

Jack's September report

There was no August ANC meeting, and hence, nothing to report. Note to residents who are seeing my monthly newsletter for the first time: you will see here, each month, a summary of what the ANC has done at the most recent meeting. You should not have to attend ANC meetings to find out what your ANC is doing.

The ANC single-member districts (SMDs) will change, as of January 2, due to the redistricting following the 2010 census. The population of Mount Pleasant decreased by about 1350 residents, and consequently our ANC next year will have only five commissioners. My SMD will change a bit, as I will lose the block defined by Adams Mill Road, Klingle Road, and Walbridge Place – sorry, residents of that block, but feel free to call on me in the future anyway – and gain the block bounded by Lamont Street, 18th Street, Kilbourne Place, and 19th Street. Residents of the latter block are seeing my newsletter for the first time, as I anticipate this change. Residents of the block I'm losing will see these names as ANC candidates on the November ballot: China Terrell (the incumbent), and Arturo Griffiths. Residents of the block I'm gaining will see only my name on their ballot.

This newsletter is my monthly information to residents, reporting on ANC activities, and other neighborhood news. I absorb the costs of printing the newsletter, accepting no ANC funds, nor contributions from residents, much as I appreciate the offers I've been given. I've been doing this monthly newsletter for ten years now, personally delivering it to every household in my SMD.

Residents may know that I am legally prohibited from putting my newsletter in mailboxes. Mail slots are ideal, but if there's no slot, then I'll tuck it behind a doorknob. Sometimes there's just no alternative to the mailbox, though. Dogs can be a problem as I do my monthly delivery. Some dogs are fine and friendly, some just bark noisily, but others threaten to amputate my fingers as I push my newsletter through the mail slot. I'll be compelled by dogs, on occasion, to skip a house.

The **Kenyon/Adams Mill intersection project** “will begin very soon,” reports the contractor. I've been working for this since 2003, mainly to allow the left turn from westbound Kenyon onto southbound Adams Mill, a maneuver that is currently very popular, but illegal, and dangerous. Other enhancements, such as bike lanes, crosswalks, and a redesign of that confusing ramp from Beach Drive, are included.

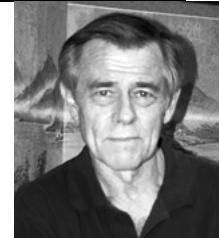
The Department of Health has been checking mosquitos here for the **West Nile virus**, including right in my back yard, and their tests came up positive. This may be the first time that West Nile has been found here in Mount Pleasant. But that isn't really anything new, because West Nile has long been in DC, and in nearby Montgomery County as well.

The virus first appeared in New York in 1999, near JFK International, probably brought aboard a commercial aircraft from the Middle East. It's carried in crows and robins, and transmitted to us via mosquito bites. In 80% of cases, the infected person will show no symptoms at all. In about one

ANC 1D03 NEWSLETTER #120

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case in 150, a severe illness will develop. We over-50 folks are most susceptible to severe outcomes.

In last year's monitoring for West Nile, of the 31 “pools” in DC where the virus was found, 15 were on the grounds of the Armed Forces Retirement Home, off Irving Street, opposite the Washington Hospital Center. Mosquitos there won't come this far, but birds certainly will, and will carry the virus. So it's been here all along, no doubt about it.

That's another reason for doing all you can to prevent mosquito breeding in your yard. Asian Tiger mosquitos in particular are “container” mosquitos, laying eggs on the dry wall of things cup-shaped, the eggs hatching when rainwater fills the cup. Anything around your house that acts like a cup should be emptied out frequently, at least twice a week. Mosquitos don't fly very far from where they hatch, so anything you do close by will reduce the mosquito population around your home.

I continue my protest against **unreasonable speed cameras**, such as that thing on Porter Street, combining a speed camera with an unreasonably low speed limit. DDOT can offer no explanation for that 30 mph limit, merely repeating that that's what it's always been, though nobody today remembers why. No one has ever done a safety or engineering evaluation there to determine what the speed limit ought to be. It just is what it is, and the MPD blindly enforces it, whatever it is.

Ward Six Councilmember Tommy Wells has formed a task force to consider lower fines (currently \$125 for speeds 10 mph over the posted limit, the threshold for actual ticketing). That possibility has the problem that the FY2013 budget balance depends on an assumed \$30M increase in ticket revenues thanks to the expanded photo-enforcement network, so any reduction in fines must be coupled with reduced spending somewhere else. It really appears that the recent expansion of photo enforcement devices is primarily about revenues for the District, and only secondarily about safety. As Ward Two Councilmember Jack Evans said: “I would say it's probably more about money because it was put in the budget to balance the budget. If it was for safety purposes, it probably would have been handled differently.”

As for speed causing collisions, statistics show that this is actually uncommon in our city environment. In the District, only 5% of collisions involve speed violations, and only 3% list speed as the primary cause of the collision. Much more significant here for our personal safety are drunk, drugged, and distracted driving. Photo enforcement devices won't capture those.

