

Jack's November report

The October 16 meeting could do nothing, for lack of a quorum, Stormy, Yasmin, and Gregg being absent. The meeting was rescheduled for October 30, only to be cancelled, due to the hurricane. Frustrating!

This ANC needs reinvigoration, as exemplified by our inability to get a quorum of four of the six commissioners to a meeting in October. Come January, we will have two new commissioners, and perhaps that will provide the commission with the new energy it needs. The **results of the November election**, with preliminary vote totals:

1D01: Yasmin Romero-Castillo, 393 votes; Frank Agbro, 328; write-in, 6

1D02: Adam Hoey, 384 votes; write-in, 16

1D03: Jack McKay, 748 votes; write-in, 52

1D04: Phil Greiner, 420 votes; write-in, 18

1D05: China Terrell, 459 votes; Arturo Griffiths, 327; write-in, 16

Three of the current commissioners, namely Gregg Edwards, Laura Wilson Phelan, and "Stormy" Scott, did not run for re-election. With the reduction to five commissioners (due to the decreased Mount Pleasant population), our 2013-2014 commission will have three re-elected incumbents, and two brand-new commissioners, Adam Hoey and Phil Greiner. The new commission will be sworn in on January 2, and the first meeting will be on January 15, 2013.

At 9:45 pm on October 11, there was a **robbery of a resident on the 3100 block of 19th Street**. The victim "was talking on his cellphone while walking in the alley when he was accosted by a gunman who stole his cellphone", according to MPD Inspector Angel Medina. The robbers then fled towards Mount Pleasant Street in a black Audi SUV.

This incident was unusual in several respects. Robberies are rare on the west side of Mount Pleasant, most robberies occurring east of 18th Street. Handguns are seldom used in street robberies here, the threat of violence being the most common means. Fleeing the scene in a car – a pretty fancy car, no less – is also unusual, most robberies being perpetrated by robbers on foot. By the same token, this seems unlikely to recur here, as these particular robbers have more mobility, and greater range, than the on-foot robbers.

The MPD tells me that the Audi does not match any stolen cars, though that's what one would expect. Who drives an Audi SUV to do robberies? I still think it must have been a stolen car, despite the MPD having no corresponding vehicle on the "stolen car" list.

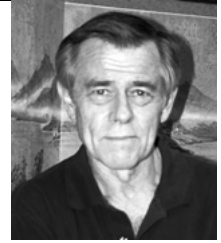
MPD report: "On Saturday, October 27, 2012, at approximately 7:57 PM there was a **Robbery with Knife** at Adams Mill Rd and Walbridge Place. The victim, an adult female, was approached by a suspect armed with a knife who demanded her property. The suspect obtained the victim's property and fled the scene in a truck with another subject.

"Officers responded and obtained a description of the suspects and began canvassing for them. Officers located the truck and both suspects in the 5800 block of Georgia Avenue,

ANC 1D03 NEWSLETTER #122

Jack McKay, November 11, 2012

Jack McKay
3200 19th St, Tel. 462-8692
jack.mckay@verizon.net
http://DCJack.org



NW. Both adult male suspects were arrested and the victim's property was recovered by the officers."

The District Council has heard the many loud complaints about **speed cameras**. Councilmembers Wells, Cheh, and Barry have introduced a bill to mitigate the consequences of a proliferation of speed cameras around the District. The bill would do the following.

- * The fine for speeding up to 20 mph over the posted limit would be reduced from \$125 to \$50.

This recognizes the fact that, for lower-income DC residents, \$125 fines are brutal. Surely a \$50 fine is adequate for deterrence of speeding. It should be noted that the District allows 10 mph over posted limits without penalty, so 20 mph over the posted limit amounts to 10 mph over the actual, enforced speed limit.

- * "Stealth" ticketing would be ended: a first violation would result in a warning, and for 30 days after that first ticket, only further warnings could be issued.

- * The DC Government would undertake a study of speed limits, to determine the appropriateness of current limits, and recommend changes where appropriate. The criteria for determining speed limits would have to be defined.

- * The funds obtained as fines would be used only for traffic safety related purposes, and would not go into the general District budget.

It appears to me that current speed limits are simply best guesses made by DDOT, with no foundation other than a vague notion of what seems reasonable. Contrary to what one would suppose, there's no traffic engineering analysis supporting speed limits. Just guesswork. As DDOT replied when I asked for the rationale behind that 30 mph limit on Porter Street: that's what it is simply because that's what it's always been.

I believe also that current speed limits are set 10 mph below what anyone thinks is an actual maximum safe speed, to facilitate enforcement. (This is a standard practice, worldwide, "to account for inaccurate speedometers, momentary inattention, etc.", says one study.) On all DC thoroughfares, average vehicle speeds exceed the posted limit. Nobody takes posted limits seriously, and that causes great confusion when speed cameras are installed, with the threat that speed limits might suddenly be strictly enforced, with "zero tolerance".

