

## Jack's November report

At the October 15 meeting, the ANC considered, then tabled until November a couple of resolutions. China and Phil were both out of town on business trips, and the issues under consideration could await the November meeting, when we might have all five commissioners present.

Concerning monthly meeting attendance, I haven't missed one since July, 2003, ten years ago.

On the afternoon of October 25, **Adams Mill Road** below Kenyon Street was finally opened to southbound traffic. Many residents have been inconvenienced by the closing of that route to Adams Morgan, and through the Zoo to Beach Drive.

Residents can now safely and legally make the left turn from Kenyon onto southbound Adams Mill. In addition, there are wider, ADA-compliant sidewalks, and safer crosswalks, as well as very nice "decorative teardrop" street lights in place of the old cobras. And trucks – not big trucks, but ordinary delivery vehicles – can make the turn from northbound Adams Mill onto Irving without wheels rolling up onto the sidewalk. A bus shelter is being built at the Irving Street stop, and there's a sidewalk providing safe access from the Harvard Towers. (And the jersey wall we had put up to give those residents a safe walk to their preferred bus stop is gone.)

I think that rock-faced median barrier looks pretty nice, creating an attractive route into our neighborhood. As one Mount Pleasant Forum poster wrote, "After everything with the Harvard Triangle project, and I certainly had my concerns, I think it looks pretty good".

Councilmember Catania has called for a "public oversight roundtable" to discuss "the status of plans to **revise school boundaries** and feeder patterns for District of Columbia Public Schools". I don't know what such plans might be, but it would not surprise me to see major changes proposed for Mount Pleasant. The current middle and high school boundaries send most Mount Pleasant residents to Deal and Wilson, off in Tenleytown, and ignore much closer schools, right here in Ward One. Deal and Wilson are overcrowded, whereas the schools in Ward One are not. So, from the overall perspective of DC public schools, it must be tempting to put Mount Pleasant in-boundary for schools to the east of us, such as the Columbia Heights Education Campus, achieving a better balance of school populations, and reducing the distance Mount Pleasant middle- and high-schoolers would have to go each day.

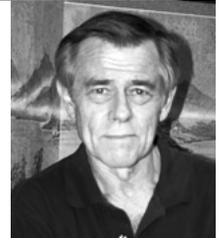
I know how such a proposal would be received here. Every parent wants the best school possible for his or her child, and that means Deal and Wilson. As the only one of the current ANC commissioners who has actually had a child of the family in a DC public school – Bancroft – I know well how important it is to a parent to send a child to a good school.

On October 3, the Historic Preservation Review Board, by a 6 to 0 vote, "approved the design development of the [**Oakwood Terrace**] concept and delegated further review to the staff". I understand why many neighbors are unhappy

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Jack McKay, November 8, 2013

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with this development, but fighting it through historic preservation was never going to succeed.

Some residents have taken a new approach, calling for a Tree and Slope "overlay" zone to be applied to a number of Mount Pleasant lots adjoining Rock Creek Park, from Oakwood Terrace to 19th Street. The principal consequences of this would be a limit to lot coverage of 30% (vs. 60% for current, R-4 zoning), and a "maximum impervious surface coverage" limit of 50%.

I'll reserve judgment on that matter, not knowing enough about this zoning, and what effect it might have on other residents.

Early in October, a resident e-mailed me that **the no-parking signs adjacent to the alley between Park Road and Monroe Street** had been moved to a large distance from the 18th Street alley entrance. The legal minimum parking distance to an alley is five feet, but four signposts had been moved up to 25 feet from the alley, depriving residents of at least four curbside parking spaces. After some pressing, DDOT replied that these signs had been moved because the alley was used by delivery vans and trash trucks.

Indeed, the alley to the west of 18th Street is used for access to a number of Park Road residences, because those grand mansions are sited high above Park Road. I can understand the difficulty with seeing oncoming traffic when exiting an alley – I do this every day, from my own alley garage – so perhaps the extra distance is warranted for the alley on the west side, to see traffic coming from the left. But the alley on the east side is not used in this manner, and the additional distance on the right-hand side of the west-side alley exit isn't really needed. I'll do what I can to retrieve three of the four lost parking spaces.

DDOT argued that there's no regulation preventing them from increasing the no-parking distance above the legally specified five feet "if there is a sight distance based issue". I would argue that there's no law allowing them to put no-parking signs wherever they want, whatever the regulations say. Many of our alleys have similar visibility issues, and could similarly have curbside parking lost because a resident with an alley garage complains. As one DDOT official wrote, "safety is our utmost importance". That's a prescription for eliminating a lot of curbside parking spots in Mount Pleasant.

Yasmin Romero-Latin is backing me in an appeal to recover some of these lost parking spaces. China Terrell is not: "DDOT had taken care of this and the residents whom I have

heard from are happy”. China isn't listening to residents who have to try to find a curbside parking spot every night. And, as one of the Park Road residents concerned about that alley exit said to me, DDOT “overreacted” to their complaints.

I think the neighborhood needs those parking spaces. And safety is an issue there, too, as anyone who has to walk from a parking space blocks from home, late at night, will agree.