Nor will speed cameras do anything about excessive speed where it matters to us most, on our residential side streets. In fact, one has to worry that speed cameras on our arterials, such as Park Road, will cause ticket-avoiding drivers to speed down residential side streets instead, thus increasing the risk imposed on us and our children. Commuter abuse of Newton Street, and of the alleys paralleling Park Road, in order to bypass Park Road, is already a problem.

In 2009, responding to complaints about speeding traffic on Park Road, I sponsored an ANC resolution requesting a speed camera for that location. The MPD ignored our request, I believe because there would not have been enough ticketable violations (speed greater than 35 mph) to justify the cost of the camera. Cars seem to be going awfully fast on Park Road (and on Walbridge Place), but few are in fact going fast enough to warrant speeding tickets, according to the current policy, which allows 10 mph over the posted limit.

Another troublesome characteristic of speed-camera enforcement is “**stealth**” ticketing. If a cop pulls you over, you know right away that you’ve got a problem. But a speed-camera ticket may take a week to get to you, by which time you may have triggered that same camera repeatedly, unaware that it’s slapped you with a fat ticket each time. An unhappy resident of Ingleside Terrace said that she’s gotten three tickets at the Porter Street location, and of course the second and third were on their way in the mail before she received the first.

Stealth ticketing ought to be banned, as my July ANC resolution said. You shouldn’t get additional tickets until the first has been delivered. The MPD reply is that they publicize speed camera locations, and issue only warnings to violators for the first 30 days. But our Ingleside Terrace neighbor got no such warning, and I think most of the publicity about this speed camera has come via my newsletters.

There are those who say that drivers can see what the posted limit is, and ought to obey it, end of discussion. (MPD Chief Lanier takes that approach.) But the fact is, **the average speed of cars on city streets exceeds posted limits**. That’s true in urban areas in general, not just in DC; typically 70% of urban drivers will exceed the posted limit, congestion permitting. A safety-minded driver thus has to choose: to match the average speed of traffic, as is generally considered safest? Or to go only the speed limit, and feel like a fool, as other drivers rush on by?

Some nearby examples, all posted for 25 mph speed limit: Beach Drive, average vehicle speed 30 mph; Piney Branch Parkway, average speed 32 mph; 16th Street, between Arkansas Avenue and Irving Street, average speed 29 mph. Should one go the same speed as other drivers, and worry about finding a costly speed camera ticket in the mail next week? Or carefully drive the speed limit, and ignore those drivers tailgating you to try to make you speed up?

Yes, some residents simply want all traffic to slow down, because those 30-mph cars, especially big SUVs, are intimidating. It’s unfortunate that the crosstown arterials through Mount Pleasant are narrow, in some places with nothing but an occasional street tree separating pedestrians

from the traffic. That’s a legitimate concern, but let’s talk about that as the real issue, a sincere dislike for 30-35 mph traffic, even if the perceived safety threat isn’t borne out by actual traffic accident statistics.

To summarize: the District’s speed-limit policy is a confused mess, and the proliferation of speed cameras makes that confusion apparent and intolerable.

Historic Preservation strikes again. A Lamont Street resident repaired his front steps, using nice concrete pavers. Historic objected, because the original material was plain, bare concrete, so plain, bare concrete it must remain.

The District’s historic preservation law says that alterations are okay if “compatible with the character of the historic district”, but the Historic Preservation Office insists on a much more rigorous standard, allowing no visible alterations at all. You must make your property look just as it did the day the house was built. Visible improvements are banned.

The Historic Preservation Office did relent in this case.

Mount Pleasant agreed in 1986 to become a historic district, but only, I believe, to fend off incongruous development, not to lock homeowners into the current appearance of their homes, precisely replicating whatever was built decades ago, however plain, and however inadequate for today’s residents. Thanks to historic district designation, our neighborhood is a museum, and our houses are museum pieces.

Last spring there was a threat that **the Deauville site** would be declared “blighted”, a classification that results in punitive property taxes, intended to persuade negligent property owners to keep their properties up. (1855 Lamont Street is justifiably declared “blighted”.) In May, the ANC passed my resolution opposing that classification for the Deauville, because the current owners – the tenants, and in time, the National Housing Trust, developing workforce-affordable housing – are doing all they can to find the money needed to build a new building on that fire-devastated site. Costly, punitive persuasion they don’t need.

Despite our resolution, the DCRA in August did put the Deauville site on the “blighted” list, as if the tenants, and the National Housing Trust, need to be pressured to redevelop the site. I’m fighting that categorization, but the DCRA refuses even to explain to the ANC why it won’t take our advice.

One of the best speeches of the **Democratic Convention** was that by John Lewis, reminding us of how far we have come since the days when segregation was the law, and bigotry the social norm: “Brothers and sisters, do you want to go back? Or do you want to keep America moving forward?” Emily and I came to Mount Pleasant 40 years ago because it was then an exceptional model of an integrated, multicultural, multiethnic, diverse neighborhood. More and more of America is looking like Mount Pleasant, and I believe that’s what has Tea Party people so upset. I say, let them come to Mount Pleasant, and see our diversity success story. As one convention speaker said, **diversity is not a burden, it’s a blessing!**

The next meeting of the ANC will be on **Tuesday, September 18, 2012, 7:00 pm**.