

Jack's September report

At the July 21 meeting, the ANC:

- Approved the quarterly financial report to the DC Auditor;
- Advised the Metropolitan Police “to refrain from writing tickets for illegal parking, barring situations that compromise public safety”;
- Advised the Mayor's Agent “to approve the demolition of the gymnasium/auditorium of Bancroft Elementary as “necessary to allow the construction of a project of special merit””;
- Advised the Historic Preservation Review Board (HPRB) that it “it opposes the proposed project at 1756 Kilbourne Place NW”;
- Advised DPW to “give high priority to the towing of parked cars interfering with Department of Transportation (DDOT) projects”.

So, where was my **August newsletter**? Well, there wasn't one. Like much of the District Government, I took August off, including a week way up north in the Ontario woods. It's refreshing to visit such a different place, but then it's good to get back to DC, especially east-of-the-Park DC, with its marvelous variety of cultures and ethnicities. I guess we're not “post-racial” yet, but parts of DC are surely leading the way! That's why we love this city.

Recall that the **modernization of Bancroft Elementary** has been held up by historic preservation law, which prohibits the demolition of anything considered a “contributing structure” in a historic district. The Historic Preservation Review Board (HPRB) concluded that, as desirable as school modernization might be, demolition of the old gymnasium was “not consistent with the DC Historic Landmark and Historic District Protection Act”.

The law says that the so-called Mayor's Agent may, despite that HPRB ruling, approve the demolition by finding that the project is “of special merit”, meaning “having significant benefits to the District of Columbia or the community by virtue of . . . social or other benefits having a high priority for community services”. My resolution addressed precisely that point: “the modernization of Bancroft will be an essential step in the upgrading of our neighborhood school to meet the needs of the many young people moving into this neighborhood, and to end the flight from Mount Pleasant by residents discouraged by our neighborhood school.” The Mayor's Agent (Mr. J. Peter Byrne) quoted that statement in his decision, issued September 8, agreeing that demolition of the gym meets the “special merit” requirement, and the modernization of Bancroft Elementary can now proceed.

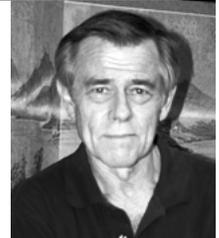
In April residents suffered a **barrage of parking tickets** issued by the police, in addition to the usual ticketing by Parking Enforcement personnel (a part of DPW). Somebody got the idea that Mount Pleasant wanted more parking enforcement, and the MPD decided to “help out”.

But the police do a poor job of parking enforcement. Those Parking Enforcement officers take photographs, later posted on the Web, as visual proof of the violation; the MPD officers don't. The DPW tickets are neatly printed by hand-held printers; the MPD officers provide barely-legible scrawls. But

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most important, the DPW folks really know the parking laws; MPD officers, too often, do not. I spent a lot of time helping residents “deny” MPD tickets for legally parked cars, and pressed our Lieutenant Pate to deal with the officers issuing the bogus tickets, educating them about parking laws.

I'm sure there were other residents who were hit with bogus parking tickets, but who didn't know how to fight them, and so just paid them. Hence, my resolution advising the MPD to leave parking enforcement to DPW Parking Enforcement. They do quite enough ticketing of parked cars, and don't need help from the police.

My resolution advising DPW to “give high priority to the towing of parked cars interfering with Department of Transportation (DDOT) projects” was based on the experience of the slurry-seal work on Newton Street. **The whole of Newton Street, from 16th Street to 19th, had to be cleared of parked cars on July 10.** But many residents didn't get the message, and all too many cars were left in place, obstructing the work.

What was bizarre was the disappearance of the DPW tow trucks called to remove parked cars, before the towing job was done. As a result, the contractor's workers stood idle for hours, waiting for a tow truck to reappear and remove the cars blocking the job. The work should have been completed by early afternoon, but instead extended to 7 pm, due to those parked cars. And even with that lengthened workday, the DDOT contractor had to work around a last few parked cars, and return the following week to take care of the patches that could not be reached for the slurry-seal work.

That's inefficiency that we all pay for. Altogether, the job took about twice as many labor hours as it should have, all because DPW was inefficient about removing the parked cars obstructing the work. It seems that other calls for towing service are given priority over this task of clearing parked cars to permit road work to proceed.

Why were there so many cars left parked on Newton Street, despite all the notices warning of the July 10 work? I think a lot of them belong to people who don't live on Newton, but in apartment houses along 16th Street, and park their cars back in the neighborhood, there being no usable parking on 16th. Yes, people who live in those apartment houses get RPP privileges, so there's nothing stopping them from using our residential streets for their parking lots. And if they don't happen to return to their cars to see the “Emergency No Parking” placards – an amazing number of people seem to use their cars only rarely – then their cars remain, blocking

the road work. Efforts by the construction crews to reach the owners to move their cars, leaving notices and ringing doorbells on Newton, are futile.

There's got to be a better way to notify people that their cars need to be moved; or, a better way to move them.

