

Jack's November report

At the October 21 meeting, the ANC:

- Agreed to purchase items for the Holiday Party planned for Lamont Park on December 6, up to \$2515;
- Called on the Office of Planning, and the Zoning Commission, to halt apartment house conversions in Mount Pleasant;
- Advised the District Council to to “ensure that local, clean, affordable, reliable power is a priority” in the consideration of the Exelon acquisition of Pepco.

The ANC passed Adam's resolution calling for an immediate halt to the **conversion of residential buildings in Mount Pleasant to apartment houses**. Under current R-4 zoning, any building can be partitioned into multiple dwelling units – apartments, or condominiums – according to a lot area requirement of 900 square feet per unit. Of the approximately 2000 buildings in Mount Pleasant –

143 row houses could become three-unit apartment houses
37 row houses could become four-unit apartment houses
36 row houses could allow 5 units or more
27 free-standing houses could become apartment houses.

Historic Mount Pleasant (HMP) has been leading an effort to prohibit all conversions to apartment houses. Their complaint is that competition from developers, eyeing houses on lots permitting apartment house conversion, are driving up the prices of these large-lot houses, making them unaffordable for single family use. But single-family row houses in Mount Pleasant, including those on lots that do not permit apartment-house conversion, are already out of sight for families of moderate means. Prohibiting apartment-house conversion will still limit ownership to people who can get, and pay the monthly rates on, \$800,000 mortgages, and that won't make home ownership in Mount Pleasant “affordable”.

I think preventing apartment house conversion is sensible for row houses, because of the consequences for the immediate neighbors – noise, people coming and going, and competition for curbside parking. For that reason, I voted for Adam's resolution, though I do not agree with his, or HMP's, rationale. Where I disagree with the HMP recommendation is on the prohibition of apartment-house conversion of free-standing houses. The big mansion at the corner of 18th and Monroe is an example of a house for which only conversion to multiple dwelling units – condos – made financial sense.

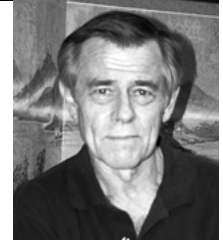
HMP asserts that the conversion of single-family dwellings to multi-family dwellings will have “a negative impact . . . on the quality of life and historic character” of Mount Pleasant. I'm sure HMP would like to see all Mount Pleasant houses owned by single (wealthy!) families. But for free-standing houses, many of which are large and correspondingly extremely costly, partition into multiple dwelling units opens home ownership to people who could never afford an \$800,000 row house.

The Office of Planning proposal would permit the conversion of free-standing buildings to apartment houses as “special exceptions”, requiring that the conversion “will not tend to affect adversely, the use of neighboring property”, a provision that sounds good to me. HMP disagrees, insisting that such conversions be prohibited by zoning, thus requiring

ANC 1D03 NEWSLETTER #144

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a zoning variance, obtainable only by showing “exceptional practical difficulties or exceptional and undue hardship”, a much more difficult requirement.

Adam's resolution, calling for the ban on conversion for all structures in Mount Pleasant, was sure to pass, and the matter of variances versus special exceptions for free-standing buildings didn't warrant a “no” vote, so his resolution passed unanimously, 3 to 0 (Phil and Yasmin missed this meeting).

I abstained on **the Exelon/Pepco matter**, which passed by a 2 to 0 vote. I had spent a good deal of time before the meeting researching the apartment-house-conversion issue, and had no time to investigate the pros and cons of this utility acquisition. Furthermore, I'm not convinced that this is an appropriate matter for ANC consideration. Our job is to worry about DC Government actions affecting our neighborhood. This is a citywide matter more appropriately dealt with at the District Council level.

Police officers have asked me to request that residents **post their house numbers on the alley behind their houses**. They find it quite troublesome to have to puzzle over which house is which, when they go into an alley to approach a house from the rear. Ingleside Terrace was noted specifically as lacking, and needing, such alley-side house numbers.

I mentioned last month a sudden **wave of burglaries** in Mount Pleasant, five in one week at the end of September and beginning of October, whereas normally we suffer only four burglaries in a month. Then, as abruptly as it began, the crime wave ended. During the three weeks following that five-burglary burst, there were *zero* burglaries in Mount Pleasant. Whoever was responsible for these crimes has either been arrested, or has decided to work on some other neighborhood.

Verizon's FiOS – fiber optic cable service – after years of “real soon now”, is now actually becoming available here in Mount Pleasant. The principal virtue is very high internet speed, nominally 25 Mbps, far faster than, say, DSL. It's not everywhere in Mount Pleasant, not yet. Curiously, it seems to be available on the east side of my block of 19th Street, but not the west side (my side). But presumably all of our neighborhood will shortly be “wired” for FiOS.

