

November report to constituents

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

ANC 1D03 NEWSLETTER

Jack McKay, November 24, 2003

Highlights of the November ANC meeting

The November ANC meeting was intense, focusing first on the problem of **crime in Mount Pleasant**. The immediate problem that brought this to the fore is the drug dealing that takes place in the vicinity of the "triangle park" at Park Road and Mount Pleasant Street, and in the alley that connects that location to 18th Street and to Newton Street. Two nonfatal shootings have occurred in connection with that dealing. The Latino gang shooting on Mount Pleasant Street on October 9 is also contributing to the current level of concern about crime, and in particular the threat posed to innocent bystanders. In addition to this fear of serious crime, there is a general discontent with conditions on Mount Pleasant Street, i.e., litter, graffiti, drinking, urination, and annoying loiterers.

Commissioner Sale introduced a resolution that attempts to deal with all of these problems at once (see box), demanding an MPD crackdown on all illegal acts, even as trivial as littering and double parking. This resolution assumes that the MPD could eliminate all of the problems in Mount Pleasant, major crime and minor, if they just put proper effort into it. Crime in the District is blamed on MPD mismanagement, not poverty and demographics. This resolution assumes furthermore that major crimes occur where tolerance of minor crimes creates a "lawless environment" – the well-known "broken window" theory.

This approach to the problems of Mount Pleasant has two serious flaws:

- (1) Any arrest, even for a "nuisance" offense, takes an MPD officer off patrol for a minimum of two hours. Ordinarily we have relatively few officers assigned to Mount Pleasant, because our crime rate is quite low in comparison with the rest of the city (see box). Taking officers off patrol, leaving us with even sparser police coverage, only makes it easier for the drug dealers to operate.
- (2) The "quality of life" offenses pertain primarily to a subculture of Latino laborers who hang out around the 7-11. Arresting and fining them will have utterly no effect on the drug dealers, nor on the Latino youth gangs, and is likely to impose substantial hardships on these men.

I contend that our most serious crime problem at the moment is the drug dealing, and that the way to handle such a problem is to concentrate all of our resources on that problem. Such open-air drug markets are extremely difficult to close down, as evidenced by the existence of some 60 known drug markets in the

This is the controversial portion of Commissioner Sales' "zero tolerance" resolution: **Resolved** that starting on December 1, 2003, the ANC1D calls on the government of the District of Columbia to implement a policy of consistent and strict enforcement of offenses in Mount Pleasant not apparently previously enforced in an adequate manner. Such offenses will include, but will not necessarily be limited to: assaults of all types, threats to do bodily harm, disorderly conduct, destroying or defacing public or private property, throwing stones or other missiles, unlawful assembly, profane and other indecent language, lewd, indecent, or obscene acts, cruelty to animals, public intoxication, possession of open containers of alcohol, prostitution, nuisance properties, drug-related nuisances, littering, illegal dumping, aggressive panhandling, truancy, violations of curfew, unlawful entry on property, abandoned or junked vehicles, double parking, and speeding.

Facts about violent crime (robbery, assault, homicide) in Mount Pleasant:

- the rate of violent crime in Mount Pleasant is about half the average for the District, and half the average for Ward One
- the violent crime rate here is about one-third that just across 16th Street, in Columbia Heights
- Of 73 PSAs east of Rock Creek Park, 67 have violent crime rates higher than ours.

This is not to say that all is well here, and we shouldn't complain; but one must conclude that, if anyone deserves greater police resources, it's our neighbors to the east. It's pretty hard for us to claim that we should have more officers on patrol, at the expense of other neighborhoods, when our crime rate is well below the average for Ward One, and for the District. Indeed, if there is a single reason for crime here, including drug dealing, it is our proximity to neighborhoods characterized by great poverty and high crime rates. It is significant that, in all the recent notorious crimes, both victims and perpetrators are from outside Mount Pleasant.

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

District, including a notorious one just a block away from the MPD substation on Park Road, and by the inability of the Park Road neighbors to put a stop to this drug market, despite their strenuous and courageous efforts.

