

Jack's October report

The September meeting of the ANC could not officially take place, for lack of a quorum. In place of that meeting, some of the business community came and we had a meeting with the Fiesta DC management. More on the Fiesta below.

Fiesta DC came to Mount Pleasant on September 25. I've long been a supporter of this event, despite the traffic and parking inconveniences imposed on residents. I was pleased last year when the plan to move the Fiesta to 14th Street fell through, and it returned to Mount Pleasant.

But this Fiesta was dreadful. It's under entirely new management, and, despite their promises, it was extremely badly handled. Tens of thousands of people came to Mount Pleasant in their personal cars, imagining that they could somehow find parking here. Nothing instructed them to go to the DCUSA parking lot. Drivers simply trying to pass through on Irving Street found themselves in a trap, unable to find a way around Mount Pleasant Street, blocked from Argonne Place to Park Road.

The vendors at the Fiesta were supposed to park their trucks on U Street and take provided transportation back to Mount Pleasant. All too many of them didn't, parking their trucks on our side streets, where they obstructed visibility and clogged our narrow streets all day long.

The nastiest problem though was the men who chose to make residents' yards into public urinals, declining to use the porta-johns on the street. As one very justifiably unhappy resident wrote, "for over six hours Sunday our alley and driveway were used as a toilet and trash can for empty beer cans. My wife came home from work to find a dozen middle-aged men peeing on our house and our neighbors were accosted when they asked one man, I thought reasonably, to stop urinating on their window. The police were called, but after they left, the problem returned."

Well, that's simply intolerable. Much as I've enjoyed having the Latino Fiesta here, it's time to say that it's too big, too disruptive, and too badly managed, to be here in Mount Pleasant. This your-yard-is-my-toilet behavior is the final blow. I've been having a discussion with CM Graham on this subject. Unless some very good answers are provided by the Fiesta sponsors, *guaranteeing* Mount Pleasant that these problems will not be permitted to happen again, I will oppose having the Fiesta here in 2012.

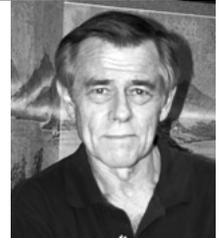
I mentioned last month that **redistricting of the ANCs** is under way, making changes to ANC and SMD (single-member district) boundaries to adjust for the results of the 2000 census. This affects Mount Pleasant especially, because the decrease in population here requires that our ANC be reduced from six to five commissioners.

I complained vehemently about many aspects of this redistricting process, including the composition of this District councilmember-appointed task force. Of the 11 members, only one, Gregg Edwards, is from Mount Pleasant. It's not reasonable to have our ANC and SMD boundaries decided by people who don't live here and don't necessarily know our neighborhood. And there surely should have been

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at least one other Mount Pleasant voice, to speak for the row-house residents, given that Gregg is a vocal advocate for the apartment-house community, and has no love for the row-house side of the neighborhood. I believe that we ANC commissioners must work for the benefit of everyone in Mount Pleasant, equally, not favoring "easties" versus "westies", or row-house owners versus apartment-house renters. Mount Pleasant is proud of its diversity, and the ANC should be supportive of that diversity, bringing people together, not separating them.

That unfortunate task force composition culminated in Gregg's proposal to split Mount Pleasant in two, east and west, the neighborhood east of 17th Street seceding to become part of the Columbia Heights ANC, while the neighborhood west of 17th would be left with a little 3-commissioner rump ANC of its own. The purpose was to deprive the residents of Mount Pleasant west of 17th Street of any voice in matters along and adjacent to Mount Pleasant Street, leaving all such matters to the east-side apartment-house residents.

I objected to this, and I got a lot of help from residents, angered by this attempt to divide Mount Pleasant in two, east and west. E-mails objecting to this proposal were sent by residents to the task force members, and to the District Councilmembers in charge of this process.

Nonetheless, task force chairman Alan Roth incorporated Gregg's proposal in his final "5-ANC alternative" recommendation on October 3, an option that would create a new "Georgia Avenue" ANC in Ward One (not a bad idea). One of the task force members, Shelore Williams, then offered a motion to keep the 5-ANC option, but restore 16th Street as the border between the Mount Pleasant and Columbia Heights ANCs, restoring the integrity of Mount Pleasant. Shelore's resolution squeaked through, by a vote of 6 to 5. Had Mount Pleasant residents not spoken up in opposition to this split-Mount-Pleasant plan, Shelore's resolution would surely have failed.

Gregg didn't give up, asking that his split-Mount-Pleasant plan be included in the task force recommendations as a third alternative. That, happily, didn't fly.

If this notion of splitting Mount Pleasant in two hadn't lost at the task force, I was certainly going to fight it at the Council.

As for Mount Pleasant, **the two recommendations sent by the task force to the Council leave our ANC boundaries unchanged.** That may sound trivial, but this was far from an

easy outcome. The ANC redistricting law is extremely badly written, confusing and ambiguous. The Office of Planning interprets it as requiring that every single-member district, everywhere in DC, have a population of 2000, plus or minus 100. Plainly, if an ANC is to be composed of a certain number of these 2000-resident SMDs, then the population of the ANC must be a certain multiple of 2000 residents, or very close to it. Mount Pleasant's 2000-census population, 10,459 residents, is just a few percentage points away from five times 2000, but that's is far enough that it is truly impossible to construct five SMDs in Mount Pleasant that meet that 1900-2100 resident requirement, not without splitting up census blocks.

