

Jack's September report

There was only one ANC1D meeting in August, a special meeting to deal with the library issue. The commission passed one resolution, asserting that the response of the DC Public Library to questions asked by the Board of Zoning Adjustment at its July hearing did not meet the burden of proof required for a zoning variance. More on this below.

Concerning the **expansion of the Mount Pleasant Library**, recall that the BZA hearing of July 19 concluded with a request to the Library for explanations of why this zoning variance was such a necessity that a failure to get the variance would result in an "undue hardship". The library has gotten along just fine for 85 years at that location without any "institutional need" making the 15-foot rear-yard setback required by zoning a problem. But lately the library system has declared new "needs", and so they want the variance from the zoning regulation.

This is a very uncomfortable precedent to establish, namely that an institution can revise its operations, declare new "needs", and then call for longstanding zoning regulations to be nullified. If a homeowner went to the BZA and asked for, for example, permission to exceed the zoning lot coverage limit, because his family had grown, he wouldn't have a chance. Newly established needs call for one to move to a larger place, not for disregarding the zoning regulations for one's lot.

That's what the ANC resolution confirmed, essentially that one has to live with the zoning regulations of one's chosen lot, and one cannot discover "new needs" and then be allowed to violate the zoning regulations.

The BZA met on September 13 to consider the library's response to their questions, in particular, was this really a "necessity" for the library to be able to do its job, or was this merely a "wish list" for what they would like to do. The Board voted 4 to 1 to allow the variance. I think they were quite unhappy about it, disliking this principle that zoning regulations have to give way to "new needs". But they also knew that denying the variance was going to cause severe problems for the library, which has already built on that portion of the lot. They also disliked the fact that the library was calling for complete occupation of that 15-foot space, not just a portion of it. And one BZA member expressed her concern that the library has encountered strong neighborhood resistance again and again, not just here in Mount Pleasant, even though one would think that neighborhoods would simply be grateful for enhanced libraries. Something's wrong with the way the DC Public Library has been going about this business.

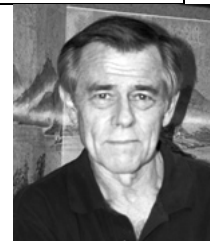
But that's that – the variance is allowed, construction will continue, and as far as I'm concerned, that's the end of the matter. We've spent way too much time and energy on this issue.

That **earthquake** on August 23, 1:54 pm – magnitude 5.8, pretty substantial – shook our house pretty well, and I really don't care to encounter anything larger than that. I lived in

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California for 20 years, "earthquake central", and I never before felt one as strong as that which shook us in August.

The quake was followed by the most amazing bureaucratic stupidity I've ever seen here, as downtown DC was evacuated, as if this was a toxic-gas attack or something. The traffic jams were horrendous. And what was everybody fleeing? Hey, the earthquake was over, and it wasn't that much, really. How many buildings in the area were rendered unsafe, and falling down? Two? Quake's over, settle down and go back to work, please. No purpose was served by sending everybody out to rush home in mid-afternoon.

Not long after the quake, I set off for my daily bike ride, and discovered the Zoo in a state of frenzy, gates closed, the visitors being hurried away. Uh, what did they think was going to happen after the quake? Perhaps that the tigers were going to escape, and start eating tourists?

This was the worst case of over-reaction I've ever seen. The District seems to have developed a knee-jerk "evacuate the city" response to anything going wrong. Sending everybody out into the streets and onto the roads is not an intelligent response, even if terrorists are bombing the city.

I noted last month an unusual number of **burglaries** here, with an unusual concentration on the area on Park Road and north. In 2010, Mount Pleasant averaged just two burglaries a month. But in May there were nine, in June eight, and in July 12 burglaries here, way above the norm.

It seems that Crestwood, just to our north, has also been hit hard, suggesting that this is one band of burglars, comfortable with working this area. Early in August, the Fourth District Commander reported that a "person of interest" was identified, and a search executed, which turned up "a large amount of stolen property". An Ingleside Terrace victim of the recent burglaries reported on August 13 that she "received a call from a detective in police district 4 who has my stolen computer!" Well, this is a promising development. And in August, the number of burglaries in Mount Pleasant dropped to five, less than half the July count. I'm hoping that the burglary ring that has been plaguing the area has been broken.

Oh yes, the search warrant was issued for a residence in Columbia Heights. As I've noted many times before, this is a common pattern: guys come from the lower-income neighborhoods to our east to do burglaries and robberies in the higher-income neighborhoods here. That's why close coordination of the police east and west of 16th Street is

essential. Unfortunately, Chief Lanier's plan to divide jurisdiction in this area, putting Mount Pleasant in the Fourth District, while Columbia Heights south of Monroe Street remains in the Third, will go through as she insists, despite strong protests from this ANC, and from Councilmember Graham. The chief shrugs off our concerns about anything that compromises communication and collaboration between the police forces east and west of 16th Street. Our police, and those across the street in Columbia Heights, will work out of different headquarters, for different commanders, using different radio frequencies. But don't worry, nothing will change. (If nothing will change, what's the point of the re-organization?)

