

October report to constituents

Here is news of the October Advisory Neighborhood Commission meeting, and the preliminary agenda for the November meeting.

Highlights of the October ANC meeting

By a 1980 DC law, **anyone wanting to sell a building of rental units must first offer to sell to the tenants**, giving them an opportunity to avoid being forced out of their homes. The 1980 law contains a loophole that has become popular with owners wanting to evade this provision. Instead of selling the building outright, the owner may sell 95% of the building, wait for a year and a day, then sell the remaining 5%. Whatever one thinks of the first-right law, this is a blatant evasion of the purpose of the law. Councilmember Mendelson has introduced a bill in City Council that would close this loophole, and Commissioner Babcock introduced a resolution in support of this bill. The ANC passed the resolution supporting Mr Mendelson's bill, by a four to one vote (Commissioner Sale opposing, Comsr. Grant absent). (For lack of space, I won't include the text of this resolution, nor of the La Casa resolution following.)

The **La Casa Multicultural Services Center** is the homeless shelter on Irving Street between 14th and 15th. This is in the middle of the Columbia Heights redevelopment area, and the escalation of property values there is a threat to the continuation of this shelter. It is, admittedly, not the happiest of neighbors, and anyone who frequently walks to the Columbia Heights Metro will have encountered disagreeable situations, such as passed-out drunks sprawled on the sidewalk. I noted this, and Marna Brady of Neighbors' Consejo agreed that the shelter must work hard at containing such problem cases. In a new, larger facility, there will be less spillage of such problems onto the street. In any case, this shelter, the only bilingual shelter in all of Ward One, is indispensable, especially in the cold of winter. We do not, after all, want homeless men sleeping on our doorsteps. The ANC passed, by a five to

The **Walbridge - Adams Mill intersection** is now an all-way stop. About one driver in 10 still fails to notice the change, so extra caution is still required. Even with this temporary problem, the intersection has become much less troublesome than before for drivers entering Adams Mill from Walbridge, and for pedestrians crossing Walbridge. I don't much like stop signs, which seem to sprout up willy-nilly all over the place, but these stops on Adams Mill were well warranted, and have made that intersection much less dangerous than before.

ANC 1D03 NEWSLETTER

Jack McKay, October 27, 2003

Opinions expressed here are those of Dr. McKay alone, speaking for himself, not for the Mount Pleasant ANC.

Columbia Heights Traffic Study – recommendations affecting Mount Pleasant:

- More east-west time at 16th Street intersections, for both traffic and pedestrians
- Redesign of the Kenyon-Adams Mill intersection to permit cars to make the left from Kenyon onto Harvard
- Count-down pedestrian signals at 16th and Park, Irving, and Columbia, with "bumpouts" for pedestrian safety.

Also suggested: closing 15th at Irving, forcing all traffic to turn right on Irving, and eliminating the merge of 15th into 16th. I objected to this notion, which would severely interfere with traffic flow from downtown to Mount Pleasant, and I am confident that this proposal will be dropped from the consultant's final report.

Violence and gangs in Mount Pleasant. On the afternoon of October 9, gunfire erupted on the street at Mount Pleasant and Harvard, and about a dozen shots were fired between that spot and Kenyon. The victim was a 20-year-old Latino who had reportedly committed the sin of switching gang loyalties, from La Mara R to 1-5 Amigos. A driver of the number-42 bus was caught in the crossfire and wounded. The truck of the curbside mango vendor in front of Haydee's took a bullet through the windshield.

This is frightening, no doubt about it, but the danger to Mount Pleasant residents should not be exaggerated. These Latino gangs target each other, not us. The drug dealers who trouble the Park Road - Mount Pleasant Street area are much more dangerous to us, because they will threaten violence to anyone who interferes with their business.

The Latino gangs are mainly a threat to our children, and they must be fought in our schools, where they find their recruits. They are an enormous threat to adolescent Latinos, who turn to gangs for peer approval, for substitute families, and for protection. Once in a gang, they may be forced into criminal acts, and they are forbidden ever to leave the gang.

