

Jack's February report

Our January meeting was just a few days after the January 22-23 blizzard, which confounded travel in the District. Because of the snow, the Mount Pleasant Library closed early, 7 pm, on our meeting day, thus preventing us from meeting there as scheduled. Unable to hold our regular 7 pm meeting at the library, but needing to have a meeting to deal with January legal requirements, we quickly arranged for a mini-meeting at La Casa Community Center.

Because of this last-minute change in location, we agreed that the meeting should deal only with “administrative” matters, no “official” ANC actions. The DC Code requires that we elect officers, and set the annual calendar of meetings, in January, so those things we did, and little more.

ANC officers for 2016 are: chairperson, Rosa Rivas; vice chairperson, Arturo Griffiths; secretary and treasurer, me.

I'm pleased to have been the commissioner to nominate Rosa for ANC chair for the year. She's been vice chair for a year, so it's appropriate to move her up one slot. The commission is enthusiastic about having a Latina as our chairperson – clear evidence that the Mount Pleasant immigrant community is a full participant in neighborhood affairs. Last year's chairperson, Frank Agbro, is also an immigrant, of course, so this is our second year with an immigrant as chairperson.

Arturo Griffiths will be vice chairperson. I did my best to shed the ANC treasurer role, without success; I'm well practiced at it, and nobody else wanted the job. I will continue also as secretary, the most time-consuming position.

We set the calendar of monthly meetings, which will be on the *Tuesday preceding the fourth Thursday* of each month. That synchronizes our meetings with those of the Historic Preservation Review Board (HPRB).

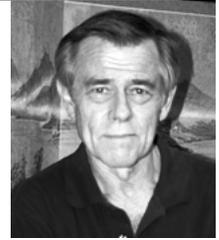
I've been trying since December to get an ANC resolution objecting to the **sharply increased traffic fines** that DDOT intends to impose (on their own, not via a Council action). Because the blizzard messed up our January meeting, I could not have my resolution considered. So I wrote a response to the DDOT notice on my own, not for the ANC, but as a resident, arguing the following:

1. Drivers don't willfully violate traffic laws because they're unbothered by “mere” fifty-dollar fines; traffic violations are frequent because the probability of getting any fine at all is small. Hence, compliance with traffic laws will not be increased by the heftier fines, and those fines consequently will yield no enhancement in traffic safety.
2. The moving-violation offenses affected by these big fines are insignificant causes of traffic fatalities, the supposed rationale for those increased fines. The actual causes of most fatalities are *drunk* driving, *drugged* driving, *drowsy* driving, and *distracted* driving. Anything that fails to deal with those causes, such as these fines, is irrelevant to the “Vision Zero” goal of zero traffic fatalities.
3. Though enforcement is weak, some drivers will be unlucky enough to be ticketed, and heavy fines – hundreds of dollars – penalize not only the offender, but, if a driver comes from

ANC 1D03 NEWSLETTER #157

Jack McKay, February 15, 2016

Jack McKay
3200 19th St, Tel. 462-8692
jack.mckay@verizon.net
<http://DCJack.org>



a low-income family, that entire family. Some of us can absorb a hundred-dollar fine without difficulty, but for others, that's the rent, that's food for the children.

I expect the District Council to take this matter up, and head off this attempt by DDOT, and Mayor Bowser, to do this on their own, with no review by our elected Councilmembers. Five hundred dollars for failing to yield to a Metrobus? Two hundred dollars for failing to come to a complete stop before a right-turn-on-red? The District Administration seems to think that we DC drivers are all wealthy people who shrug off fifty-dollar fines, so fines of hundreds of dollars are needed to compel our obedience to traffic laws.

Mount Pleasant is a low-crime neighborhood, compared with most of the rest of the District, but crimes do happen. Mostly we suffer from theft-from-automobile (11 per month in 2015), burglaries (3 per month), and a few robberies (2 or 3 per month). Those robberies, classified as crimes of violence (whether or not actual violence was employed), are the most troubling, because they can result in physical injury, or even death.

Robberies in Mount Pleasant have been largely confined to the eastern edge of the neighborhood, two-thirds of them taking place east of 18th Street. I believe that this is because the young men who do the robberies come from the other side of 16th Street, crossing into Mount Pleasant to find victims. But lately this pattern seems to be changing. Here are the robberies reported in Mount Pleasant so far this year:

01/06/16 08:45 PM	Kilbourne Place, 1700 block
01/12/16 12:20 AM	16th St, 3517 - 3648 block
01/15/16 10:30 PM	Park Road, 1800 block
01/19/16 07:45 PM	Walbridge Place, 3200 block
01/20/16 11:50 AM	Mt Pleasant St, 3140 - 3172 block
02/04/16 09:00 PM	19th Street, 3115 - 3199 block

What's unusual is that three of the six entries are *west* of 18th Street. The 19th Street incident is especially grim. The victim's mother writes this report: “Five teenagers, three of whom were female, seemed to be out just looking 'to do someone' and turned around and said something like 'or we could just do this one right here.' She [the victim] tried to de-escalate the situation, but they swung a backpack at her head, knocking her to the ground, then rained fists on her head. They left her with two black eyes, head lumps, and a broken nose. Luckily a neighbor came to his door, and that made them run off”.