By the way, some residents have questioned my characterization of Mount Pleasant as "higher income". Well, compared to Columbia Heights, it is. The average family income here in Mount Pleasant is now 14% higher than the DC average, 33% higher than the Ward One average, and a stunning 91% higher than the Columbia Heights average.

A terrible toll has been taken on our smaller **street trees**, due to the high temperatures and low rainfall of July. The fact is, it's up to us residents to help street trees through the summer heat. The city isn't going to do it, and nature isn't dependable.

It's too late now, but perhaps for next summer, people can think about this: "Residents can register as "canopy keepers" at ddot.dc.gov/trees to receive drip watering systems for their street trees . . . canopy keepers agree to provide new trees with 15 to 25 gallons of water every two weeks for two years". If a newly planted street tree appears within hose distance of your home, think about volunteering to be a "canopy keeper".

Of course, the hot and dry weather of midsummer came to an end in late August and early September, with first the remnants of Hurricane Irene, then of Tropical Storm Lee, coming through and dumping a total of about 15 inches of rain, six months' worth of rain in six weeks. The nine inches of rain recorded in August was the highest for that month in 44 years. Less than halfway through September, we're over seven inches. No drought conditions here!

I mentioned in the August newsletter that **ANC redistricting** is now under way, and must be completed by mid-October. A problem with our ANC is that it will shrink to just five commissioners, if our ANC boundaries remain unchanged. (The population of Mount Pleasant has decreased by 1335, to 10,459 residents, according to the 2010 census.)

The 16th Street division between Mount Pleasant and Columbia Heights, once a powerful barrier, has become increasingly porous, as Mount Pleasant residents troop to 14th Street for the Metro station and the shops, while Columbia Heights residents come to Mount Pleasant for the restaurants and entertainment. (Years ago, a prominent Columbia Heights resident commented that "Mount Pleasant residents would go to Columbia Heights only at the point of a gun". Well, times have changed, and now Mount Pleasant and western Columbia Heights are becoming ever more similar, quietly merging into one neighborhood, not two.

The Ward One Redistricting Task Force met on September 13 (only their second meeting, a full six weeks having elapsed since the first) to consider ANC and SMD (single-member district) revisions. It's clear that Columbia Heights isn't interested in any merger with Mount Pleasant. I'm afraid we're stuck with downsizing to a commission of just five members. Six was already problematically small. With only a handful of commissioners, it's hard to find members with the time and energy required to handle all four officer positions. That's why I've been both Secretary and Treasurer for the past several years. Downsizing to five will make that even more difficult.

As for the redistricting task force, I have protested the way the redistricting is being done. I have numerous complaints, but perhaps the most significant is the composition of this task force. Of the eleven members, six reside in ANC 1A (Columbia Heights), two in 1B (U Street/Shaw), two in 1C (Adams Morgan), and just one in 1D, Mount Pleasant. On a map, the distribution of task force members is even more lopsided, seven of the eleven coming from the northeast corner of the ward. Basically, the boundaries of our ANC, changed or not, and the boundaries of the single-member districts within our ANC, will be decided by the ten task force members who don't live here, and who may know little about our neighborhood.

Because of the downsizing to five commissioners, our single-member districts will change, and it's not clear what's going to happen to my district. The proposals proffered at the September 13 meeting make major changes, removing many of my constituents – Monroe Street, Newton Street, much of Park Road and Lamont Street – from my district. I've been serving this part of Mount Pleasant for the past nine years, and I'm very unhappy at being removed from my long-time constituents. I'll do what I can to minimize the changes to the district boundaries here, so that I can continue to serve (and deliver newsletters to) the residents of northwest Mount Pleasant. If you agree with that sentiment, please communicate that to Councilmember Graham.

Some time ago I suggested the use of **diatomaceous earth for bedbugs**. This stuff is very effective at reducing cockroach populations in our Canadian cabin in the woods. I was surprised to see this statement in the Wikipedia article on the substance: "It has also been used to control bedbug infestations, but this method may take weeks to work." Given how very hard it is to eliminate bedbugs, "weeks" isn't bad.

It's mid-September, and we're rapidly **losing the long day-light hours of summer**. During the month we lose more than a full hour of sunshine, most of it, about a minute and a half each day, in earlier sunsets. The big hit to the end-of-day light comes on November 6, when we lose Daylight Saving Time. Then we go overnight from a 6 pm sunset to a 5 pm sunset, a change which really puts a crimp in bicycle commuting. (Emily insists that it's supposed to be "Savings", not "Saving". Nope. It's "daylight-saving time".)

The next *business* meeting of the ANC will be on **Tuesday, September 20, 7:00 pm**. The next *informal* meeting is scheduled for **October 4, 7:00 pm**.