

Jack's November report

On November 11, the ANC did the following:

- Advised the Board of Zoning Adjustment (BZA) again to disapprove a zoning variance at 1665 Harvard Street;
- Advised DDOT to proceed "as soon as practicable" with the visitor parking and daytime parking "pilot" programs in Mount Pleasant;
- Advised DDOT to permit left turns from eastbound Klingle Road onto Park Road;
- Called for wider participation in the Mount Pleasant Traffic Study (I voted "no");
- Defined a new policy concerning ANC resolutions, to encourage early notification of topics, for timely notification to the public;
- Called for immediate action concerning the situation in front of the burned-out Deauville, to compel the owner to provide safer pedestrian passage and to clean up the site.

The final public meeting of the **Mount Pleasant Traffic (Transportation) Study** was held on November 15. The final results of the study will be posted shortly. A number of recommendations have been made, major and minor. As was clear at this final presentation, there are no easy answers, and almost every choice involves tradeoffs. Making things better for pedestrians and/or bicyclists invariably implies decreased convenience for motorists.

Almost nothing that the Study recommends will happen automatically. Everything will require further consideration, as we evaluate tradeoffs, and choose from their recommendations the changes we want. The Study simply gives us the detailed assessments to use in these considerations.

Many of us, for example, would like to see the commercial strip of Mount Pleasant Street made into a pedestrian-oriented area, where people could walk and shop in traffic-free comfort. But the only way to expand the sidewalks, providing space for easy walking and sidewalk cafés and sidewalk vendors, would be to take some space away from automobile uses. Parking is already scarce, and parked cars provide a valuable barrier between pedestrians and traffic, so the additional space must come from the traffic lanes. Ergo, take away one traffic lane, perforce converting Mount Pleasant Street to one-way traffic flow. Nobody wants one-way traffic because that would itself be beneficial. It's just the only way to get the space needed to make the area pedestrian-friendly.

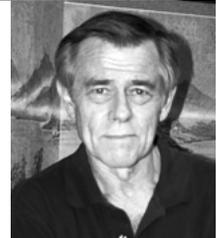
The one-way suggestion immediately brings howls from residents who complain that they'll have to drive a couple of blocks more to get to their homes. Yes, we understand the inconvenience, but what's the alternative? To leave Mount Pleasant Street dominated by noisy traffic, with pedestrians forced to dodge by each other as they try to walk along narrow sidewalks, cluttered with street signs and treeboxes?

For some residents Mount Pleasant is only a bedroom suburb, and for them the vitality of the commercial area is unimportant. I understand that attitude, but this neighborhood does not benefit from a commercial strip that is shriveling, with buildings standing vacant for months on end, and a customer base that is shrinking, finding other places to shop.

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Jack McKay, November 24, 2008

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Barack Obama did well in Mount Pleasant: 5267 votes, or 92.9% of the votes cast here for president. There were 293 votes for McCain/Palin (5.2% of the total), 39 for Ralph Nader (0.7%), and 28 for Cynthia McKinney (0.5%). Some 42 votes were write-ins; "none of the above", I guess.

I estimate that, nationwide, almost 40 million non-Hispanic whites voted for Obama. As so many people have said, we never thought we would see an African-American President, not in our lifetimes. And here it is. This was a day to be proud of America.

Oh yes, I was re-elected for another two-year term, beating "write-in" handily, 792 to 42. Thanks to all who took the trouble to mark the arrow next to my name.

For several years now, planning and community consultation have proceeded on the Columbia Heights Public Realm project. This included a **reconstruction of Park Road**, from 14th Street to 16th Street. Recently DDOT has added our section of Park Road, from 16th to 17th Streets, to the project. Unhappily, because this was a late addition, there's been almost zero consultation with this neighborhood.

We're trying hard to make up for that, though it's late, with work on Park Road about to begin. I want to see two things from this project. One is sidewalks that are reasonably wide, at least meeting the disability standard of 36 inches clear space. The project engineers assured me, at the project meeting on November 20, that the sidewalks will indeed be widened, by pushing the roadside wall alongside the sidewalk near 16th Street back, and by extending the curbs out. The second thing I want to see is clear pavement markings at the 17th Street (Mount Pleasant Street) intersection, where currently westbound drivers come into conflict over how two lanes on the east side of the intersection become one lane on the other. The three lanes of Park Road at that intersection should be a left-turn lane onto Mount Pleasant Street, a right-turn lane onto 17th Street, and a straight-through lane for Park Road.

My usual practice on **zoning variances** is to help homeowners get the variances they want, as long as their neighbors have no objection. In this Harvard Street BZA case, the neighbors objected strenuously to the proposal, which amounts to a garage directly behind their house, about 17 feet from their rear windows. If the garage faced the applicant's own house, there would be no objection to the variance. But it's his neighbor's house, not his own, that suddenly gets a view of the backside of a garage. Hence the ANC resolution advising denial of the application for a zoning variance.

The DC Public Library presented its plans for expansion of the **Mount Pleasant Library** at a meeting on October 22. Propose is a large, modernistic “cube” alongside the current building, occupying much of what is now driveway and alley.

