

October report to constituents

Here is news of the **October 2, 15, and 24 ANC meetings** (yes, three!), and other happenings in Mount Pleasant. On October 2, the ANC:

- Advised the Board of Zoning Adjustment to approve a permit variance application for 3125 Mt Pleasant Street (the Raven tavern);
- Advised the District Council to approve three Fenty appointments to DC agencies;
- Advised the Board of Zoning Adjustment, and the Historic Preservation Review Board, to approve permit applications for 1811 Kenyon Street;
- Tabled a request for advice to the HPRB for a project at 1811 Newton Street (the condo conversion of a small apartment building);
- Agreed to “protest” the application for a liquor license by Marleny’s Restaurant (a *pro forma* move to negotiate a “voluntary agreement”, not because we object to the granting of a license);
- Tabled a request for advice to the HPRB and the BZA for permits for work at 1747 Kilbourne Place;
- Agreed on a list of notional traffic concepts to be submitted to DDOT, requesting that they be considered as part of the current traffic study. One of these concepts, concerning an “auction” of residential parking permits, was separated from this list and tabled, upon my assertion that this was far too challenging a notion to be considered at this time.

The ANC also met on October 15, naming Jane Zara ANC Treasurer, replacing Joe Esparza, who has moved out of Mount Pleasant. On October 24, the ANC reiterated its support for the Hear Mount Pleasant “voluntary agreement” for liquor licensees, and advised the ABC Board to require all protesting organizations to make their protest-related proceedings, such as meeting minutes and board votes, open to the public, given that their actions amount to making neighborhood law.

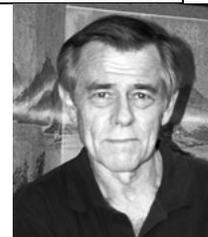
The ANC commissioner for the far northeast portion of Mount Pleasant (Oakwood Terrace, Brown Street, 16th Street to the Woodner), **Joe Esparza, resigned** abruptly on October 5, due to his move out of Mount Pleasant. The vacancy in Joe’s district will shortly be made official (the Board of Ethics and Elections has to confirm that he’s left his district). We do hope that someone can be found promptly to fill that post for the remaining year of Joe’s term.

In my July newsletter, I noted the admirable effort by Cheryl Morton, the mail delivery lady for the northern parts of Mount Pleasant, in the **capture of three burglars** at work on 17th Street. I hear that the Postal Service has recognized Ms. Morton with a special commendation for her action.

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Jack McKay, October 29, 2007

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



Fiesta DC was, I think, a great success. Some of the complaints about last year’s show were resolved: the bands weren’t so loud, and the post-Fiesta cleanup went better (Mount Pleasant Street, power-washed by the Fiesta DC crew, hasn’t been so clean in years). The Fiesta, and the parade, were marvelous fun, and contributed to making Mount Pleasant a place of special vitality and interest. We’re proud that our neighborhood is a welcoming place for Latino immigrants, in sharp contrast to certain Virginia suburbs.

The **Mount Pleasant Traffic Study** will feature three meetings with the neighborhood, to solicit public input. I’ve arranged for the first of these meetings to be held at the Stoddard Baptist Home at 1818 Newton Street, on **October 29, 6:30 to 8:30 pm** (thank you to the Home for agreeing to make their dining room available). At this time the DDOT consultant is compiling neighborhood traffic, bicycling, and pedestrian problems, and making observations to support measures to mitigate those problems. The consultant is not yet considering any changes to mitigate those problems.

One notion being sharply criticized already, even before being formally proposed, involves making Mount Pleasant Street a one-way street. Posed that crudely, people naturally object, perceiving only the difficulties brought about by a one-way traffic flow.

But it’s not that simple. No one thinks that anything would be improved simply by making this street one-way. The goal is **wider sidewalks and larger parks**, to make the business district a more comfortable place for people on foot. Wider sidewalks would eliminate the narrow spots where pedestrians have to dodge past each other, between building fronts and parking meters and treeboxes. Wider sidewalks would permit sidewalk cafes, without forcing pedestrians into narrow gaps between the tables and the curb. Larger parks – well, who wouldn’t like to have more spacious parks, at both ends of the street?

Very well, but where does one get the additional space needed for wider sidewalks and larger parks? The buildings aren’t going to move aside, so some of the street must be converted from automobile to pedestrian use. Giving up curbside parking is unthinkable, that already being desperately scarce. So the only feasible way to gain more pedestrian space is to take one traffic lane and convert that automobile space to pedestrian use. That can be done, of course, only if traffic is converted to one way flow. How else is anyone going to make space for wider sidewalks?

This would not, as some have claimed, result in speeding traffic, because cars would still be confined to a single traffic lane. It would make pedestrian crossing of the street easier and safer, and would reduce traffic noise on the street, too.

