

Jack's May report

At the April 21 meeting, the ANC:

- Advised ABRA to renew the liquor licenses for our three Class A retailers: Lee-Irving, Sportsman, and the Woodner Market.
- Advised the Public Service Commission to reject the proposed acquisition of Pepco by Exelon;
- Advised the DCRA Zoning Administrator, and the Board of Zoning Adjustment, to cease the current practice of giving developers “credit” for previously required off-street parking spaces, even if nonexistent, based on the previous occupant of a lot;
- Advised the Zoning Commission to delete the text in the proposed zoning regulations that would make mandatory the practice of giving developers “credit” for previously required off-street parking spaces, even if nonexistent.

I continue my lonely battle against the absurdity of the Meridian Hill Baptist Church conversion to an 85-unit apartment house being given **“credit” for 75 off-street parking spaces, none of which actually exist.** Back when the current zoning regulations were first implemented, circa 1958, buildings that had been built before the regulations went into effect were given a pass on those regulations, a policy which was not unreasonable, given the difficulty and expense of rebuilding to meet the new regulations. But why should a new owner, redeveloping a property for a new use, be allowed that same exemption from the current regulations?

The Meridian Hill Baptist development would be required, under current R-5-D zoning, to provide 28 off-street parking spaces for its 85 dwelling units. (The proximity of the Columbia Heights Metro might reduce that to 14.) But the church itself, if built according to current regulations, would be required to provide 75 off-street spaces, one for every 10 of its allowed occupancy. The church was given “credit” for those 75 (nonexistent) spaces, and the new developer inherited that credit, so he's exempted from that 28- or 14-space off-street parking requirement.

That is, in my opinion, totally unjustified. If he wants an exemption from the current regulations, he should have to file for a zoning variance, and meet the corresponding requirements.

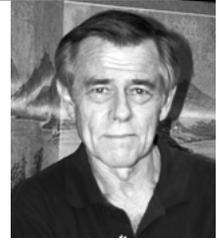
But I'm not optimistic about either the current Zoning Administrator, the object of one of my two resolutions, or the Zoning Commission, the object of the other, agreeing to this. This bizarre provision is not only unwritten practice at the DCRA, but the Zoning Commission has written it explicitly into the new zoning regulations, largely unnoticed by anyone. I'm sure developers love it.

Citing residents' requests for increased enforcement of parking regulations in Mount Pleasant, the Metropolitan Police decided to try to “help out” with parking enforcement. Unfortunately they are really bad at it, and I've learned of numerous **parking tickets on legally parked cars.** Essentially, the MPD officers don't understand the law that allows residents with Ward 1 RPP (residential permit parking) permits, on blocks designated for RPP, to park as close as 25 feet from an intersection, though the no-parking-

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to-intersection signposts are placed 40 feet from the intersection. That is, only residents get this additional 15 feet of parking space, and only on residential blocks. This has been the law since 2006, and it has allowed residents a few precious curbside parking spots. But MPD officers have been writing tickets for any car parked beyond the no-parking sign, oblivious to this exception, despite MPD training documents making this explicit.

The Parking Enforcement people in those little white cars, besides knowing the parking laws well, do a better job of ticketing illegal parking. They take photographs of the offense, later posted on-line, so recipients of tickets have some evidence for their defense, if they consider the ticket unwarranted. The MPD doesn't take pictures. The Parking Enforcement people print out clearly legible tickets; the MPD officers produce handwritten, often-illegible scrawls. And I have yet to find an MPD officer aware that the correct ticket codes for parking too close to an intersection are P024 (25 feet) and P025 (40 feet), not P055 (no parking anytime). Furthermore, the fine for P055 violation is \$30, inflicted via these MPD tickets, whereas the correct fine for parking too close to an intersection (if you are within 25 feet) is just \$20.

I know of nine such invalid MPD tickets. I'm sure there were more, as this was going on all over Mount Pleasant, and not everyone knows that such matters can be brought to me for assistance. So residents were being ticketed, and fined, excessively, for legally parked cars.

It took a while, but our Lieutenant Pate did speak to and correct those misguided MPD officers, so the bogus ticketing seems to have stopped. Better, the MPD should leave ticketing of illegal parking to the Parking Enforcement people, who do a much better job of it, at a lower pay grade.

The current schedule for **Bancroft modernization** has the major work being done in the summers of 2017 and 2018, and complete in time for the 2018-2019 school year. That's a year later than was planned as of the January community meeting. The scheduling is driven by the cost – \$66 million – and the overall DC school modernization budget.

There's considerable dismay over the slow pace of school modernization, and controversy as well as over the selection of schools for modernization. The District Council Committee on Education, chaired by At-Large Council-member David Grosso, compiled a list of all DC schools ranked, logically, according to their need for modernization. On that 104-school list, Bancroft ranked number 10, and rated *higher in need than any of the elementary schools*

currently allocated FY2016 funding by Mayor Bowser's budget.