Residents of the adjacent building, 3155 Mount Pleasant Street, were very unhappy with this plan because of the consequences for their own building. They were also unhappy that the DCPL had not talked to them about this proposal before it reached what appears to be a nearly final stage. We on the ANC are also displeased that none of these plans have been run by us. Other ANCs have similarly complained that the DCPL shoves plans through with only token community consultation.

Certainly the basic modernization of the aging library is necessary: a thoroughly rebuilt heating and cooling system, for example, and better meeting spaces. The point of dispute seems to be the proposed expansion, a rather modernistic two-story structure built alongside the old building. I think a lot of residents, not just those living right next door, will have a problem with that design.

There's a Federal program called **Safe Routes to School**, which residents Anne Pasmanick and Howard Wilson, and others, are trying to use to enhance the safety of our streets for kids walking to Bancroft. I've noted two significant problems. One is commuter cut-through traffic, using Newton Street as a way to bypass the traffic congestion and stop lights on Park Road, and speeding right by our elementary school in the morning. The other is drivers using alleys like roads, for example, shooting down the alleys paralleling Park Road, again for the purpose of bypassing the backups at the traffic lights. Unhappily, virtually all those driving through alleys fail to stop at the sidewalk, instead plowing right on out to the edge of the street, without a pause. I see parents carefully teaching their children that, where a sidewalk crosses an alley, they must stop and look especially carefully for cars emerging from the alley.

It's absurd that even on a sidewalk, our children are not safe from cars. Visibility is poor at an alley exit, and drivers cannot see to be certain that there are no pedestrians about to cross that alley. Small children are especially hard to see, and commonly don't perceive the hazard of crossing an alley. It's up to you, the motorist: stop before you cross that sidewalk, and make absolutely certain that no one is coming, before you emerge onto the sidewalk. District policy currently forbids speed humps in alleys, but that policy is being reconsidered, due to the increasing danger at alley exits.

Speaking of alleys, there's an awkward situation on **east-bound Klingle Road**, where the left turn onto Park Road is prohibited. Residents of that block, and of Pierce Mill Road, circumvent this no-left-turn from Klingle by turning right onto Adams Mill, left into the alley, through the alley to Walbridge Place, and left onto Walbridge, to gain access to westbound Park Road. That's not a safe route, and residents complain of speeding traffic in that alley.

I see no reason for the ban on left turns from Klingle, and the ANC passed my resolution calling for that turn to be allowed.

Speaking of road safety, Councilmember Graham has introduced a **Bicycle Safety Enhancement Act**, which would (1) require all District trucks to have side guards to prevent bicyclists from being trapped under the truck's rear wheels (the cause of Mount Pleasant bicyclist Alice Swanson's death last July), (2) require drivers to pass by bicyclists at a distance of no less than three feet, and (3) impose a \$100 fine for “improper use of a restricted lane”.

I argued, at a hearing on November 14, that that last provision might actually make things worse for us bicyclists. Nobody knows what use of a bike lane by a motorist is not “improper”, so your average driver will just stay out of bike lanes, always. We see that behavior now, as drivers make right turns from the left, crossing the bike lane. That's just what we don't want, because that cutting across the bicyclists' path is what leads to the notorious “right hook” bike-car collision.

District law *permits* drivers to enter “restricted” lanes for the purpose of a right turn, and *requires* drivers to make right turns “from as close to the curb as practicable”, specifically to prevent bicyclists (and motor scooters) from attempting to pass a car on the right just as it is turning right. Bike lanes are supposed to be painted with broken stripes for 30 feet or more approaching a right-turn intersection, to indicate to motorists that they're permitted to enter that lane. But few bike lanes are so marked, and few drivers realize that they're *supposed* to get all the way to the right for a right turn, bike lane or no. I believe that this provision will remain in Mr Graham's bill, but that he will support a program to instruct District drivers that they're not merely permitted, but *required* to use that bike lane when turning right.

In the early morning hours of November 17, a drunken fool teenager got going the wrong way on I-66 and crashed head-on into a car coming in the correct direction, **killing two Mount Pleasant women** in that car. Tu Nhi Nguyen and Jennifer My Nguyen (not related) were Vietnamese immigrants and residents of 1630 Park Road. The second Mrs. Nguyen leaves two children, 12 and 15 years old, without a mother. What an unspeakable tragedy.

Many people have complained about the dreadful state of **Kenyon and Irving Streets**, full of pits left by the WASA lead-water-line work. Evidently the cold weather delayed repaving, and that work is supposed to start this week (December 1). We'll see.

A record-breaking crowd is expected on the Mall for the **inauguration of Barack Obama**. Many residents would like to join in the festivities, but are reluctant to deal with such a crowd, or are physically unable to make the trek downtown and stand for hours in what will likely be very cold weather. I've floated the idea of putting a Jumbotron in Meridian Hill Park, so we can have our own Mall party right here. Councilmember Graham is suggesting a party in the Reeves Center, where it would be lots warmer. We'll see what we can make happen.

The next ANC meeting will be on Tuesday, December 2 , 7:00 pm, La Casa Community Center, 3166 Mt. Pleasant St.
