

Jack's September report

On September 2, the ANC did the following:

- Engaged two assistants, Adebisi Odegbile and Laticia J. Jefferson, to help us with grant management, bookkeeping, and miscellaneous staff work
- Established a grants program, limited to \$5000 total
- Named Jane Zara Chair and Gregg Edwards member of the Public Education Committee
- Advised the DC Public Library to include the ANC in its considerations (the complaint is exclusion from discussion of the remodeling of the Mount Pleasant Library)
- Advised the District Department of Transportation (DDOT) to “engage in serious discourse” with this ANC on the Traffic Study (I voted “no”, preferring to see the results of the study before complaining that they didn't follow ANC advice)
- Advised the District Council to remove Mount Pleasant from the law currently near passage that would ban “single sales” of alcoholic beverages in Wards 2 and 6, and Mount Pleasant (only) in Ward 1.

Councilmember Graham's **single-sales bill** has been modified to include Wards 2 and 6. Wards 4, 7, and 8 already have legislated bans. Why not a city-wide ban, if we're going to go that way? That would make more sense than this piecemeal approach. Then we would likely discover that alcohol abusers will get their alcohol, one way or another, despite these attempts at mini-Prohibition.

Passage of Mr Graham's bill has been put off until a third hearing, set for October 7. (District Council recently lost a court decision based on their passing a bill significantly changed between first and second readings.) Mr Graham mentioned hearings for Ward 1 to see if “some consensus or agreement” could be reached here. He's quite dismayed that not one of the four ANCs in his own ward endorses his singles ban. We object, on grounds which I've previously cited here. ANC 1A (Columbia Heights) opposes the ban, and 1B (U Street/Cardozo) recently declined to pass a resolution supporting a ban for that area. Adams Morgan, ANC 1C, considers the singles ban irrelevant.

Ban advocates cannot show a single example of a problem drinker whose behavior has been reformed by the ban, but simply point to the improvements observed in singles-ban neighborhoods, never admitting that those improvements come about only because the badly behaved men go away, taking their noxious behavior into somebody else's neighborhood. Surely we can do better than that.

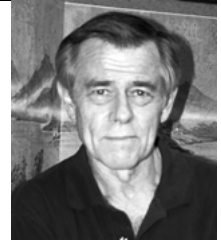
Councilmember Graham's bill will pass, there's never been any doubt about that. On the District Council, only Councilmember Mendelson has had the political courage to oppose single sales bans, recognizing that they do not in fact solve the indigent-public-drinker problem.

On July 11, Mr Graham held a public hearing concerning his single-sales ban for Mount Pleasant. Curiously, only ban supporters were notified of this hearing. Our ANC, well known to be in opposition, was not notified, and learned of the hearings only after they were over.

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I was surprised to see (on the video recording of the hearing) **Historic Mount Pleasant** (HMP), alongside the Mount Pleasant Neighborhood Alliance (MPNA), testify in support of the singles ban. What does the single-sales ban have to do with the preservation of “historic” architecture? Nothing, obviously, and I wonder why the HMP board endorsed this venture into an unrelated neighborhood issue.

If HMP had public records, one could perhaps find out when and why they decided to take sides in the single-sales issue. But they meet in private, and publish neither meeting minutes nor board resolutions. There's an HMP Web site, but it is singularly devoid of information, such as the group's by-laws. There's a link to their 2007 annual report, but that link doesn't work. The Mount Pleasant Forum, where I post every ANC resolution and all meeting minutes, has a section set aside for the HMP, but the HMP doesn't use it.

Besides taking sides in a neighborhood controversy unrelated to historic preservation, HMP has a powerful voice in our permit applications. An HMP officer meets privately with Historic Preservation Office (HPO) bureaucrats, deciding which of our applications will be approved, and which will be denied or challenged by the HPO. What advice do they give to the HPO concerning our permit applications, and why? Good luck on finding out. When a red “Stop Work” order appears, halting work on a job, is it because the HMP has reported a resident to the HPO? That's commonly suspected, but no one knows, because the HMP doesn't reveal its actions to the neighborhood.

Communication with the neighborhood seems to be absent from HMP's mission. It seems to me that the HMP, serving as the HPO's Mount Pleasant watchdog, influencing our permit applications, and now taking positions on controversial neighborhood issues, owes residents some transparency.

I've seen home contractor's trucks with parking tickets, for Residential Permit Parking (RPP) violation. What in the world are the contractors servicing our homes supposed to do? Take the bus, hauling their tools and supplies in back-packs? We residents certainly don't benefit from this sort of “protection”. I have heard that some contractors won't work on homes in RPP-zoned neighborhoods, because of the parking tickets.

This will help: the **Pilot Visitor Parking Program** for Mount Pleasant is supposed to start “before the end of 2008”. Every household on an RPP block will be given a permanent visitor's pass, which the resident can lend out to visitors, including home care workers *and contractors*.

I have pressed also for a provision for employees of Mount Pleasant schools and businesses to be able to purchase daytime-only parking passes, so that they can park on RPP blocks, in lieu of commercial parking garages. We've got to get such a program going, because the day will come when Mount Pleasant is 100% RPP, ending the block-by-block zoning that concentrates all non-permit cars on the few remaining unzoned blocks. If visitors and contractors and home employees can park on RPP blocks, the parking congestion on unzoned blocks will be eased.

