

Jack's October report

At the September 16 meeting, the ANC:

- Advised a Council committee to approve and send to the Council a bill adding Mount Pleasant to Great Streets designation;
- Passed a resolution advising DDOT “to implement a parking permit program for employees” in Mount Pleasant;
- Approved a measure facilitating the use of ANC simultaneous interpretation equipment by other organizations.

Readers of my newsletter may recall that I pressed for a **parking permit program for employees of Mount Pleasant institutions** back in 2009, and came pretty close to accomplishing it, too. The problem then was that we were extending RPP – Residential Permit Parking – to Monroe, Newton, and Ingleside, and this was surely going to present a problem to employees of the Stoddard Baptist Home, and to teachers and staff at Bancroft Elementary. There's no commercial parking lot in Mount Pleasant, so what were they to do?

The program was dropped before it went into effect (though you can still spot “1DD” signs around the neighborhood, indicating where possessors of these permits were to be allowed to park; on my block, for example).

Well, China Terrell decided to revive my effort, hence the resolution noted above. But she deleted certain essential elements of my parking-permit program:

- 1) The permits under my program were to cost these users about \$2.50 per day, so as not to undercut bus fares. Under China's version, the permits would be free;
- 2) The proceeds of the sales of these permits were to be used for beneficial purposes within Mount Pleasant, to compensate residents for the use of their curbside parking space. Under China's version, there would be no proceeds;
- 3) The permits under my program would be valid only on certain blocks known to have free space during the day, necessarily on blocks some distance from Bancroft, Stoddard, and Mount Pleasant Street. Under China's program, employees could park anywhere in Mount Pleasant.

China insisted on free parking, unrestricted, to Mount Pleasant business employees. I protested this change, but she retorted that “the latino trabajadores that we are helping with our resolution” could not afford to pay for parking.

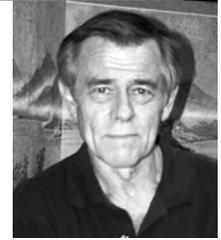
I could not possibly support China's resolution, not without the provisions above. On the other hand, I didn't want to vote against the concept of parking for Mount Pleasant employees, which I do support. Yasmin and Adam backed China, so she had the votes to pass her resolution. I abstained, knowing that my vote would not change the outcome. Furthermore, there is absolutely no possibility that the DC Government would ever support free neighborhood-street parking for commuters.

There's an election coming. Vote for old Jack, and keep these newsletters coming! Nobody's running against me, but still, every vote counts!

ANC 1D03 NEWSLETTER #143

Jack McKay, October 12, 2014

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There's been talk of a project to **rehabilitate Beach Drive**, a job that would certainly cause some disruption, not only because of the closing of the road for periods, but for the diversion of Beach Drive traffic onto 16th Street.

This is in the works, but is hardly imminent. The Federal Highway Administration will advertise for bids in January, 2015. The scheduled completion date for the project is December, 2017. Yes, three years from now. It's a bit early to worry about the effects of this project on your daily travels.

There's a “**tree space**” between our sidewalks and the curbs, and we residents are responsible for the maintenance of that space (i.e., keeping it clear of trash). Some residents undertake plantings in their tree spaces, which is certainly allowed (no permit required), but is subject to certain regulations, in particular:

DCMR 24, 109.11 Planting material used to beautify a tree space shall have a shallow root system and shall not be allowed to grow to a height in excess of eighteen inches (18 in.).

Some tree-space plantings in Mount Pleasant have gotten quite tall, and this presents problems to people trying to exit cars on the passenger side. Just opening a car door can be difficult, if a big bush is growing right next to the curb. **Please, control your tree-space vegetation!**

Typically Mount Pleasant is hit with four **burglaries** in a month. But at the end of September, and beginning of October, there were five in the space of one week:

9/28/14	1828 - 1899 Block of Harvard Street
9/29/14	3156 - 3199 Block of 18th Street
10/01/14	1700 - 1737 Block of Newton Street
10/02/14	1800 - 1899 Block of Kenyon Street
10/03/14	3101 - 3199 Block of 16th Street

There's no pattern here that I can see. The clearance rate for burglaries in the District is a pitiful 9.3%; that is, 91% of burglaries are never “closed by arrest”. A resident's best move is to avoid being an easy victim. Burglars look for easy entry points. Because three-quarters of Mount Pleasant residents have jobs or attend school, there are plenty of unoccupied houses during the day, so burglars have many “opportunities” to choose from. They avoid, naturally, houses with evident alarm systems, or with dogs.

Residents concerned about this might attend the PSA 408 meeting on October 22, at La Casa Community Center, 7 pm.

I noted last month that our current **visitor parking passes** will be valid through the end of the year, despite the

September expiration date written on them, and that residents will have to apply for future passes, rather than having them delivered automatically. A DDOT web site has been set up for registration for visitor passes: vpp.ddot.dc.gov/vpp/

New on Mount Pleasant Street: the **Zabver Thai**, for Thai carry-out. Yelp lists 5 reviews, and every one gave it 5 stars! “A godsend”, one called it. We especially liked the “Moo Ta-Kite” – grilled marinated pork.

