

## September report to constituents

Here is news of the **September 6 ANC monthly meeting**, and other happenings in Mount Pleasant. At the monthly meeting, the ANC.

At the September meeting, the ANC:

- Asked the Board of Zoning Adjustment to deny a request that the appeal of the seven-condo development at 1636 Irving be dismissed without a hearing, stating that a hearing was necessary if only to air the important issues involved.
- Endorsed “Walk Our Children to School Day” (October 3)
- Asked the Historic Preservation Review Board to delay its hearing of a condominium development at 3508-3510 16th Street, to give us time to investigate it (we’re a bit sensitive to condo projects now).
- Endorsed a public space permit application for an already-installed payphone at 3124 Mount Pleasant Street (the Mount Pleasant Supermarket). With cellphones becoming universal, pay phones are rapidly disappearing, yet a considerable number of low-income residents depend on public pay phones.
- Requested that a pedestrian way be established through the Bell/Lincoln grounds, connecting Hiatt Place and Lamont Street, to make a pedestrian-friendly route to Columbia Heights, and especially the Metro Station, preferable to the narrow, noisy, traffic-plagued Irving Street route.
- Asked that the recreational facilities that once were available adjacent to the Lincoln Middle School, e.g., the soccer field, be upgraded, and again opened to community use after the completion of the school construction.
- Asked DDOT to make the intersection of 18th Street and Kilbourne Place an all-way stop, consistent with other intersections in our neighborhood, because of limited visibility of traffic from Kilbourne Place, and to avoid problems due to a possible erroneous assumption by drivers emerging from Kilbourne that this is an all-way stop, like 18th and Lamont, and 18th and Kenyon.
- Asked DDOT to investigate means of preventing Park Road through traffic, eastbound towards 16th Street, from using the 1600 block of Lamont as a cut-through to 16th.

## ANC 1D03 NEWSLETTER #37

Jack McKay, September 27, 2005

Jack McKay  
3200 19th St NW, DC 20010  
462-8692  
jack.mckay@verizon.net

**Zipcar/Flexcar reserved parking spots** have appeared on Mount Pleasant Street, and some residents are looking forward to having those cars accessible on the street, instead of in alleys. I’m told that there’s some confusion at DDOT about the signs for those spots, and the short-term rental cars will appear in a week or two.

The rebuilding of **the 3400 block of Mount Pleasant Street** (adjacent to Bancroft) is finally complete, some 15 months after using the streetlight project to revive this project. DDOT’s work was supposed to be completed in April, but Pepco not only forced months of delay, but dug up a good deal of DDOT’s nice work. Now we’re pressing DDOT to make Pepco repair some of the damage they’ve done. This job has been a nightmare, but now it’s virtually done. We now have good curbs and rain gutters, safe sidewalks, and a street wide enough for both-sides parking, without risking scrapes from passing trucks.

The next **ANC monthly meeting** will be on **Tuesday, October 4**, 7 pm, La Casa Community Center, 3166 Mt Pleasant Street. On the agenda: liquor license transfers, ANC notification of DDOT Public Space permit applications, ANC notification of DCRA zoning decisions, a stop sign for Monroe Street at Brown, the DDOT reply to the ANC speed hump resolution, HPRB review of 3510 16th Street, a liquor license for Pupusa San Miguel.

A WASA contractor has been replacing those infamous lead water service lines along 19th Street, including, as I reported last month, the 3300 block, north of Park Road. I called DDOT to check on that, and they halted the work, because that block was repaved just last summer, and newly paved streets are supposed to be protected against excavations for five years. After some testy exchanges between DDOT and WASA, it was agreed that the lead lines would be replaced, because DDOT has judged the paving job unsatisfactory, and intends to have it redone under warranty. Now that once-smooth road has a series of lumpy patches. When will DDOT repave it again? I sure don’t know.

Residents should realize that **replacing the lead service line with copper pipe does not necessarily end the lead-in-water problem**. My lead readings were 23 ppb on first draw, 39 on second, and a resident of the 3300 block reported similar numbers. Those first-draw readings are due to lead *in our own plumbing*, not to the lead service line.

It was only in 1986 that Federal legislation put a stop to the use of lead-based solder in copper plumbing. Most of us have plumbing older than that, and the recent measurements show that our own plumbing is causing serious lead levels in our first-draw water. A value of 23 ppb is far from safe; the EPA “action level” is 15 ppb, and the only “safe” value for lead is zero. Since it’s impractical to replace all the plumbing in your house, we must continue the same precautions we’ve been taking since this lead service line fiasco began. Even with the lead service line gone, there still may be lead in our first-draw water.