Concerning this resolution, I focused my remarks on the need to concentrate our police resources on the drug dealing problem, if we are to solve that, while Commissioners Babcock and Bitondo worried about "zero tolerance" turning into police harassment of our Latino residents.

The ANC voted unanimously, after much discussion by the Commissioners and by many members of the public, and Captain Grossman of the MPD, to table Commissioner Sales' resolution. This will return as "unfinished business" in the December meeting.

There was more, much more, in an excruciating meeting that went on until past midnight. But I can squeeze no more into my one-page newsletter, and perhaps that's just as well. You should be grateful that you weren't there, and that I won't even try to make you read about it.

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Heather McClure described a grant application by the **Council of Latino Agencies**. The work would include Spanish-language parenting materials, and 12 outreach meetings with Latino parents on the subject of raising children here. Considering the serious problems we have, including the recruiting of schoolchildren into Latino gangs, this seems a worthy cause. The amount requested, \$4000, I asserted was simply too much, given that our normal budget for grants is a total of \$2000 a year. A reduced grant of \$2000 was approved by a 5 to 0 vote.

The **PlayStart playground at Bancroft** was assembled by volunteers on November 8. Iris Rothman had planned on perhaps 20 people showing up to help. However, in a massive and heart-warming outpouring of community support for this combined school-community playground, well over 100 people showed up to pitch in, assembling and installing playground equipment on a sunny but chilly November morning. The playground is open to all, and is already attracting neighborhood children.

Preliminary, partial agenda (highlights) for the Dec. 1 ANC meeting; times approximate

7:30 Call to order
7:40 Community Forum
8:10 Gustavo Velasquez, Office of Latino Affairs
8:35 Robert Bobb, City Administrator
9:00 Reconsideration of Policing resolution
9:20 Jeff Coudriet, Neighborhood Reinvestment Act
10:10 Adjourn

Homicide on Park Road: At 9 pm on November 16, a client of the halfway house on Park Road was ambushed as he approached the house and shot dead by two assailants. This location is also, coincidentally, the center of our drug trafficking problem, and this incident compounded the distress of the nearby residents.

It appears that this homicide was associated with this man's life prior to prison. He had just served five years, on charges which have not been revealed to us. Shortly after the shooting a fistfight broke out on Park Road, as one of the victim's friends (or relatives) attacked another young woman, apparently holding her responsible for his death. This was a revenge killing, and people close to the victim may know who was responsible for it. It is also consistent with the adage that in most homicides, murderers and their victims are known to each other, and are not strangers.

Callistus Nwadike, of DDOT, provided a schedule of the planned **streetlight replacement** work. Our street lights are on an old-fashioned "series" circuit, so that if there is a single fault anywhere along the circuit, all the street lights on the circuit go out. That's why we have these periods of dark streets, the lights as far away as Hobart going out when there's a problem away up on Brown Street. (When you see those M.C. Dean panel trucks in the neighborhood, they're searching for the problem.) Mr Nwadike tells us that work should begin in January, and a full year will be needed to complete the work on the north side of Park Road. Another year will be needed to finish the job south of Park Road. I asked if this meant that we, on the south side of Park, would suffer from continued blocks-wide outages for another year or more. He hedged (Callistus is a good man, and I won't criticize him), but plainly the answer is "yes, we will".

In the October newsletter I noted that **mariachi bands** are prohibited by MPNA-written "voluntary agreements" from playing in Mount Pleasant restaurants. An MPNA board member has replied that "they are most certainly allowed", and insisted that I post a retraction. I asked how this could be, given the unequivocal ban on live music imposed by the MPNA. She offered no explanation.

At City Council hearings this month, Councilmember Jim Graham pried the explanation of this apparent contradiction from MPNA President Marika Torok. It seems that the MPNA will tolerate a "roaming" mariachi band that dips into a restaurant for a short period, then returns to the street. *But no restaurant can hire a mariachi band to play for its customers.* The MPNA board member's assertion that "MPNA has never disallowed mariachis and the owners are quite aware of that" is deceptive, and I'll stand by my statement. The exclusion allowed the "roaming" mariachis is not a significant exception from the rule, and for that matter can be nullified by MPNA at their whim, the mariachis being undeniably "live music", explicitly prohibited by the MPNA agreements.