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Minutes of the August 1, 2006 regular monthly meeting of Advisory Neighborhood Commission 1-D

These minutes approved at the September 5, 2006 meeting.

Call to order

Chair Edwards called the meeting to order at 7:09 pm. Present were Commissioners Gregg Edwards, Mitchell Backfield, Stormy Scott, Wayne Kahn, and Jack McKay, making a quorum.

Public discussion

Barbara Hayden introduced **Marilyn Carrera**, who was on hand to provide Spanish interpretation, if needed. **Todd Pfeiffer** thanked Gregg for his work on the alley between Heller's Bakery and the Samber Market, and mentioned notions for development of the alley and the area into which it opens. **Michael Hall** spoke in support of such development. **Barbara Hayden** referred to the scheduling conflict between the ANC monthly meeting and National Night Out, and spoke also of the plans for the Harvard Towers slope. She also reported that Mount Pleasant Main Street had filed an application for \$170,000 in DDOT funds for streetscape and Lamont Park improvements. **Steve Mudd** reported that All-Ways Mount Pleasant had called for greater openness of the Harvard Towers slope planning, and brought a number of AMP letters for the ANC. **Fred Olsen** asked about a return of the US Post Office to Columbia Heights.

Treasurer's report

Rich Wysocki was absent, so there was no Treasurer's report.

Exploration of alley & courtyard-oriented development

The commission agreed to spend five minutes in a discussion of the alley adjacent to Heller's Bakery, so that the persons in the audience present for that topic would be able to leave the meeting early. Gregg moved this draft resolution:

ANC1D asks the Office of the City Administrator, the Department of Public Works, and the Department of Transportation to support the improvement of the area around Alley ID = 6253260801 to explore community, cultural, and economic development via encouragement of innovative uses of the alley (called here zAlley) and a former cul-de-sac (called here ZaPlaZa).

Specifics:

1] No parking in zAlley or on ZaPlaZa. We ask DC to not grant permits or leases for parking on this public space.

Why: Parking and assorted private uses would tempt reversion of this area to a trash dump and crime spot.

2] No dumpsters allowed within three feet of the alley or plaza.

Why: The danger of collisions makes the alley even narrower, and can effectively close the alley to access by delivery cars or trucks.

3] Assign DC government coordination of efforts to a single agency, preferably DCRA and not dDot.

Why: There will be many permits required, and DCRA is the central point for most of these. Supporting innovative developments is a relatively new role for DCRA, but one it increasingly is call upon to exercise. This could be a way to further this ANC's call for dealing with a perceived hostile business environment by treating Mount Pleasant as an innovation zone. The assistance of the Office of Planning would be a big help.

4] Support formation, and when deserved, start-up funding of a not-for-profit corporation – with membership broadly open to residents, property owners, and merchants of the block – to develop this area.

Why: DC has generously funded the Main Streets and Great Streets programs. For a very small fraction of that cost, it may be possible to open an even greater resource for creating good and meaningful jobs, and increasing the availability of affordable housing: DC's alleys and internal court yards.

5] Support exploration of city acquisition of the small margin of land that separates the plaza from four neighboring properties.

Why: The margin of private property surrounding the cul-de-sac was originally set for the size of cars in 1928, and are typically 12.5 feet by 15 feet (with a few larger). These are too small for much use – either contemporary sized cars or for structures. On the other hand, acquisition would open direct connection to four or five other properties which could then participate. Later, it would make possible a network of pedestrian paths that would link internally to the rest of this highly populated block. The extra size of the plaza would also expand the range of uses of the space, and permit parallel uses, increasing its attractions for further community, cultural, and economic development.

6] Support provision of locked facilities on or near the plaza for electric power and communications.

Why: These utilities are essential to offer competitive events that could attract a wide range of uses, including future use by mini-markets, food-fests, artistic productions. With the small amount of property noted above, there could also be about five restaurants that could offer rear service.

7] Support DC exploration and encouragement of a trash handling cooperative to consolidate the huge flow of trash now placed in this area by about a dozen merchants, residents, and apartment buildings.

Why: Without this consolidation, the full potential of this space will be compromised by the smell and appearance of massive amounts of trash. Plus, the inevitable accidents that make the trash available to support a large rat and pest population.

Jack's motion to table this resolution to a future meeting failed for lack of a second. The resolution was opened to public discussion, for a limited time. After some discussion, Jack again moved that this be tabled until the next meeting. *The motion to table passed, three to zero, with two abstentions.*

Consent item: meeting with ABC Board

Gregg proposed that he call Jeff Coudriet to set up another time for a meeting with the ABC Board. No formal motion was made.

Consent item: Petty cash

Jack moved that we restore the petty cash fund to the sum of \$200. Due to confusion over the size of the check needed, the discussion ran overtime, and the matter was deferred until the end of the meeting.

