

Jack's May report

On May 19, the ANC did the following:

- Advised DDOT to provide “an appropriate traffic engineering assessment of the traffic calming problem” on 17th Street, between Newton Street and Piney Branch Parkway (my resolution);
- Advised the MPD, and DDOT, to install speed cameras on the 1800 and 2000 blocks of Park Road (my resolution);
- Advised the Office of Zoning, and associated District agencies, to state in letters to neighbors notifying them of a proposed action that they should contact their ANC;
- Advised the Alcoholic Beverage Control Board to accept the license renewal applications by the Sportsman and Lee-Irving liquor retailers.

The petitions for **Residential Permit Parking** for the 1800 blocks of Monroe and Newton, Ingleside Terrace, and the 3300 block of 19th are ready to go to DDOT. No, I don't know how long it will take to make the transition from unzoned to RPP-zoned blocks.

Essential for this change was the introduction of **daytime commuter parking passes**, so that people working at Bancroft Elementary, and the Stoddard Baptist Home, would not be left with no place to park. These passes were supposed to be ready in March, but they've been delayed. It seems that people all over the District looked at our daytime-pass notion and thought it was a marvelous idea. One prominent urban-design blogger wrote this: “The Mount Pleasant daytime parking pass program is the right solution for employees. Instead of keeping blocks unzoned for RPP, which invites abuse, . . . the program lets employees buy a parking pass for a daily rate similar to one day's bus fare.”

The day-pass idea was a topic of great interest at Council-member Graham's hearings on his parking bills (see next segment) on May 20. Schools, including Tubman Elementary in Columbia Heights, want it. CM Graham mentioned that teachers at Tubman currently park on a phys-ed field, and Mayor Fenty explicitly instructed the school to put a stop to that, so that the schoolkids could use the field in the manner intended. But, just as at Bancroft, the school parking lot is far too small, so what are the teachers to do? Daytime parking passes would solve their problem, if there's curbside parking available during the day, as there is here.

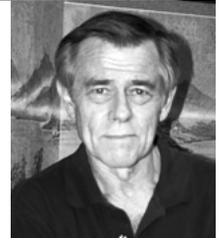
Given this great interest in the program, the new director of DDOT, Gabe Klein, said that the Mount Pleasant program should be delayed while DDOT takes greater care in its details. Ideas were offered to reduce the impact of the quarterly purchase (\$160 for a three-month permit) on low-income workers; booklets of one-day passes were suggested. Legislation may be necessary to permit the program, which CM Graham said will “happen very quickly”, should it be necessary.

The daytime-pass program will certainly come about, and possibly in a form that will be easier for the Stoddard and Bancroft workers to digest. Fortunately, Bancroft's about to go on summer vacation, and Stoddard believes that it will manage with the portion of Newton in front of the Home,

ANC 1D03 NEWSLETTER #81

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which will be left unzoned. Things will work out, even if RPP goes into effect before the daytime parking passes appear.

There was supposed to be a community meeting “to discuss the upcoming Day Pass Program DDOT plans to implement in Mount Pleasant”, first set for May 19, then May 21, then “cancelled”, with no new date set. CM Graham promises that the meeting will take place “very soon”.

The **parking bill proposed by CM Graham** would (1) allow everyone in a neighborhood, not just residents of RPP blocks, to have Ward One RPP stickers; (2) make one side of each RPP block “Ward One permit holders only”, eliminating the two-hour visitor allowance; and (3) establish escalating fees for RPP, \$15 for a household's first car, \$50 for the second, \$100 for the third.

I testified (as a resident, not for the ANC) in opposition to the one-side-reserved proposal, which is irrelevant in Mount Pleasant. Visitors aren't so numerous as to make it impossible for residents to find daytime parking on their blocks. I objected also to the escalating RPP fees, observing that anyone who is willing to bear the high costs of car ownership, and struggle every evening to find a place to park, must consider that car indispensable. The higher fees would not reduce car ownership, but would simply be a new tax on car-owning residents.

I also suggested a restoration of a limit on the time a car can be left parked in one spot. The old 72-hour limit was too short, but something should be done about cars left in place for weeks.

CM Graham's bill is a long way from becoming law. He's not intent on pressing these new measures, but is in truth fishing for new ideas to deal with our parking problems. Yes, like daytime passes, which will give all residents the benefits and privileges of RPP, while allowing daytime commuters to park on our streets, for a fee. The proceeds of these commuter fees are supposed to be returned, in part, to the neighborhood.

I hear many complaints about **traffic speed**. Many complaints pertain to our east-west arterials, Park Road and Adams Mill Road and Irving Street and Walbridge Place. For many drivers on these roads, Mount Pleasant is just an obstacle as they're rushing off to somewhere else. Add trucks and buses and it's no wonder these roads are uncomfortable parts of our compact, inner-city neighborhood.

The highest traffic speeds are observed on the 2000 block of Park Road, that last block of Mount Pleasant between the

Klinge/Walbridge intersection and Rock Creek Park, where the Traffic Study observed 85th-percentile speeds of 34 mph. (That is, 85% of the traffic was moving at or below that speed, 9 mph above the posted limit.)