That's very much like what used to happen all too frequently on the *east* side of Mount Pleasant: little groups of teenagers, looking for an easy target to rob – someone alone on the street, and appearing unlikely to fight back. But this group came from the direction of *Adams Morgan*, and made their escape via *Adams Mill Road*. That's unusual.

Is this related to the incidents on Walbridge Place and Park Road? I don't know, but three robberies in a month on the west end of Mount Pleasant is unusual, and suggests that we all need to be extra careful. Yes, the police are aware of this, and are increasing their attentions to the west end of our neighborhood.

My advice to neighbors is, if worried by anyone on the street, head for a well-lit front porch, on the assumption that would-be robbers will not pursue you there, fearing that a resident will appear at the door. We residents should keep our porch lights on all through the night, offering safe refuge for anyone feeling threatened on the street.

An unfortunate incident erupted at **Don Juan's Restaurant** on the evening of January 27. At about 11:15 pm, a customer “was sitting at the bar with his girlfriend, ordering food, when he was approached from behind and assaulted” by four or five men. The victim “was punched on the right side of his head and knocked off of the barstool he was sitting on.”

Evidently these people had some dispute originating outside the restaurant, and the fight broke out there only because they happened to encounter each other at the restaurant. That is, this was *not* some drunken brawl originating in the restaurant. The proprietor of Don Juan's, Alberto Ferrufino, tells me that none of the participants had been drinking in his restaurant.

The managers broke up the fight, and the people involved left. Then, “the owner of the establishment attempted to notify Officer Edward Stewart (Mount Pleasant Business Beat Officer) of the Fourth District on his personal cellphone about this offense. However, Officer Stewart was off-duty at the time and the owner was unable to notify him. . . . the owner reported that he did not call 911 to report the crime.”

That last seems to have been Alberto's mistake: having failed to contact Officer Butler, he should have called 911 and reported the fracas to the police. But the incident appeared to be over, and the victims of the assault did not want the police called, so he let it go.

Big mistake! The MPD found out about this because the victim later went to a hospital emergency room for treatment of his injuries, and the hospital reported the assault. MPD Chief Lanier, upset by the lack of notification, asserted that “continued operation of this establishment presents an imminent danger to the health and safety of the public”, and imposed a 96-hour shutdown. Further, Chief Lanier requested “*an immediate revocation of the alcohol license . . . to ensure the safety of all citizens and visitors of Washington, D.C.*”

That was, in my opinion, excessive. The only mistake the restaurant made was in failing to report the fight to the MPD, having been unable to reach the MPD beat officer. That the fight happened to take place within the restaurant certainly did not imply “an immediate danger to the health and safety

of the public”, nor was revocation of the liquor license called for.

I posted on the internet that Alberto needed help to avoid the loss of his liquor license, a death sentence for a restaurant. Many people responded, because Alberto has an excellent record and reputation in Mount Pleasant. It's significant that people who live close by his restaurant are some of his strongest supporters. ANC Commissioners Rosa Rivas, whose home is half a block away on Mount Pleasant Street, and Frank Agbro, a block away on Kilbourne, quickly volunteered letters of support.

Those letters of support from the neighborhood saved Alberto's liquor license. On February 1, the ABC Board voted “to allow MPD's closure to expire without further suspension of the license”. And that was that.

That **snowstorm of January 22-23** caused as much paralysis of the city as any I have seen, and this is the *seventh* major snowstorm I've experienced in DC. The problem with such a storm is, simply, where do you put the snow? A typical street here has 30 feet of road width and 8 feet of sidewalk. A plow may clear 15 feet of travel roadwidth, but then residents do have to dig out their cars, and we've all got to clear the sidewalks, so that's 38 feet of pavement width, for which the snow has to be shoveled someplace. Yes, there's that four-foot treebox space, but there's 10 feet of pavement for every foot of treebox. Hence, an 18-inch snowfall corresponds to a 15-foot-tall mountain of snow in the treebox, and that's not counting intersections. Can't be done!

Hence, trucks simply plowing the snow aside so that cars could pass by wouldn't be sufficient. Fleets of dump trucks had to be brought to Mount Pleasant, to be filled with snow by front-end loaders, then to haul the snow away to build an enormous pile down near RFK Stadium. That is a slow, expensive, labor-intensive task. DC's basic problem is that it can't afford to keep such resources on hand every winter to deal quickly with a once-every-seven-years snowstorm.

Just stumbled across this fact: **George Bancroft**, after whom our neighborhood school is named, founded the US Naval Academy in Annapolis in 1845. Why Annapolis? Because he was able to acquire an abandoned Army post there. As for naming our school after the man, Mr Bancroft was known as an advocate of public education.

An advocate of a **playground at 1900 Lamont** filed a “conflict of interest” complaint about me with the Board of Ethics and Governmental Accountability, based on that lot being immediately adjacent to my home. On January 29 the Board wrote that they “found no evidence to support a causal link between Commissioner McKay's actions and his pecuniary interest”, and dismissed the complaint. Now perhaps we can focus on the pros and cons of the playground. I stand by DC policy, which is that “*every person is entitled to ambient noise levels that are not detrimental to life to life, health, and enjoyment of his or her property*”. That includes the apartment renters at 1900 Lamont.

The next meeting of the ANC will be on Tuesday, **February 23, 7:00 pm, at the Mount Pleasant Library.**