our front yards are, at least adjacent to the sidewalk, “parkings”, meaning that they are to be maintained in the manner of parkland, nothing to do with parked cars.) Bushes extending out over the sidewalk can be troublesome, especially in the dark, threatening an eye-poking injury to passers-by.

On July 9, **petitions for ANC candidacies** will be made available, and are due back at the Board of Elections by August 8. Our ANC will shrink next year from six members to five, and some single-member-district boundaries will be substantially changed. (Mine will change only a little.) I imagine that next year's ANC will look very different from the current commission. If you know anyone who's interested in becoming an ANC commissioner, now's the time to decide!

Yes, I intend to run for another term. I like being able to get, occasionally, help from the District for residents with complaints.

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| The next meeting of the ANC will be on Tuesday, May 15, 2012, 7:00 pm. |
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