Councilmember Graham forced DDOT to paint bike lanes on this block in early 2007, believing that visual lane “narrowing” with stripes of paint would reduce traffic speeds. In fact, this had no effect on traffic speeds. Nor did these bike lanes, which violate national bike-lane safety standards, do us bicyclists much good. (The downhill lane, forcing bicyclists right up against parked cars, is suicidal.) What the lanes did do was define a “buffer space” between parked cars and passing traffic, and that's been helpful to residents getting into and out of their parked cars.

DDOT has continued to talk to residents about methods for reducing traffic speeds on this block. Road narrowing can slow traffic, and DDOT has suggested **choker medians**, reducing the clear width of the traffic lanes. But that proposal eliminates the buffer space for the downhill direction, putting passing traffic right up against the parked cars. Not only is this hazardous to people getting into and out of their parked cars, it may lead to sideswipe damage of parked cars by passing trucks. The medians would make it impossible for passing cars to swing wide to give residents space at their cars. Maybe there are worse things than cars moving faster than we like. In due course, the residents of the block will be polled for their preference.

Speaking of **speed humps**, residents of the 3400 block of 17th Street (from Newton Street down to Piney Branch Parkway) have petitioned for humps on their road. The Traffic Study recommended four speed humps along Newton Street, and two on 18th Street, to slow traffic in the vicinity of Bancroft Elementary. But they did not recommend any measures on 17th Street, observing that “the 85th percentile speeds observed [28 mph] during this study are within normally accepted parameters for a 25 MPH roadway”.

This presented a problem, because if the ANC is going to advise overruling the traffic engineering judgment, good reasons are needed. I set about making my own speed measurements, and was getting some interesting results, when I was intercepted by an angry resident who argued, in a 1300-word diatribe, that I had no right to question their request for speed humps. On the contrary, I have a responsibility to confirm that what residents request is consistent with what's right for all of Mount Pleasant, and the District as well. In this case, it's important to establish that there's real justification for the speed humps, despite the contrary recommendation of the Traffic Study.

DDOT appears to have decided that speed humps will simply go in wherever residents request, with no further evaluation. They just put in speed humps upon receipt of a petition, with no discussions with the affected residents, no warning of what humps would be put in where, no warning of what warning signs would be posted, and where. This is a prescription for speed humps on every residential block in Mount Pleasant.

I'm going to stand up for a more careful and disciplined procedure. Speed humps are not a magic cure to the problem of traffic speed. They cause increased traffic noise and fumes, present obstacles to bicycles, clutter our sidewalks with ever more “warning” signs, and interfere with street cleaning and snow clearing. Traffic engineers consider speed humps the last resort, whereas residents too often perceive them as their first and only method for traffic “calming”. There's got to be some traffic engineering analysis, and dialog with the residents, before installing speed humps.

On May 12, the Board of Zoning Adjustment unanimously denied the **zoning variance application for 3150 17th Street**, despite our resolution of April 21 favoring the variance. This had become a hotly contentious issue on the ANC, as Dave Bosserman (his district) and I saw problems for the next-door neighbor with what was proposed, and wanted to reconsider that endorsement at the May 5 informal ANC meeting, in time for the May 12 BZA meeting. Gregg Edwards, who was going to chair that meeting, was insistent that we not even be permitted to bring up reconsideration. In protest, I declined to attend. A neighbor of the applicant, feeling mistreated, walked angrily out of the meeting, followed immediately by Dave Bosserman.

This conflict would have been avoided if the neighbor had been advised by the BZA, in the letter informing him of the variance application, to come to the ANC immediately. I didn't discover, until a chance meeting with him, that anyone had any complaints. This is the background for the resolution advising the BZA to tell neighbors to go to their ANC with any complaints, rather than waiting for the BZA hearing.

Everybody wants to know when something's going to be done about **the ruins of the Deauville apartment house**, burned to the ground on March 13, 2008. Councilmember Graham provided an update on May 4. It seems that the insurance on the building, \$5M, wasn't enough even to cover the balance on the mortgage, \$5.4M, so the bank took the entire insurance payment. Other claims against the owner total over \$1M. The parties are fighting it out in court.

At about 11 pm on May 16, there was another **gunshot incident** on Monroe Street, reminiscent of the gunshots in the same area in September, 2007. A fourteen-year-old on a bicycle in the street was struck in the ankle. He was not a Mount Pleasant resident, and what he was doing there that late at night, in the rain, I don't know.

Neighbors' Consejo is having a very hard time. On March 17 the director, Alfredo Morales, was dismissed. In April, 13 of the 21 members of the Consejo staff were laid off, for lack of funds to meet payroll. As the interim director, Judy Diaz, said, the neighborhood needs the Consejo, which provides substance abuse treatment to people in this area, especially the Spanish speaking. Should the Consejo vanish, we'll have an even worse time than now with passed-out drunks on the street. I've not seen a word about the Consejo's troubles in the English-language press.

The ANC will have no *informal* meeting in June. The next ANC *business* meeting will be on **Tuesday, June 16, 7 pm.**