Our schools are working on methods for preventing children from being drawn into the gangs, and for reducing gang-against-gang violence. We can fight back by refusing to be intimidated by these gangs. We must continue to spend time on Mount Pleasant Street and to patronize neighborhood businesses, declaring by our presence that we will not surrender our neighborhood to the gangs.

zero vote, a resolution supporting the continuation of this shelter in or near its current location.

Enrique Rivera, special assistant to the Chief of Police for Latino affairs, and Lt. Lyons of PSA 414, summarized the status of **Spanish-speaking police officers in Mount Pleasant**. Given our very large Spanish-speaking population, we need officers fluent in Spanish, and we trust that the MPD is putting its scarce bilingual officers here and in Columbia Heights, where the need is greatest. Of the 15 officers currently assigned to Mount Pleasant, six are bilingual, a proportion far above the rate for the MPD as a whole, confirming that the MPD is indeed concentrating its Spanish-speaking officers in this area. The ANC passed a resolution urging the MPD to have at least one Spanish-speaking officer here on every shift.

Habana Riviera, "where DC meets the tropics", is a new restaurant in Mount Pleasant, featuring Caribbean cuisine. The owner has applied for a liquor license, and this brings up again the matter of "voluntary agreements". The ANC intends to file a formal protest to the license application, not because we object in any way to their having a license, but simply to establish standing to be included in the negotiation of an agreement. We are determined that certain excessive restrictions included in current agreements, i.e., the prohibition of live music, be eliminated. (We have our very own Mount Pleasant mariachi band, which performed in Lamont Plaza at the Fall Fiesta on October 18, and again on October 25. I think it is terrible that this band is forbidden to perform in Mount Pleasant restaurants.)

Mount Pleasant Schools. Bancroft Elementary, our admirable public school, will add a sixth grade, thus allowing a smooth transition to middle school. Elsie Stokes Charter School, newly located on 16th Street near Park Road, offers two-language education not only in Spanish and English, but French and English. All three of our neighborhood elementary schools -- Bancroft, Stokes, and Sacred Heart -- are now true two-language schools, in which all students will become fluent and literate in both English and Spanish (or French).

Preliminary agenda (highlights) for the Nov. 3 ANC meeting; times approximate

- 7:30 Call to order
- 7:40 Community Forum
- 8:00 Street light outages & repair, Callistus Nwadike, DDOT
- 8:15 Zero tolerance policing
- 8:45 Neighborhood Reinvestment Act, Jeff Coudriet (Councilmember Jack Evans)
- 9:05 State of Latino Kids, Heather McClure, Council of Latino Agencies
- 9:25 Habana Riviera liquor license application & protest
- 9:30 Graffiti abatement team & grant
- 9:55 Adjourn

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Graffiti: Since last March I've been trying to get a cleanup of Mount Pleasant graffiti going. This work paid off in September when the DC Clean City Coordinator, Mary Williams, called me, requesting a list of graffiti sites in Mount Pleasant. I compiled a photographic list of the most serious sites, and obtained waivers from the property owners, and on October 10 the city's "Graffiti Blaster" was brought in to remove graffiti on a couple of bare-brick locations, such as the alley wall alongside Heller's. On the 11th Ms Williams was back with paint supplies and graffiti removal tissues, and we dealt with several graffiti sites on painted surfaces.

It is clear that the city alone cannot handle the graffiti removal task: their Blaster is much too big and powerful, and cannot be used on painted surfaces. Most of our walls are painted, for which the only good answer is painting over the graffiti. Elinor Hart's **Mount Pleasant Main Street** is taking the lead at acquiring a stockpile of color-matching paints, and Jeff Bensing of MPMS has already repainted several Mount Pleasant Street graffiti sites.

Mount Pleasant business owners are increasing their efforts as well, perhaps encouraged by my visits. **Best Way, Ercilia's, El Progreso, and Sportsman's** have recently painted over their graffiti-marred walls.

We have so far eliminated graffiti from 17 of the 21 most serious spots on or near Mount Pleasant Street. Henceforth, Mount Pleasant Main Street will deal with graffiti as soon as it appears, which is the best way to deter the graffiti perpetrators.



Graffiti: "RONE" appears to be a personal tag -- short for Tyrone? -- while "LC" is a gang mark (Latino Crew). Jeff Bensing and Matt Silverman painted over this graffiti on October 11, and the wall remains graffiti-free today.