The Mount Pleasant Traffic Study counted vacant curbside parking spots on weekdays, and found well over 500 vacancies around the neighborhood during the day (mainly on RPP blocks, of course). We propose that up to 85 daytime-only permits be issued, for perhaps \$50 a month, the proceeds to be returned to the neighborhood for our benefit.

The good news is that **robberies are down**; just one so far in September. Odd: a guy jumped out of a car on Irving Street, grabbed a purse from a pedestrian, jumped back into the car and fled with his buddies. Not your usual M.O. A witness came to the victim's aid, got the tag number of the thief's car, and called the police. This is Mount Pleasant's best defense against crime: neighbors who are unafraid to get involved.

The bad news is that **burglaries are way up**. Usually we have five or six in a month. As of late September, we're up to 14. (The record is 20, set in August 2007.) Most have been in the row-house district of Mount Pleasant south of Park Road. The M.O. amounts to prowling through our back yards until an unlocked door is found.

In last month's newsletter, I noted that we were in record-low territory for August **rainfall**, and many of our street trees needed watering help. Two days later, the remnants of Hurricane Fay passed through, dropping a welcome three-quarters of an inch, though still leaving August with less than one-third its normal rainfall. A week after that, Tropical Storm Hannah dumped four inches on us, ending our drought.

Readers know that Don Jaime's and Haydee's Restaurants can now offer **live music**, having overcome the longtime ban imposed by the MPNA. Don Juan's Restaurant also has its entertainment endorsement and can offer karaoke. Mount Pleasant seems to be surviving, without harm, the arrival of live entertainment.

Aleks Duni, proprietor of the Marx Café, was reluctant to join in the live-music battles, and instead has been begging the MPNA directly for relief from the live-music ban written into his "voluntary agreement". But the MPNA, as of this July, has allowed him only a pittance. Marx can offer live music only at "Sunday brunch", and just one night a week, only from 9 pm until midnight. Live music must be played "at a volume level that allows patrons to talk at a conversational level". But if the music is not audible *outside* the restaurant, as it must not be according to city noise regulations, what concern is it of the MPNA how loud the music is *inside* the restaurant? Nobody's forcing anyone to patronize the place.

The MPNA also continues its ban on dancing. The café shall not "permit the moving of tables and chairs for the purpose of

dancing". This is a restriction imposed on the restaurant *patrons*, who shall not be permitted to dance in the Marx Café. Why not? Why this puritanical ban on dancing?

Aleks wouldn't join Hear Mount Pleasant and the ANC in the battle for live music, so now he's on his own, at the mercy of the MPNA. He's not finding much.

Speaking of live music, **Don Juan's Restaurant** is now permitted to offer, in addition to karaoke, "roaming mariachis". I hear that someone – from the MPNA? -- filed an anonymous complaint about their live mariachi music last week, because the mariachis weren't "roaming". It was the MPNA that testified last April that they didn't object to "roaming" mariachis. Why are "roaming" mariachis okay, but mariachi bands that don't "roam" aren't? This is weird.

Residents of the **2000 block of Park Road** have long complained about drivers speeding on their block, into and out of Rock Creek Park. That one block is 42 feet wide, 10 feet wider than our other streets, and that width encourages increased traffic speed. On September 23, DDOT met with block residents to talk about what could be done.

Because Park Road is a "minor arterial", "vertical" measures like speed humps are not allowed, and only by visually narrowing the road might traffic speed be reduced. The road could be narrowed by building a sidewalk on the park side of the street. This would also make getting into or out of a car on the passenger side much easier, and walking along Park Road safer. It would also permit a crosswalk, and pedestrian crossing light, at the bottom of the hill, near the bridge.

The bike lanes were put in not for bicycles, but in the naïve belief that they would visually narrow the road and make drivers slow down. They didn't work, and they're not much use to bicyclists, either, putting us too close to the cars, in the car-door danger zone.

The parking lane is substandard in width, just seven feet, less than the DDOT standard of nine feet, and less even than the DDOT "minimum" of eight feet. The DDOT pavement paint crew couldn't even paint a complete lane marking, being blocked by parked cars extending more than seven feet from the curb. Parked cars commonly intrude into the bike lane.

The new Ward One DDOT traffic planner, Gabriela Vega, will return with firmed-up ideas, and then the block residents will decide what they want done. By the way, the Mount Pleasant Traffic Study, which is separate from this Park Road matter, is approaching its conclusion, perhaps in November.

The **Elsie Stokes Charter School**, located on 16th Street just south of Park Road, has moved away, to Brookland. I'm sorry to hear that; I thought this little school added interest to Mount Pleasant, offering a French/English dual-language track along with the now-commonplace Spanish/English, as well as Jenna Bush on the teaching staff. It did cause some traffic problems, due to the parade of parents' cars dropping off and picking up the children. Now Brookland residents are complaining about the school's traffic.

The next ANC meeting will be on **Tuesday, October 7**, 7:00 pm, La Casa Community Center, 3166 Mt. Pleasant St.