

Jack's March report

On March 17, the ANC did the following:

- Agreed to work with Councilmember Graham on a reconsideration of the Mount Pleasant Library expansion plans, emphasizing the need for library services elsewhere in Ward One;
- Advised DDOT to design the Park Road/17th Street intersection such that large tractor-trailer trucks could make the turn onto Mount Pleasant Street;
- Provided preliminary endorsement of a zoning variance application for 3150 17th Street.

The big battle of the month was about **the planned expansion of the Mount Pleasant Library**. All were pleased to see the plans for renovation and upgrading of the interior, which is aged and inefficient. Problems arose because the DC Public Library decreed that all libraries were to have at least 20,000 square feet of area, and this building has “only” 17,000. Hence, the DCPL proposed a modernistic glass “cube” expansion to be placed adjacent to the old building.

If the DCPL had had real dialog with the neighborhood, they would have realized the problems that this expansion plan caused. The ANC protested repeatedly that the DCPL was not seriously engaging the neighborhood. Their meetings were invariably followed by the DCPL continuing its plans unchanged. In February, opponents, including virtually every organized group in Mount Pleasant, met with Councilmember Graham and asked him to make them stop and reconsider.

The March 17 ANC meeting was turned over to the Councilmember, who led a discussion including roughly 50 residents. The ANC summarized the results of that discussion in a resolution calling for restoration and renovation “within the existing walls”, but halting “any consideration of expansion”, and advising an investigation of “where else in Ward 1 library services are needed and might be located”.

Opposition to the expansion is widespread, though for very different reasons. Historic Mount Pleasant objects to its modernistic appearance, butted right up against the old library. Nearby neighbors don't like the “cube” interfering with their views, or their access to their homes. The Library Renaissance Project objects to the failure of the Public Library to engage in serious public dialog here, as well as in other DC library projects (Shaw, Benning). The MPNA, and Hear Mount Pleasant, also object, for reasons not clear to me.

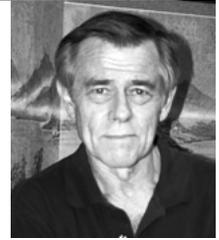
What the DCPL has ignored is that this library is not just Mount Pleasant's library, but is the only public library in Ward One, and ought to serve our neighboring communities as well as ours. I displayed a map showing that, if we take half a mile as the maximum walking distance to the library, then essentially all of Adams Morgan, and U Street/Cardozo, are beyond walking distance from this library. There's no parking available at the library, so evidently residents are supposed to take the bus, which is expensive and inconvenient, especially with children in tow.

Modern urban libraries are called upon to do much more than lend out books. Today libraries provide Internet access to residents who do not have such services at home, essential for

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crossing the “digital divide” that puts the children of low-income families at a disadvantage. Urban libraries are also vital for providing early learning to preschool children. The Mount Pleasant Library does well at these services, but plainly is too distant from many Ward One residents who need these services.

What's needed is “outreach” via a satellite of our library, providing some Internet-access computer terminals, some early-childhood reading services, and “interlibrary” book loans. No full-service library is needed, but a modest “store-front” operation would do the job.

I'm trying to turn this dismay over the “cube” expansion into an opportunity to extend public library services to parts of Ward One that currently have none. Yes, that means a smaller library for Mount Pleasant, but extending the reach of the library to thousands of residents who are currently without seems more worthy than some additional library space here.

Residents of RPP-zoned blocks now have their visitor passes. Mine gets used weekly by our housework helper, who no longer has to fear RPP tickets. DDOT continues to work on implementation of a **daytime parking pass**, for people who commute by car to their jobs in Mount Pleasant. These daytime-only parking permits will cost commuters about \$2.50 per workday, which is pretty inexpensive parking.

I've noted that the reason we need this is to do something about the large numbers of non-DC-tag cars that clog up our few remaining unzoned blocks. An unfortunate number of residents keep their cars registered elsewhere, and park them on Newton and Monroe, where they can be left for weeks on end, much to the discomfort of residents of those blocks.

On any weekday, a *majority* of the cars parked on Newton Street have non-DC tags. Courtesy of the early-March snow, I was able to count how many cars are simply parked semi-permanently on our unzoned blocks, *not* here due to daily commuters to Bancroft or Stoddard. I counted *more than 50* such cars parked on just a few blocks, occupying some 20% of the total curbside parking space, day and night. Making them move would ease the parking problem for all the residents of Newton and Monroe.

RPP zoning of Newton and Monroe will accomplish that. Yes, there's a program for dealing with cars without DC tags, but it's clearly not doing the job. RPP zoning will also permit the residents of Newton and Monroe to park wherever they need to in the neighborhood, whereas at the moment they cannot park even around the corner from their homes,

practically all other streets being RPP-zoned. Ingleside Terrace, and the 3300 block of 19th Street, must be RPP-zoned as well, or they'll just be swamped by cars forced off Newton and Monroe. I'm initiating petitions to accomplish this.