The **November 4 election** displayed again the division of the District into disparate communities, the “haves”, mostly west of Rock Creek Park, and the “have-nots”, to the east. Catania won in all the high-income neighborhoods, upper Northwest, Georgetown/downtown, and Capitol Hill. Bowser won every-

where else. Mount Pleasant, befitting its in-between status, was closely divided, with Bowser having a slender lead:

	Mount Pleasant	Ward One	DC
Bowser	47%	49%	54%
Catania	44%	43%	36%
Schwarz	5%	5%	7%

For at-large Councilmember:

	Mount Pleasant	Ward One	DC
Elissa Silverman	21%	17%	12%
Anita Bonds	18%	20%	24%
Eugene Puryear	7%	6%	8%
Courtney Snowden	6%	6%	6%
Graylan Hagler	6%	4%	3%
Michael Brown	5%	6%	8%

The percentages are of the total votes cast for Councilmember. The interpretation is complicated by the vote-for-two provision. Many voters voted for only one. Silverman did well here, while Anita Bonds' vote was well below her DC-wide total. I speculate that Mount Pleasant's growing population of young professionals see Elissa Silverman as most closely reflecting themselves, while Anita Bonds won the support of older DC residents.

For Attorney General:

	Mount Pleasant	Ward One	DC
Karl Racine	28%	35%	41%
Paul Zukerberg	24%	23%	14%
Edward Smith	17%	20%	21%
Lorie Masters	17%	16%	15%

Why did Mount Pleasant so favor Paul Zukerberg, versus Karl Racine, compared to the rest of the city? I have no idea.

For Ward One Board of Education member:

	Mount Pleasant	Ward One
Laura Wilson Phelan	42%	37%
David Do	25%	25%
Lillian Perdomo	14%	10%
Scott Simpson	14%	16%
Gail Anderson Holness	5%	11%

Congratulations to former ANC1D Commissioner Laura Wilson Phelan.

As for the school boundary revisions currently being implemented, I expect Mayor-Elect Bowser to bring the revisions to a halt, and to re-open the whole matter. Basically, the current boundaries are not only impractical, but are offensive, reflecting the biases that prevailed in the District fifty years ago. The middle-school and high school

boundaries in particular send upper-income families to a few favored schools in far Northwest, while directing lower-income families to lower-tier schools. The Wilson HS boundary, for example, extends all the way to Foggy Bottom, while skirting Shaw and Columbia Heights. Cardozo HS is just a few blocks from Adams Morgan, but teenagers from that neighborhood are sent off to miles-away Wilson. Maybe this suited the 1960s, but it's time the school boundaries were revised for the 21st century. The vital first step is to make east-of-the-Park schools comparable to Deal and Wilson in quality and safety. Will Bowser be able to do that?

Mount Pleasant will have a remarkable ANC next year, three of the five commissioners – Franko, Rosa, and Arturo – being immigrant Americans:

		votes	write-ins
1D01	Frank Agbro	496	38
1D02	Adam Hoey	228	19
1D03	Jack McKay	581	50
1D04	Rosa Rivas	312	24
1D05	Arturo Griffiths Ilana Harrus	271 238	22

The 581 votes for me is a gratifying total, suggesting that I'm doing reasonably well at this job. The 50 write-ins indicate that not everyone is pleased, but that's the nature of the job. Can't please everyone!

In the spring of 2012, DDOT set about imposing a new system for **handicapped driver parking**. About nine percent of all parking meters were to become “red top”, reserved for use by people with handicapped permits. The current provision allowing such drivers to park at any meter, without paying, was to be dropped.

That approach wound up angering everybody. Non-handicapped drivers protested the loss of so many metered parking spots. Handicapped drivers objected to giving up their park-free-at-any-meter privilege. So the DDOT program was abruptly halted. There are red-top meters around, but those are not (yet) reserved for the handicapped.

Well, the DDOT program is coming back, planned for implementation in January. What's been changed to make this plan acceptable? I don't know, I'll keep a close watch on it. (Note: my wife has handicapped parking tags, so I'm sure to get and appreciate the views of the handicapped driver.)

It disturbs me, a bicyclist, to see young people **biking without helmets**. Here's a statistic: 65% of bicycling fatalities in 2012 were without helmets, vs. just 17% percent with. It's not the collision itself, but the head striking the pavement that kills. I owe my life to my helmet: a minor bicycle-bicycle collision in May, 1996, on the Rock Creek Park bike path, sent me over the handlebars and head-first into the pavement, an impact that compression-fractured two vertebrae of my spine, and would surely have crushed my skull, had I been without a helmet.

The next meeting of the ANC will be on **Tuesday, November 18, 7:00 pm, at the Mount Pleasant Library.**