Consent item: Burglaries

Jack moved this resolution:

Resolved, that ANC 1D requests the Metropolitan Police Department to investigate the problem of home burglaries in Mount Pleasant, and offer advice for reducing the rate of burglary in our neighborhood.

Why: historically, Mount Pleasant experiences an average of three burglaries per month. But in June there were eleven, and in July, another eleven. This abrupt tripling of the burglary rate indicates that our neighborhood has suddenly become a target for burglars, and residents are anxious to put a stop to it.

Resolution passed by five to zero vote.

Priority item: Police Security for residents of Harvard Towers

Stormy moved the following resolution:

Resolved: ANC1D asks the Mayor's Office of Aging, and the DC Housing Authority to immediately reorganize personnel and practices to assure a substantial upgrade in the security of the Residents of DCHA properties in Mount Pleasant, specifically Harvard Towers.

In particular,

- 1] A comprehensive security plan should be drawn up for policing, fire, and emergency interventions within 30 days that meets the standards of best practices in the top twenty cities of the US.
- 2] These plans be critiqued by outside consultants hired by the Mayor's Office on Aging as experts in those fields, by October 1st 2006.
- 3] The plans be certified every two years, starting by November 1st 2006 by the DC Police Department, the DC Fire Department, and the DC Office of Emergency Preparedness.
- 4] The DC Police Department make random checks of the state of security and the promised level of security at least three times a month, two of which times are with due diligence for at least 15 minutes, and one of which is for at least 45 minutes.

5] Extra steps must be taken to assure that non-residents (unless visiting in a residential unit or in the company of their hosts) do not enter and loiter, and do not sojourn with residents for more than a day at a time.

Why: Residents have complained for at least five years at neighborhood civic meetings about the low level of security experienced in Harvard Towers. There have been large discrepancies between the reports on level of cooperation expressed by DCHA staff, and that by MPD. Requests to resolve these discrepancies have been ignored. There have been numerous fires, and residents complain that there have been very little effective response by DCHA. Groups of non-residents congregate in the halls or stairways and accost residents, or engage in what appear to be unwelcome activities.

There have been continuing spates of fires, resident-on-resident abuses, and reports of drug trade.

Resolution passed by five to zero vote.

Priority item: Anti-dumping of residents at Harvard Towers.

Stormy offered this resolution.

ANC1D asks that the Mayor's Office on Aging, the DC Housing Authority, and the DC Department of Health assure that residents assigned to live in Harvard Towers be monitored to assure their ability for independent living.

Specifically:

1] DCHA establish an evaluation program that is certified as representing best practices in the USA's top twenty cities by an expert outside contractor engaged by the Office on Aging. This program should be in place by October 1st, 2006.

2] All residents of Harvard Towers within one year be evaluated to assure their physical and mental ability in actual practice of independent living.

3] Thereafter, on a rolling basis but with intervals no longer than two years, each resident must be tested and their ability certified.

4] Those who fail the tests in 1] and 2] above may, at the discretion of DCHA, be kept and retested within six months; those who fail again must be reassigned to an assisted living situation within 30 days after the initial six months.

Why: Residents have reported at neighborhood meetings that there have been numerous fires and resident-on-resident abuses. Much of this is reported to be associated with the weakened condition of a portion of residents.

Resolution passed by four to one vote, Wayne, Gregg, Stormy, and Jack voting "yes", Mitchell voting "no".

Consent item: neglected properties

Jack introduced this resolution:

Resolved, that ANC 1D advises the Department of Consumer and Regulatory Affairs (DCRA) to investigate certain properties in Mount Pleasant that are not abandoned, but are unoccupied and neglected, including 1865 Newton Street, 1663 Newton Street, 1718-1720 Newton Street, and 1855 Lamont Street.

Why: These boarded-up properties are unsightly, the buildings and yards are poorly maintained, and no renovation work is currently in evidence on any of them. The shabby appearance reduces the value of adjacent properties, and the vacant houses are tempting to vagrants. At least one has already been a site of apparently illicit activities. Three of these properties are on the DCRA Vacant Property list, but no actions appear to have been taken to resolve the situation.

Resolution passed by five to zero vote.

New business: Traffic control at the Woodner

Gregg introduced this resolution:

Resolved: ANC1D asks the DC Department of Transportation to install a pedestrian crossing traffic control measure that significantly upgrades safety for pedestrians crossing 16th Street at Spring Place NW, to lower the possibility of pedestrian-automobile collisions.

Why: Every day, there appear to be thousands of people jaywalking across this major arterial. Long time residents recall fatalities as a result. Even beyond the issue of safety is that of convenience: This is where very large numbers of people want to cross.

Resolution passed by five to zero vote.

Approval of meeting minutes

Jack asked that the minutes of the July 10 meeting be approved. There being no objection, the minutes were approved.

Adjournment

Jack moved adjournment, passed unanimously, and the meeting adjourned at 9:18 pm.