There was a **fire at the Argyle Convenient Store** early the morning of August 30, due to an electrical fault – an overloaded circuit – near the ATM machine. Rocky Rakani has been running that store for 20 years, and has never missed a day, until now. The place is burned out rather completely (the firewall protected the apartments above), and the silver lining to the fire is the opportunity for a thorough renovation of the shop, interior and exterior. Years ago there were doors on the Park Road side, which will be restored, though the entrance will remain on the Mount Pleasant Street side. The faux-brick facing will be removed, and the exterior walls restored to their original condition, matching the rest of the Argyle building.

Rocky's very upset. That little store is his life, and it will be months before the shop is again in operation.

One incident shows what a remarkable fellow Rocky is. In January, 2004, quoting the police report, "C1 [Rocky] reports that S1 asked for some dog food. S1 then produced a semi-auto silver gun, pointing it at C1, stating, "open the cashier and give me the money." C1 grabbed the gun stating, "go ahead motherf\*\*\*r--shoot me. I'm not giving you anything." (Note: this is not recommended!) The would-be robber fled.

We hope to see Rocky and his shop back in business, soon.

In my August newsletter, I warned of "young men from Columbia Heights, prowling our 'wealthy' neighborhood, looking for easy victims". I believe that this is what led to the **homicide on Irving Street**. Greg Shipe, a newcomer to Mount Pleasant, just moved into the apartment house at 1615 Kenyon, was walking his dog in the 1700 block of Irving Street at 10:45 pm the evening of Saturday, September 17. Neighbors heard a single gunshot, and found Mr Shipe dead.

No one saw this happen, nor did anyone see people fleeing the scene. The MPD detectives believe that this was a botched robbery, and they're looking for two youths, one on a bicycle, as "persons of interest". I speculate that this was a pair of teenagers who were attempting a robbery, then ran in fright when the gun went off. There's no reason to believe that anyone was targeting Mr Shipe for murder, and no apparent reason even why robbers should have shot him. Did he resist? Did the gun go off by accident? No one but the guy who pulled the trigger knows.

I have long worried about robberies, which are the most serious crime that plagues Mount Pleasant, because they threaten to become deadly encounters. Lately the frequency of robberies has been relatively low; just four here in August, versus the average of five or six per month. But these robberies have lately been done by youths in their mid-teens, barely more than children, increasing the danger of physical harm. I'd rather be robbed by a veteran mugger than by an adrenalin-hyped, judgment-deficient teenager. Consider the killing of the Dupont Circle waiter in August 2004. The victim protested that he was carrying no cash, whereupon the 15-year-old attempting to rob him shot him dead.

I advise people to carry some cash, and be prepared to hand it over without argument. Carrying none, thinking to avoid a robbery loss, can cost you your life.

What should we do, to prevent this from happening again? The best deterrent to crime is some substantial probability of being caught and punished. Unfortunately, **the District's rate of closing robberies by arrest is a dismal 14%**, well below the national average of 23% for cities of over 250,000 population. That low closure rate is a weak deterrent. A robber has an 86% chance of getting away, free not only to rob again, as most will, but living proof to his buddies that robbery succeeds, encouraging them to follow his example. Since 2003 I have been asking why the District's closure rate is so low, and what we should do to bring it up.

There are some who say that the way to prevent robberies is simply to improve conditions on Mount Pleasant Street. They cite the very popular "broken windows" theory, that a disorderly-appearing environment encourages serious crime. But even one of the authors of that theory says this, twenty-plus years on: "*I still to this day do not know if improving order will or will not reduce crime.* People have not understood that this was a speculation." In short, even the author of the "broken windows" theory would not assert that reducing disorderly conduct on Mount Pleasant Street will reduce burglaries and robberies.

In fact, we have powerful evidence right here against the "broken windows" speculation. After the two homicides of October and November 2003, we had an overwhelming police presence on Mount Pleasant Street, including police cruisers and the MPD van posted on the Street 24/7. We had police officers, and hence orderliness on the street, and zero tolerance of crime, in huge measure. Despite this, we suffered an *increase* in the number of neighborhood robberies. In January of 2004, despite all those police, despite the police-state atmosphere on Mount Pleasant Street, we had 17 robberies, more than in the months preceding, or in any month since, and triple our average of five or six. One of our shops was robbed within sight of the MPD van, in broad daylight – and the robber made good his escape.

Many people want to see cleaner conditions, and less disorderly conduct, on the Street, and that's fine, as an end in itself. But neither increased numbers of officers, nor strict imposition of order on Mount Pleasant Street, will decrease the robberies that are our most serious crime of violence, and which evidently led to the tragedy of Mr Shipe's death. I will continue to argue for more resources for detectives to solve and close robberies *by arrest*, putting the robbers away, and discouraging their friends from trying.