Michelle Obama has started a vegetable garden at the White House. Twenty-three fifth-graders from our own **Bancroft Elementary** are participating, doing planting and cultivating of this inner-city garden. Congratulations to Bancroft for having been chosen to be Michelle's garden partner!

Councilmember Graham introduced a bill **criminalizing loitering**, and allowing the police to declare almost anyplace a "Hot Spot No Loitering Zone". He also specifically suggested that it could be used against the Latinos who like to spend their days around the 7-11. That shows the danger of such a bill, because those men, while perhaps not very well behaved, are not criminals, and this law could easily become a weapon for police harassment of them, simply because some residents find them unpleasant or uncomfortable.

Negative reaction to the Councilmember's bill was quick and sharp, including a resolution of opposition from the Adams Morgan ANC. On March 16, the Councilmember *withdrew his bill*, just in time to head off a resolution from our ANC to the same effect. Phil Lepanto was the first commissioner to propose such a resolution, and I believe it would have passed without a dissenting vote.

WASA is about to add an "**impervious surface charge**" to our water bills. The problem is that, like many older cities, we have combined sewage and stormwater sewers (CSOs), and a torrent of stormwater can cause overflows of raw sewage into our creeks (including Rock Creek) and rivers. WASA is paying a lot of money to build underground water storage tunnels, to hold the stormwater overflow long enough for it to be passed through the Blue Plains sewage treatment plant. The "impervious surface charge" is supposed to bill water users according to the amount of stormwater they dump into the sewers.

Despite the talk about determining each property owner's impervious surface area, and billing accordingly, that will be only for commercial establishments. The additional charge for residents will initially be the same for everyone, with no attempt to measure how much hard surface there is at your home. The initial charge will be \$2.57 per month. This will replace the current "stormwater fee" of \$1.98 per month, so the net effect on our water bills will be small.

It's not going to remain small, and by 2012 may be over \$5 a month. At some point it may be adjusted according to how much hard surface (roof, pavement) a home has. I think there should be an allowance for residents who capture and contain their rooftop runoff, e.g., in rain barrels for home garden use.

Bancroft, by the way, has an excellent runoff-retention system, capturing runoff from its large paved lot adjacent to Rock Creek Park. The water goes into a big sand-filter container, then is released slowly into a "rain garden".

Our **ANC grants program** is a dreadful mess. The young woman hired as "grants manager" resigned abruptly in

December, leaving us stranded with 22 grants to manage. Our staff assistant, Adebisi Odegbile, agreed to take on the task, but he resigned abruptly in early March. None of us has the time to do the job. Our ANC task is to deal with District agencies and their actions affecting Mount Pleasant, and is not to pretend that we're a charitable foundation. We lack not only the time, but the expertise.

Because of these grants-manager problems, the actual working of the grants has yet to begin, nearly three months after the announcement of awards. We've also spent thousands of dollars on management of this undertaking, and by the time it's done, will have spent more in operating the program than was awarded in grants.

We were supposed to review our grants policies by the end of March, but the library issue forced that aside, so we'll take that up in April. My position is simple: we don't have the time to do this, we don't have the skills to do this, there's nothing in the DC law that says that ANCs are supposed to administer grants programs (half of all ANCs don't), the past efforts at grants have been extremely troublesome, failing the auditor's reviews, and we should cease trying to do this. Better to give the money back to the District, than to waste it this way. The current grants effort must be continued to completion, as we are obliged to the grant awardees to do so, but I am dead set against this ANC attempting grants again.

In my February newsletter, I noted the problems we were having finding a way **to slow traffic on the 2000 block of Park Road**. DDOT has proposed narrowing the road with median chokers, but this would have only a small effect on traffic speed (2 mph), and would eliminate the buffer space between parked cars and traffic. We can have slightly slower traffic, and no buffer space, or we can have the buffer space, and unslowed traffic. The residents must pick one or the other. Personally, I think the median traffic speed of 29 mph isn't that bad, whereas the buffer space is indispensable.

Councilmember Graham jumped into this fray with his favorite solution to traffic speed, namely **speed humps**. However, Park Road is not an ordinary neighborhood side street, but is a "minor arterial", carrying heavy traffic, over 7000 vehicles per day. Compare the traffic limit for speed humps advised by the Institute of Transportation Engineers, a maximum 3000 vehicles per day, and the limit adopted by DDOT, 5000 per day. Such heavy traffic over speed humps results in extreme levels of traffic noise and fumes inflicted on nearby residents. DDOT tells me that they positively will not put speed humps on Park Road.

Fiesta DC has been in Mount Pleasant for the past few years, but this year is being moved to 14th Street. Sponsors tell me that they liked having it in Mount Pleasant, but the street is too short, and too narrow, for their parade. I'm sad to see this colorful event leave the neighborhood.

The ANC will have an <i>informal</i> meeting on Tuesday, April 7, 7:00 pm . This will be mainly for community dialog. The next ANC <i>business</i> meeting will be on Tuesday, April 21, 7:00 pm , La Casa Community Center.
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