Early in November I found a nonsensical ticket on a car on Kilbourne Place, just short of 19th Street, imposing a \$50 fine for violating a “No Standing” zone, where the car was plainly on the correct side of the sign. (“No Standing or Parking” is the rule for 25 feet from a stop sign, on the theory that a parked or stopped car will obscure drivers' view of the stop sign, creating a severe safety hazard.) A close examination of the no-parking sign showed that the arrow, originally pointing only towards the stop sign, had been crudely modified with an additional arrowhead to indicate no parking on the side away from the stop sign as well.

Even as I pressed DDOT (responsible for the sign) and DPW (responsible for parking enforcement) about this situation, I publicized it via the Prince of Petworth blog. (“Absolutely nuts!” commented the blogmeister.) WJLA-TV picked that up, noting that the added arrow was “barely noticeable”, yet unsuspecting residents were getting socked with \$50 tickets. One Kilbourne resident said that this had been going on for “over a year”. (I wish I had known about it! I would have gotten this fixed long ago.)

That flurry of publicity did the trick, well before I could get DDOT to do anything about it. “The sign is actually correct”, wrote my DDOT contact. No, it's not, and on November 5, DDOT eliminated the bogus arrow, and for good measure, added a sign stating explicitly that parking on the side away from the stop sign is legal.

I've fought the notion that **speed cameras** “save lives”, because they don't, not in the District. Put them out on the Beltway, sure, where people driving over 70 ought to be slowed down. In the city, speeds are low, only about 3% of traffic accidents are due to speed, and the onset of speed cameras has made *no detectable difference* to the number of traffic fatalities for which speed is a contributing factor.

That said, nobody likes cars moving at uncomfortable speeds through a residential neighborhood. That's the valid objective of speed cameras: to slow traffic in residential areas, where they're not likely to save any lives, but will improve the quality of life for residents.

For that reason I long ago requested, via an ANC resolution, speed cameras for the 1800 and 2000 blocks of Park Road. The MPD has ignored my request, without explanation.

The subject came up again in September, and the MPD promised another investigation. I noted specifically that a speed camera could be placed adjacent to the sidewalk where the Pierce Mill alley exits onto Park Road, the camera facing down the 2000 block of Park Road. Two months later, there's still no reply. Councilmember Graham has pressed the MPD again for an answer.

A major “rehabilitation” of **Broad Branch Road** is in the planning stage. Broad Branch is a fine road through a portion of Rock Creek Park, but is very dangerous for bicyclists, being narrow, winding, and used by too many drivers in a hurry. I don't like taking that road in my Prius, because I'll always have some tailgater behind me pushing me to go faster than I consider safe. At a public hearing in Cleveland Park on November 5, many residents complained that this beautiful road through the park was inaccessible for pedestrians and bicyclists, because of the poor visibility on this road, and those speeding drivers.

One of the options proposed for rebuilding the road would add a modest, four-foot bike lane alongside the traffic lanes. This is the only design option offered that would make that road bicyclist-accessible. This matters to us in Mount Pleasant because the start of Broad Branch happens to be at the very end of the bike path through Rock Creek Park. Make Broad Branch bicyclist-safe, and a mile and a half will be added to the bike path. This would be marvelous for Mount Pleasant residents out for a nice bike ride, and would promote bicycle commuting by residents of upper Northwest.

I'll ask the commission to endorse this bike-lane choice. It's more expensive than the other options, and of course requires some widening of the road, at the expense of trees. That's where there is vocal opposition: from residents who think that the loss of an estimated 460 trees outweighs the value of the bike lane.

I think it's wrong to have a park that can be enjoyed only from within an automobile. And I think it's important, for the future of our city, to encourage bicycle commuting. Furthermore, the area of parkland that would be affected to provide bicycle and pedestrian access would be a mere one-twentieth of one acre, in our 1754-acre Rock Creek Park.

What's been best about Mount Pleasant, and our reason for choosing a home here 41 years ago, is its **diversity**, ethnic and economic. Mount Pleasant has been a comfortable home to everyone, of any ethnicity or income level; no resident has to feel like an outsider in someone else's neighborhood.

In 1990, Mount Pleasant was 35% white non-Hispanic, 36% black non-Hispanic, 26% Hispanic. The 2010 census showed the slipping away of that equality, as the neighborhood was then 50% white non-Hispanic, 19% black non-Hispanic, 25% Hispanic. While the white population *increased* by 15 percentage points, the black population *decreased* by 16 percentage points. I am not pleased by that trend.

This outcome wasn't planned, of course, and I believe that anyone who chooses to make a home in Mount Pleasant, east of Rock Creek Park, is racially enlightened. But the drastic increase in the cost of housing here – ordinary row houses now sell for close to a million dollars – is bringing about unintended consequences. In 1999, the average family income in Mount Pleasant was 11% *below* the District average; now it's 14% *above* the District average. Are we becoming an east-of-the-Park version of Georgetown, predominantly white and wealthy? I do hope not.

The next meeting of the ANC will be on **Tuesday, November 19, 7:00 pm, at the Mount Pleasant Library.**