The ANC has not endorsed this concept. It's merely asked the Traffic Study consultant to look into it, to determine the feasibility, benefits, and liabilities of such a change.

Many people complain to me about badly behaved men making the business strip unpleasant. Police officers in patrol cars won't stop to deal with such "minor" problems. An officer on foot can deal personally with troublesome men, and we have long fought for **foot patrol officers for Mount Pleasant Street** and nearby, to reduce disorderly conduct.

I perceive that what degrades the quality of life in the inner city is not so much *crime* as it is *disorder*. Badly behaved men and rude teenagers can be a daily affliction for people shopping, or just passing by on foot. Officers on foot, getting to know the people hanging about the street, learning which ones are troublesome and which ones are not, can bring about a real improvement to conditions faced by the public.

We have had trouble keeping our foot patrol officers, because the MPD higher-ups have not appreciated the value of this work. Officer Scott Fawcett, who was marvelous at this task and beloved by the store owners, left the MPD, feeling that his work was not valued. Whenever there's a personnel shortage, our foot patrol officers disappear.

But the new chief of police evidently agrees that foot patrols perform a valuable police service. Chief Lanier has increased the number of officers assigned to this duty from 50 to 200. Other neighborhoods, now blessed with foot patrol officers, agree: officers on foot (or on bicycle, or on Segway) can do good things for an inner-city neighborhood.

As everyone knows, this has been a **serious drought** year, our rainfall to date being 10 inches short of normal. Our vegetation, and especially our trees, are suffering. Officially, this area has gone from "abnormally dry" in the spring to "moderate drought" in the summer to, after a rainless September, "severe drought". (The rain in late October has helped, but put only a small dent in that 10-inch deficit.)

Oddly, this drought does not affect our water supply. All of the District's drinking water comes from the Potomac, and rainfall conditions upriver, in West Virginia, are "near normal". There are two reservoirs, about 200 miles upriver, which exist to be called upon when the river flow drops to very low levels. Neither reservoir has been needed this year, despite the drought, and both are full to the top. In fact, the water supply authorities have used some of this surplus water for an experiment, releasing 175 million gallons of reservoir water (1% of the reservoir capacity) not because the river needed it, but simply to measure how long it would take for this water to flow from the reservoirs to the District. (The answer: seven days.) That's about the amount of water used by the District, and other jurisdictions drawing water from the river, in eight hours.

The drought has brought about water conservation efforts in many jurisdictions around Washington. Conservation of water by us in the District does our suffering neighbors no good at all, because any water saved here simply continues on down the Potomac into the Chesapeake Bay.

Daylight Saving Time ends this year on November 4, a week later than in previous years. We'll return to DST on March 9, 2008. DST now lasts for eight months, while "standard time" applies for only four. Maybe we should change the names, so that DST is "standard time", and what's now "standard time" would be "winter time".

After November 4, sunset will come at 5 pm, and then earlier. Traffic accidents go up dramatically when the evening rush takes place in darkness. Pedestrians, especially, have to be extra cautious when crossing streets in the winter darkness.

It's about to be leaf-raking time. The first **fall leaf collection** in Mount Pleasant will be November 5 through 17, the second, November 26 through December 8. DPW wants leaves piled up in the grassy strip between the sidewalk and the curb – *not* in the street! Leaves piled in the street just clog gutters and storm drains.

The battle over a front entrance/exit for the elderly couple on Walbridge Place continues, as the homeowners (ably supported by advocates for the elderly and the disabled) insist on more than the **Historic Preservation Review Board** (HPRB) will offer. The HPRB will allow, instead of a ramp, an outdoor lift, with the proviso that the residents keep every last brick removed for this lift, so that that precious front porch can be fully restored when they die. The residents want a smaller lift, and an adjacent staircase, so that emergency personnel might be able to get in through the front. The HPRB cannot bring itself to say "yes" to that.

But one gain as a result of this dispute has already appeared: written regulations now define the rights of the disabled in historic districts. These regulations incorporate the Americans with Disabilities Act, of course, but that offers only minimal rights for the disabled homeowner. Also incorporated is the Fair Housing Act, which offers greater benefits than ADA, requiring "government agencies to make reasonable accommodations . . . when necessary to ensure equal housing opportunity for disabled individuals." There's still plenty of room for disagreement and dispute – what is "reasonable"? – but at least the regulations are now in print, so people can know what the rules are.

This change came about because the Feds have been investigating the Walbridge Place matter, and criticized the District for having no written regulations concerning access for the disabled in historic districts.

The **next ANC meeting** is on **November 6**, 7 pm, 3166 Mount Pleasant Street. The next **PSA 301** meeting is on November 13, 7 pm, Mount Pleasant Library.