The Council could help get the Bancroft project under way sooner. Communications with Councilmembers Grosso and Nadeau could help. I'll have an ANC resolution about this at the May meeting.

I have noted before (June 2014) that **the Columbia Heights Educational Campus (CHEC)**, right across 16th Street from Mount Pleasant, is a remarkable and outstanding school. A recent report in the Washington Post described it:

The globally themed school, with nearly 1,300 students in grades six through 12, has a bilingual program and a social justice focus.

Students must apply to attend, but they don't have to take a test or have a minimum grade point average to qualify.

The facility serves a larger population of students learning English as a second language than any other secondary school in the District.

It's known for its focus on higher education. All students are required to take AP classes and they can enroll in college classes while they are still in high school.

On the Post's list of the DC Area's Most Challenging High Schools, CHEC ranks 42nd, with a challenge index score of 3.586, not far behind Wilson, 3.833.

People point out that the CHEC test scores aren't the best. At Wilson, 46% of students participate in Advanced Placement exams and score well; at CHEC, just 19% do. This no doubt reflects the nature of the school's population, 34% English language learners (vs. just 7% at Wilson), and 85% low-income (37% at Wilson).

Student performance has much to do with the student's home environment, and an infusion of young people at CHEC from the upscale, professional-class families that dominate Wilson would boost CHEC's test scores. With the support of the upscale families that are increasingly numerous east of Rock Creek Park, in Mount Pleasant and Columbia Heights, we could have a Wilson-caliber high school right here in Ward 1.

Don Juan's Restaurant has a graffiti problem, on their back wall on 17th Street, evidently an inviting target for graffiti vandals. The District has a program for deterring such graffiti by, essentially, covering such inviting walls with intentional graffiti, under their supervision. The Murals DC art project is intended "to replace illegal graffiti with artistic works, revitalize sites within the District of Columbia, and to teach young people the art of aerosol painting. We will provide young artists ('Artists') with supplies and a legal means to practice their skill in a way that promotes respect for property and community awareness. Artists will paint and install works (each a 'Mural') that reflect the character, culture and history of the surrounding neighborhood."

Well, this sounds promising, and Alberto Ferrufino at Don Juan's has offered his 17th Street wall for this purpose, hoping to put a stop to the shabby graffiti that he has to paint over repeatedly. But will the "good" graffiti be attractive and acceptable to the neighborhood, and especially to the

residents directly across 17th Street from it? This is about youths with spray cans, not trained artists. We're supportive of the effort, but a bit wary of the result.

Then there's Historic Mount Pleasant; what will they think? When I noted to DPW that the proposed location was in Mount Pleasant, the lady in charge wrote that she "forgot this was in Mt. Pleasant and what this entails. . . I really don't want on a project if it is going to become an issue or make the artist feel restricted." Mount Pleasant has that reputation.

This will be a topic at the May 26 ANC meeting.

What is to be done about **parking for the disabled**? The District has a substantial problem with the abuse of disabled-driver placards, which invite fraud by allowing drivers to park at meters for free. The abuse of this policy by commuters to downtown offices has been severe.

In 2012 DDOT tried to implement a change to this policy, designating red-top meters that were for disabled-drivers only, and eliminating the free parking at other meters. This effort ran into heavy opposition, partly because of the large number of parking spaces that would be designated for disabled drivers only, and partly because of the requirement that disabled drivers actually pay for metered parking. Some disabled drivers protested that they could not reach the meters to feed them coins.

Facing opposition from both the disabled and the able-bodied, the effort was abandoned. But DDOT seems now to be quietly resuming that earlier plan, and red-top meters are sprouting up around the city. The Council has objected that this undertaking has not been cleared with the Council, and won't this effort encounter the same complaints as before?

The red-top meters are currently not enforced, but of course drivers think that they're prohibited from parking at them, so those spaces are little used. Meanwhile drivers with handicapped privileges (and my wife is one) don't know what rules apply to the other metered spaces – can they park there without paying the meter, as before? Nobody really knows, and I have been unable to get an answer from DPW Parking Enforcement stating current enforcement policy.

Councilmember Evans has introduced a bill to attempt to address this problem, though in the downtown area only. His bill would provide one red-top meter per block, where possessors of disabled tags or placards could park for free, while violators would be punished with a \$1000 fine. There would be Blue Top meters that would be open to all, and would allow parking for extended time (why?). Disabled drivers would have no special privileges at regular parking meters. Would this be a model for the rest of the city, including Mount Pleasant? Perhaps.

Much is changed by the replacement of parking meters with payment kiosks, and by the availability of payment by phone (eliminating the problem of feeding a meter from a wheelchair). Councilmember Cheh is holding a hearing on the topic of parking for the disabled on June 4, as the Council struggles to come up with a suitable program.

The next meeting of the ANC will be on Tuesday, **May 26, 7:00 pm, at the Mount Pleasant Library.**