

Jack's September report

On August 18, the ANC did the following:

- Endorsed the application by the Capital City Public Charter School to move its upper school to 3220-3224 16th Street; and
- Agreed to co-sponsor the “Celebrando la Familia Latina” event, planned to provide free legal services to Spanish-speaking residents on September 6.

On September 1, the ANC:

- Unanimously endorsed the holding of Fiesta DC, the Latino Fiesta, here in Mount Pleasant, on September 27.

What happened to the **August newsletter**? Well, I was 500 miles to the north, on our little island in Canada, enjoying the last of the summer. While DC baked in the August heat, I was cutting wood and building fires to keep warm. On only one of our eight days there did the high temperature for the day surpass 70 degrees. Did I mention that the low temperature recorded there last winter was 31 below zero?

So the August newsletter is instead an early-September newsletter. For the past seven years I've delivered my newsletters late in each month, to come shortly before our monthly meeting. Now our monthly business meetings are on the third Tuesday, instead of the first, so this transition to newsletter delivery early in the month may be permanent.

Last March, I noted with dismay that **Fiesta DC**, the annual Latino fiesta, had decided to move to Columbia Heights. On 14th Street, north of Spring Road, they could have much more space than is possible here. I said at the time that I wouldn't mind if they had trouble in Columbia Heights and moved back here.

Well, on August 18, guess what: the Fiesta DC folks called us and asked if they could have their 2009 Fiesta here. It seems the Fire and Emergency Services people refused to allow the closure of 14th Street north of the Newton Street fire station, so the Fiesta could not get its event permits. Why it took them months to come to this conclusion, and stunned everyone with this outcome only six weeks before the date of the event, I don't know.

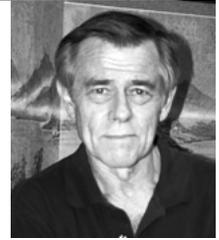
So here we are, happy to have the Fiesta back, but under great pressure to make arrangements in just six weeks. Last year the Fiesta caused horrendous traffic problems, due to utterly incompetent traffic management by the Metropolitan Police. At the ANC meeting on September 1, we, and other residents, made it very clear to the Fiesta people that we could not have a recurrence of that traffic chaos. They understand that, and shortly there will be a meeting of all parties to work out a good traffic management plan.

The problems last year were due mainly to the closure of Irving Street. Many drivers who got all the way to Mount Pleasant Street, only to discover the closure, found themselves in a one-way trap, with no clear way out. I'm proposing that Irving be kept open, except during the parade. Because Irving is one way, the crossing route can be a single lane of carefully controlled traffic. The long red light causes most Irving Street traffic to come to a stop at Mount Pleasant, so these cars will be starting from a stop, not racing across

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the street. This could work, with adequate safety. But the authorities, including Councilmember Graham, are opposing my proposal.

The 1800 blocks of Monroe and Newton Streets, all of Ingleside Terrace, and the 3300 block of 19th Street **are now posted for Residential Permit Parking**. This was necessary to put a stop to these blocks being a public parking lot for every car in the neighborhood that doesn't have an RPP sticker, in particular, the numerous resident-owned cars here that aren't registered in DC, and so cannot have RPP stickers.

Of course, nothing the District does goes without some hiccups. There's supposed to be a period of several weeks after signposts go up before RPP tickets are issued, to give residents a chance to notice the signposts and get their RPP permits. DDOT said two weeks. The Parking Enforcement officer I spoke to said “not before the end of September”.

But surprise! On Monday, August 31, just four days after the signs went up, one eager Parking Enforcement officer wrote at least 16 tickets, probably more, on Monroe Street. It seems that the instructions to these officers to leave these blocks alone listed 19th, Ingleside, and Newton, but not Monroe.

I got that fixed promptly, so no more tickets were issued after Monday. As for those tickets, DPW (which runs Parking Enforcement) agrees that those are to be “voided”. If you got one, deny the violation by mail, noting that enforcement wasn't to begin until mid-September, at the earliest.

RPP posting on these blocks has already reduced parking congestion, providing more parking for residents of the blocks. Many of the cars with out-of-state tags will find other homes. Either the owners will move them to other unzoned blocks in Mount Pleasant (not helpful), or they'll break down and register their cars in DC, then park them on their own blocks, instead of using Monroe/Newton/Ingleside.

We proceeded with RPP zoning of these blocks only with the promise from DDOT that there would be **daytime-only commuter parking passes** made available, at modest cost, to legitimate employees of Mount Pleasant institutions and businesses, most importantly Bancroft Elementary and the Stoddard Baptist Home. Councilmember Graham headed off that program, upon hearing from residents who complained either that the cost of these passes (\$2.50/day) was excessive, or that no such commuter parking passes should be offered at any price. Mr Graham insisted that DDOT hold a “community meeting” to determine neighborhood sentiment: do residents support parking for Bancroft and Stoddard folks?

The DDOT meeting, originally set for May 20, never took place, and DDOT seems to have ignored Mr Graham's repeated requests that the meeting be rescheduled. "I am asking Director Klein to tell us the latest plan for this meeting", he wrote on June 11. No reply from DDOT. My statement last May that the meeting was "postponed indefinitely" was right on the mark.