The proprietors, Mai and Wat, are marvelous. Wat previously was employed by the Sala Thai, and complained that they had modified their dishes to suit American tastes. He's going to do things the authentic Thai way! Give it a try, let's make this fine addition to the neighborhood welcome and prosperous.

Here's a note from my September, 2010 newsletter, concerning proposed work on **Oakwood Terrace**:

There are plans coming for a development on the vacant lot at the convergence of 17th Street and Oakwood Terrace. The property owner, Carmel Greer, wants to keep the neighborhood advised of what is planned – no surprises! It appears that no zoning variances will be needed, and ANC “permission” will not be required. I'm sure some neighbors will be unhappy at seeing this wooded lot built on. So let's have a conversation about it, and see what will be agreeable to the neighborhood.

Well, that worked out rather badly. No one paid attention at the time to my clear warning that “some neighbors will be unhappy at seeing this wooded lot built on”, and no “conversation” followed.

Historic Mount Pleasant (HMP) reviewed, and supported, the Oakwood Terrace plan. They're the historic preservation voice of Mount Pleasant, and their opinion counts heavily at the HPRB. (ANC opinions are ignored, because we're not recognized as having any historic preservation expertise.)

In December, 2010, the HPRB reviewed the proposal, and “passed a motion approving the conceptual site plan, height and massing of the three rowhouses and retaining wall, with suggestions for minor revisions as the plan is further developed. Approved: 8-0.”

Two years and a bit later, in March, 2013, the project came up for a routine renewal by HPRB of the 2010 approval, that having a two-year lifetime. That was when some neighbors discovered the project (Oakwood Terrace doesn't get my newsletter), and the dismay I had cautioned about in 2010 suddenly came to pass, in spades.

A certain commissioner later complained bitterly that I had “guided [this project] right past the ANC”. Not exactly. Historic Mount Pleasant supported the project, as did the Historic Preservation Office staff, so in terms of historic preservation, there was nothing for the ANC to do. The HPRB certainly isn't going to take our amateur's advice over that of the recognized historic preservation experts, in the neighborhood, and at the Historic Preservation Office. The District's historic preservation law does not require, or even allow, the HPRB to consider whether the immediate neighbors, or the ANC, approve of the proposed work. It's supposed to be an expert, technical decision: is the proposed construction “compatible”, or is it not?

And nothing that the ANC did in 2013, despite China Terrell's strenuous efforts, made any difference. After listening patiently to all the complaints, the HPRB approved, conditionally, the project:

The Board approved the design development of the concept and delegated further review to the staff, on condition that the applicant: further refines the bay at the south end of the building; composes the rear elevation more formally, making the windows more consistent with those of the front and bringing the precast cornice/parapet and belt course around the building; better balances the proportion of solid to void on the rear elevation, with wider windows and smaller door openings (transoms reduced in height); conceals the electric meters; uses either red or buff brick on the whole, but with the shades varied between the end units and the center of the façade; and submits to the staff, prior to permitting, an arborist's report on the likely impacts of the construction on oak tree at 17th Street. Vote: 6-0

The project has surfaced again at the HPRB, “revised concept/construction of two flats”, “probably to be heard in November”.

In September, the Office of the Inspector General (OIG) issued a report strongly criticizing the District's implementation of speed cameras, and the District's parking ticket policies as well. Experts advise that the fines imposed by **speed cameras** are to be used *only* for traffic safety purposes, *not* for general revenues, to avoid the appearance of the systems being more about revenues than traffic safety. But the District has ignored that advice, leading to headlines like this: “*D.C. Mayor Vincent Gray Proposes More Speed Cameras to Balance Budget*”. And when the Council proposed a reduction in speeding fines, the executive branch protested that the reduction in revenues would unbalance the District's budget. The impression is unavoidable that the hundreds of speed cameras springing up around the District are intended primarily to raise money for the DC Government (\$175 million in 2013, no small amount).

The District Council, concerned about this appearance that speed cameras are just a means of taxing motorists, instructed DDOT to study speed camera locations to see if a “safety nexus” could be found for each. As I reported in my March newsletter, that study found a safety nexus for each and every one of 295 speed camera locations, existing, planned, and proposed. *Not one speed camera failed DDOT's study.* The OIG report noted that this study appeared to be merely a “rubber stamp” for the speed-camera program.

Concerning **parking tickets**, the OIG report quoted an unidentified District official: “*If you get a parking ticket, you are guilty until you have proven yourself innocent . . . That has worked well for us.*”

On September 24 a District Council committee heard testimony about this report. The councilmembers – Grosso, Cheh, Wells – defended the District's policies, including the “guilty until proven innocent” practice, and harshly criticized the OIG for their decision to report on DC parking- and traffic-ticket policies. District policies were none of the Inspector General's business, asserted CM Cheh.

The next meeting of the ANC will be on Tuesday, October 21, 7:00 pm, at the Mount Pleasant Library.