My back yard is again a Department of Health test location for **West Nile virus**. And again, the tests are positive: West Nile is here, being carried by mosquitoes.

In most cases, an infection is insignificant. In a few cases, one may come down with something resembling flu. And in a very few cases, a person's response can be severe. Precautions against mosquito bites are warranted, of course. As for the mosquitoes, we should all be careful to prevent accumulations of water, emptying flower-pot dishes, for example, after any rain. Mosquitoes do not fly very far, so anything you do to minimize their reproduction in your yard will reduce the number of mosquitoes in your yard.

As of January 1, "no food service business shall sell or provide food or beverages in **expanded polystyrene food service products**, regardless of where the food or beverage will be consumed." This is the material which we commonly call styrofoam. It's being prohibited because the stuff is filling up our waste disposal landfills, where it lasts for centuries. And it can't be recycled. Good riddance to it!

There's been much publicity lately about a "**surge**" in violent crime in the District. I think the scare talk is misleading.

First, the crime of violence that most seriously threatens us is robbery, and there is no "surge" in robberies, which are up by a mere 2% over last year. You and I are far more likely to be a victim of a robbery than of a homicide, because there are 20 times as many robberies as homicides in the District, and most homicides involve people known to each other, whereas robberies are generally perpetrated upon strangers. The violent-crime "surge" here is entirely in homicides, which are up by 44% over last year (January 1 to September 10),

Second, this "surge" in homicides, dreadful as it is, is entirely east of 16th Street. It is especially great east of the Anacostia. That's not to say that these crimes don't matter, but that residents west of 16th Street have little to fear from it. You wouldn't know this from the press reports, which imply that the whole of the District is suffering from this "surge" in violent crime.

More than half of the increase in homicides, 2015 vs. 2014, is in the 7th District, far Southeast, across the Anacostia. In 7D, which last year had more homicides than any other police district, has seen a year-over-year increase of an appalling 88%. Two police districts, 5D (Northeast) and 7D, account for more than half the homicides in DC, and collectively have seen a 76% increase over last year. Those neighborhoods are where the problem is, where the cause must be identified, and where corrective measures must be taken.

To put this in perspective: here in Mount Pleasant, there has been just one homicide in the past five years. If Mount Pleasant had the same per-capita homicide rate as 7D does today, we would already have seen six homicides in our neighborhood this year. That's what 7D residents are living

with. And that's how stark the difference is, between us and the severely afflicted neighborhoods a few miles east.

What is the cause? I believe that it's the increasing use of guns in petty personal disputes, turning those disputes into homicides. Worse, the increasing number of guns feeds on itself, as young men involved in such disputes feel they have to get guns just in case their antagonist shows up with one. The police chief of Milwaukee, another city suffering from a large increase in homicides, says that young men in troubled neighborhoods calculate that "it is more dangerous to get caught without their gun than to get caught with their gun."

As for guns in DC, Chief Lanier says "it's like they are freaking dropping out of the sky". Whatever gun controls the District may have, anyone who wants a gun can get one. Somehow we must persuade the young men who live in these troubled neighborhoods that possessing a gun makes one more likely to become a victim of gun violence.

I was dismayed to hear, while we were away in Canada, that "**Black Lives Matter**" placards here in Mount Pleasant were being defaced, the word "Black" painted over or cut out. Some people evidently don't understand the reasons for the signs, which do not imply that any non-black lives are worth less. They simply assert that black lives don't not matter.

For many years, black lives have not mattered, not to the police, not to the public, not to the media, as much as white lives do. Consider how much more publicity a white homicide victim gets, than a black. The common thread in recent police killings – Freddie Gray, Eric Garner, Tamir Rice, Walter Scott – is that they're black. A Washington Post investigation found that, in a confrontation between an unarmed person and the police, a black man was seven times as likely to be shot by the police as a white man.

Do we not care? The signs say simply that yes, these lives do matter, to all of us, white and black, and we're not willing to brush these homicides off because the victims aren't white. It's not to say that other lives don't matter. It means simply that black lives do matter, to us, and we too want this to stop.

Work on the **Klingle Valley Trail** has begun. It should be noted that the Klingle Road (automobile) advocates won that enormous political battle in 2003, the District Council legislating that Klingle Road "shall be re-opened to the public for motor vehicle traffic". But evidently the Federal Government – i. e., the National Park Service – disagreed, and blocked Federal approval of the project. Mayor Fenty tried a last-ditch effort to revive the automobile road in 2008, proposing that the District pay the full cost, with no Federal contribution. The District Council would have none of that, objecting to paying heavily for an expensive road that would serve only residents of an upscale portion of the District.

The Klingle Valley Trail is scheduled for completion by December, 2016. I believe that it will be a valuable addition to recreational hiking in Rock Creek Park, and to bicycle commuting to downtown DC.

The next meeting of the ANC will be on Tuesday, **September 22, 7:00 pm, at the Mount Pleasant Library.**