Chief Lanier and the MPD strenuously object to the reduced speeding fines, arguing that decreasing the fine to \$50 will

make it merely a “cost of doing business”, and not an effective deterrent. But the task force established by the Council to consider these fines determined that the size of the fine matters little; what counts for deterrence is not the size of the fine, but the certainty of it. Nobody likes getting a ticket, even if the fine is not large. Speed cameras bring about a vastly increased probability of a ticket, and so should be an effective deterrent, even if the fines are reduced to less punitive levels.

On November 5, I testified to the DC Council about speed cameras (as a resident, not for the ANC), advising that they explicitly make speed-camera policy the same as current, unwritten MPD policy, namely that only speeds 10 mph or more above the posted limit – designated “aggressive speeding” – are subject to speeding tickets. I think DC drivers would not object to widespread speed-camera enforcement, if only “aggressive” speeding is ticketed.

With the advent of speed cameras, unreasonably low posted speed limits have come in for a good deal of criticism, leading to the provision in the bill for an assessment of existing limits. Just try driving 25 mph on Beach Drive, for example.

The District Council is considering changes to regulations pertaining to **motor scooters**. A point that might be significant is that a motor scooter “operated at speeds in excess of 30 mph” would be redefined to be a motorcycle, and the operator would have to have a motorcycle endorsement on the driver's license.

Motor scooter parking was a major topic in Council hearings conducted by CM Cheh. The law requires that motor scooters be parked in the street, but there is no good way to secure a scooter so parked. Thieves can easily pick up and haul away a scooter parked in the street. A better solution has to be found.

On the afternoon of October 24, a Lamont Street resident was **hit by a car** as she crossed Adams Mill Road, at the Zoo exit. The pedestrian-switched “walk” light wasn't working, so she had to guess when to cross. She crossed when the light turned red for the Adams Mill/Harvard Street traffic, but that was when the light for the ramp from Beach Drive went green. A woman driving a monster SUV, a Ford Expedition, making the left onto Adams Mill northbound, hit her in the crosswalk, as she had almost made it across. She was able to push her baby stroller safely ahead and out of the path of the car. Her injuries were painful, but minor.

There are two utterly outrageous aspects to this collision. First, it was broad daylight, there was nothing obscuring visibility, and she was in plain sight; there is no excuse for the SUV driver hitting her. Second, and worse – the police officer on the scene determined that she was walking against the light, and handed her a ticket for “going against the light”, even as she was receiving medical attention from ambulance personnel. The SUV driver was not cited.

This is the average MPD officer's notion of determining responsibility for an accident: find out if someone has violated some law, and that person is perforce responsible for the accident, period. That the driver could have, and should have, seen the pedestrian and stopped, doesn't count.

Evidently, automobile drivers are permitted to run down pedestrians in crosswalks, if the driver has a green light and the pedestrian does not.

I believe that a driver has an absolute responsibility to avoid a collision, if possible. But I haven't found any such provision in the DC Municipal Regulations.

I've protested this MPD analysis. Even if the pedestrian didn't have a “walk” light – I'm attempting to get a confirmation from DDOT that the pedestrian switch was not working, and was repaired two days later – there's no excuse for the driver having failed to see, and stop for, our neighbor in the crosswalk.

I don't ordinarily write about national topics here, but there was an election on November 6, resulting in (hooray!) **the re-election of Barack Obama**. The preliminary vote totals for Mount Pleasant (including a bit of Columbia Heights):

Barack Obama: 4758 (91.8%)

Mitt Romney: 253 (4.9%)

Jill Stein (Statehood Green): 116 (2.2%)

Gary Johnson (Libertarian): 43 (0.8%)

The Obama vote here was close to the 91.1% total for all of DC.

The Economist magazine – a business-oriented journal, and no fan of Obama – had this to say about Romney, whom it really would have preferred to endorse, but could not bear: “Mr Romney is still in the cloud cuckoo-land of thinking you can do it [balance the budget] entirely through spending cuts . . . the Republicans have become a party of Torquemadas, forcing representatives to sign pledges never to raise taxes, to dump the chairman of the Federal Reserve and to embrace an ever more Southern-fried approach to social policy.”

I grew up before the civil rights revolution, and I remember the days when segregation was the law and bigotry the social norm. I never thought I'd see a black family in the White House. That we do have that today pleases me deeply, as a symbol of our putting those horrid old days permanently behind us. The re-election of Barack Obama, with millions of white votes, reaffirms the end of those bad old days.

Autumn leaf collection is under way. The first pass of collection came the weeks of November 5 and 12. I've always thought that this first pass comes too early, most of the leaves still being on the trees. The second pass will come the weeks of December 3 and 10. By that time, the leaves are turning into sodden lumps.

Residents are requested to rake leaves into the treebox spaces, adjacent to the curb. Not into the street, please! Leaves in the street clog gutters and storm drains.

Leaf blowers are popular, but elicit lots of noise complaints. I've measured the noise levels of these machines, and they're not that high; the high-pitched whine is simply especially irritating. I use a blower in vacuum mode to get the leaves out of my ivy and off my bushes and out of my gutters, but I try to do this work when few residents are at home.

The next meeting of the ANC will be on Tuesday, November 27, 2012, 7:00 pm.
--