Alan tried to solve this problem by transferring a chunk of Columbia Heights, between Newton Street and Spring Road, to Mount Pleasant. Nobody liked that idea. Forced to try to solve this 2000-resident-SMD problem, I proposed that a few blocks of Lanier Heights, just south of Harvard Street, be switched to Mount Pleasant, increasing the population to six times 2000. But those Lanier Heights folks evidently weren't keen on joining Mount Pleasant. This was a complicated, time-consuming mess. Our ANC boundaries ought to be defined by *neighborhoods*, not by conglomerations of 2000-resident clusters of census blocks. That was my theme during these meetings: *respect neighborhoods*. Alan Roth disagreed, dismissing neighborhood concepts as vague and changeable, and so not to be allowed to govern ANC boundaries.

I might note that Alan's solution to the Mount Pleasant problem happened to move me out of my own SMD, so I would no longer be able to represent the residents who have elected me to the ANC for five terms. I suppose it's paranoia to think that this was due to my vocal criticisms of this task force. But in the end, with the Columbia Heights and Lanier Heights propositions both off the table, Alan adopted my own map of Mount Pleasant SMDs. That map leaves me in my traditional SMD, able to serve this part of Mount Pleasant as long as I am able and residents are willing to re-elect me.

At the final meeting of this Ward One ANC Redistricting Task Force, the chairperson, Alan Roth, Councilmember Graham's nominee, observed that **“Mount Pleasant was one-seventh of the ward, but contributed six-sevenths of the trouble of this redistricting”**. Yes, and I played a major role in that, leading to a threat by Alan to have me removed from the task force meeting by the police if I continued to “disrupt” his meeting. Well, there are times when one has to be disruptive to be heard. Given that our councilmembers chose to put only Gregg Edwards on this task force to represent all of Mount Pleasant, and Gregg's attempt to gerrymander our ANC to the advantage of his apartment-house constituency, I was forced to be pretty aggressive. I was speaking out for transparency in task force operations, for fairness in Mount Pleasant's representation, and for sensible interpretation of the redistricting regulations.

The **population decrease in Mount Pleasant** is largely in the apartment-house districts, whereas the population actually increased modestly in the row-house SMDs. The “new” ANC1D, as of the 2012 election, will have two SMDs that are predominantly apartment house residents, two that are

mainly row-house residents, and one that is mixed. The nature of this five-commissioner ANC will likely be determined by whoever is elected from that fifth district.

The PSA (Police Service Area) 301 meetings were resumed in September. Lately there have been numerous complaints about men spending their days in Lamont Park, sometimes drinking, sometimes drunk. One resident came to the meeting to talk over this matter with Lt Pate and the other officers. We also had people from Neighbors' Consejo on hand. It was clear that this is a problem with no easy answers.

Lt. Pate said that the MPD is under instructions from the top to deal with this problem. A number of arrests for POCA – Possession of an Open Container of Alcohol – have been made. But that's not a solution to the problem. As the lieutenant affirmed, those arrests seldom go to court, and the men arrested are generally back on the street in short order. There's some evidence that they're discomfited by the arrests, but that has resulted only in their moving a little distance away, e.g., to Kilbourne Place. These homeless men are not capable of simply stopping their consumption of alcohol, and arrest is not an effective deterrent.

The one good outcome of this meeting was a very generous offer by Mr. Tony Ross, Branch Manager of the Mount Pleasant Library, of their toilet facilities to these homeless men. Many of them have no access to toilets during the day, having been forced out onto the street for the day by homeless shelters, and perforce use nearby alleys. Every establishment on Mount Pleasant Street has a sign stating that their bathrooms are for their customers only. It's far better if these men can be persuaded to use the library instead, and thank you to the Mount Pleasant Library for allowing this, and for coming to the PSA meeting to make the offer.

Burglaries are, unhappily, increasing again. There was a brief lull, after the apparent breaking of the group that has been plaguing Crestwood and northern Mount Pleasant: zero burglaries between September 11 and September 21. But then there were 12 burglaries in two weeks, between September 22 and October 6. This rate of burglaries is far above the Mount Pleasant norm. Lt. Pate is aware of the problem, and reports that he is “in the process of coming up with an action plan. . . . We will be passing out flyers on securing homes within the next couple of days.”

Geographically, these burglaries are all over Mount Pleasant, from Monroe Street to Harvard Street, from Walbridge Place to 16th Street.

The **sidewalk cafe at Don Juan's Restaurant** has been a great success, not only for the restaurant, but for the residents of Mount Pleasant, as that sidewalk cafe gives the street an ambience of safety and a friendly presence. Alberto Ferrufino asked me for help in obtaining permission to expand the sidewalk cafe, adding tables between the Carry-Out door and 17th Street. I was happy to be able to provide that assistance, and he's now got the required Public Space permission.

The next <i>business</i> meeting of the ANC will be on Tuesday, October 18, 7:00 pm . The next <i>informal</i> meeting is scheduled for November 1, 7:00 pm .