In frustration, with the Bancroft school year beginning, Mr Graham has decided to call his own community meeting to discuss the daytime parking passes. This is scheduled for September 21, 6:30 pm, La Casa Community Center, 3166 Mount Pleasant Street. Oddly, it's not clear that DDOT will attend the meeting. Curious things are going on here.

I have noted many times that Mount Pleasant has plenty of parking space for employees of Bancroft and Stoddard, and other neighborhood establishments. They've been parking here all along, on the unzoned blocks, yet the Traffic Study counted more than 500 vacant parking spots in the neighborhood on a typical workday. Daytime commuters are not our parking problem, which comes in the evening, when residents come home in large numbers. The day-pass program gives commuters to Mount Pleasant the equivalent of a commercial parking lot, allows us to control how many permits are issued, prevents downtown commuters from parking here and taking the bus downtown, and rewards the neighborhood with some of the parking-pass revenues.

I hope residents who support Bancroft, in particular, will attend this meeting and speak up in support of allowing commuters to park on designated streets, west of 18th only, where there's ample parking space available during the day.

"On August 13, 2009 at 1:13 A.M., in the 3200 block of Adams Mill Road, Northwest, **a robbery and an assault was committed with a handgun where the subject fired multiple gunshots at the victim.**

"After excellent police work and swift investigation by the Third District Detective's Office an arrest warrant was issued for the subject today. Less than an hour ago, the subject was located and arrested in the District of Columbia and will face criminal charges of robbery and assault with a dangerous weapon (handgun)." -- Inspector Jacob Kishter, MPD

I pressed the MPD for more information, because a street robbery with "multiple gunshots" fired is an extraordinary act of violence in Mount Pleasant. Inspector Kishter added that "the involved parties knew each other and it was not a random act". In short, no innocent victims were involved, a critical distinction.

The MPD has cut back sharply on the amount of information given to the public about crimes reported in our neighborhoods. There was never much – just a sentence or two describing each incident – but even that little bit has stopped. Now we're lucky to get more than a bare statistic, e.g., a robbery occurred on a certain date on a certain block. Marco Santiago of the MPD used to supply brief details of such crimes, but MPD higher-ups – Chief Lanier? -- ordered him to stop. The MPD on-line statistics used to include "narratives" of each crime; no longer. The top brass argue that "privacy" requires them to withhold any details about

any crime. I think residents have a right to know what crimes are happening in their own neighborhoods, so that we might be better prepared and safe on our own streets.

This nasty incident on Adams Mill Road appears in the official statistics, absurdly, as "theft, bicycle". That's it. No mention of "multiple gunshots" fired, and bullets threatening the lives of residents on the street and in their homes.

There are a few residents of the newly RPP-zoned blocks who argue that the better solution is **no RPP at all in Mount Pleasant**. That could be, but it's utterly irrelevant, because the residents of RPP-zoned blocks in Mount Pleasant, now 90% of the neighborhood, are not about to give up RPP. Blocks close to Mount Pleasant Street are especially susceptible to all-day parking by employees. The day-pass program, together with RPP zoning, will allow business employees to park in the neighborhood, but only in the lower-occupancy areas west of 18th Street, and only for a price, not for free.

The Office of Planning (OP) has been conducting a "**Revitalization of Mount Pleasant Street**" effort since January. For these seven months they've been asking what people want to see on Mount Pleasant Street. I have argued that they should put more effort into determining what would be financially viable on the Street, because if what we want would be a money-losing venture, then it's not going to happen. There are now five or more vacant storefronts on the Street, and little interest evident in any entrepreneurs coming to start anything new here. The Mount Pleasant Supermarket site is ideal, complete with its own parking lot; but it's stood empty now for ten months.

On September 3, a meeting of the Advisory Council for this effort was held at Bancroft, and we heard from the OP consultants as to what businesses would make sense on the Street. Their judgment is perhaps surprising. It was to me, anyway. Don't even try to make the Street into a commercial destination, they said, drawing customers from many blocks or miles away. The Street will never succeed in competition with the 14th Street DCUSA development, nor with existing commercial areas in Cleveland Park, Bethesda, or Tenleytown. The Street can survive only as a service area for only the few blocks immediately around it, namely the apartment houses offering many potential customers within short walking distance. Right now there are too many small businesses dividing up this modest market, and the consultants advise shrinking the commercial strip to better match the size of this customer base. The loss of the Deauville, which took more than 300 Latino residents out of Mount Pleasant, has been devastating.

On September 6, the Latino Association of Mount Pleasant held a "**Celebration of the Latino Family of Washington**" in Lamont Park, featuring lawyers providing free legal assistance. Together with the Fiesta DC, this reinforces Mount Pleasant's status as the heart of Latino culture in the District. The ANC co-sponsored the event.

The next ANC *business* meeting will be on **Tuesday, September 15**. The ANC's next *informal* meeting, if held, will be on October 6.