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## Minutes of the July 6, 2010 meeting of Advisory Neighborhood Commission 1-D

*These minutes accepted at the July 20, 2010 meeting.*

### Call to order

[7:08 pm] Chair Edwards called the meeting to order. Present were ANC1D commissioners Edwards, Bosserman, Tunda, and McKay, constituting a quorum.

### Public Discussion

[7:08 pm] This being an informal meeting, business was to consist only of time-critical issues. The meeting began with an informal public discussion of current issues, in particular the Office of Planning draft Small Area (Revitalization) Plan.

### Direction Signs to Mount Pleasant at the Columbia Heights Metro

[8:02 pm] Gregg introduced this resolution:

Resolved, ANC 1D advises the DC Department of Transportation and the Washington Metropolitan Area Transportation Authority to install direction signs to Mount Pleasant at the exits of the Columbia Heights Metro Station.

Why: The strong need for this move is provided in the DC Office of Planning's Mount Pleasant Street Revitalization Strategy Draft Plan.

*Resolution passed, 4 to 0.*

### Post ANC 1D Notices in Lamont Park

[8:20 pm] Gregg introduced this resolution:

Resolved, ANC 1D will, in addition to its current pattern of posting four notices in each single member district, post a notice of each meeting in the bulletin board of Lamont Park. These notices will be posted throughout the rest of 2010.

*Resolution passed, 3 to 0 (Jack abstaining).*

## **OP should refocus its Draft Plan for Mt Pleasant to deal with its main problems**

[8:39 pm] Gregg introduced this resolution:

Resolved, ANC 1D advises the DC Office of Planning (OP) to rewrite its Draft Small Area Plan (Plan) for Mt Pleasant in the ways, which follow below, to address our main problems, preservation of the distinctive qualities of this neighborhoods cultures and population in both aspects:

- Maintaining its unusually high economic diversity, and
- Maintaining its unusually high level of numbers in a relatively small area.

**1. Supportive framework for continuing development.** Refocus the plan so that the DC government will not channel its scarce resources into ways that restrict ANC 1D and the people of Mt Pleasant into programs that often do not work in places like ours. Instead, the focus should be redirected to support a consensual and collaborative core framework so that all groups have reason to believe they have a bright future here, and can work on it.

**2. Clarify a rational basis for Special Merit consideration in Historic Preservation issues.** 1D advises OP to include a probe in the Plan. This probe should be restricted in area but not in time so that the implications may be drawn yea or nay over many years and thus be instructive for other neighborhoods in DC. In this Historic District, the meaning of Special Merit is to be decided on a rational basis and decisions may be appealed to the DC Superior Court by any impacted party within Mt Pleasant to enforce this rule. Rational basis here means the competing values should be justified by evidence-based arguments which estimate the greatest future good for the greatest number. For this District, the terms "social or other benefits having a high priority for community services " under the current law's definition Special Merit should include explicitly the values in the present Comprehensive Plan for Policies Policy MC-2.5.1, 2.5.2, and 2.5.3. In addition, the values to be explicitly considered should be stated as giving preference to projects that give distinct and credible reasons that they will preserve and foster creative development of Mt Pleasant's economic and ethnic diversity and at least maintain the current level of population. Specifically, the value should allow arguments that , preserving and enhancing diversity and healthy aggregations in culture, with historic buildings being one important part of that cultural vitality to be preserved. In specific cases, design decisions should consider maintaining affordability and appeal to culturally diverse individuals, including those whose culture was not dominant in the reference period.

**3. Innovation Zone.** Include in the Plan authorization for pilot programs and longer-lasting probes whose alteration from DC regulations can be explicitly justified, with extrapolations from prior practice argued as beneficial innovations. Beneficial here means that a good result would benefit not only local development but prove useful to other neighborhoods or to DC as a whole. In each case, the proposed alteration can be overturned within thirty business days by action of the DC Council and Mayor.

In addition, 1D appreciates the investment by OP of research in Mt Pleasant.

### **Why:**

These points are a non-separable part of the resolution.

1. Set the plan to serve as a supportive framework for further development. This means several changes of emphasis:

1.1 Generally, focus on supporting the DC Home Rule Charter designation of the neighborhood ANC as the local planning entity. The relationship between ANC1D, as a charter institution thus with legal precedence over agencies created by DC law, and OP should be collegial. This can better be done by a new approach: Starting with engagement with all sectors of those who work and live here; formulation of alternatives; leveraging local talent and expertise to fill out the consequences for all interest groups; and then constructing a common core for concerted action that fosters the development of all groups at the expense of the legal vital interests of none.

1.2 Strip out all parts that do not work for the common core. For example, the recounting of a particular and perhaps partial view of local history can be controversial and detract from attracting collegial engagement, so is better omitted.

1.3 Strip out parts where ANC 1D has already initiated development for a common core. For example, 1D has developed an alcohol policy based on over a dozen meetings with a very broad participation, far broader than OP's and other competing initiatives. The DC Court of Appeals has stopped a DC agency proceeding with a plan ignoring some of the resolutions because the agency operated against the law. OP should follow the law, and the direction laid down in this Appeals order, and not intervene without giving Great Weight to 1D's resolutions.

Effectively, this means stripping out the alcohol recommendations, as well as any others – of which there are many – where OP has ignored 1D resolutions, or is suggesting directions that may be contrary. This requires OP to follow the public policy laid down in DC's constitution, the Charter, and DC's ANC laws, and start consultation with 1D before proceeding.

It also means stripping out specific mandates to direct funds and attention to training local merchants or directing their cultural style. These "top-down" initiatives have been tried before for decades in Mt Pleasant, and bear little positive results. Instead, most merchants have resisted direction from their "betters". In place of these government funded programs, merchants have established their own networks of mutual help, often in collaboration with 1D commissioners.

1.4 Specifically addressing the summary matrix of OP directives, strip out parts that supplant 1D's Charter role as the local planning entity. These almost entirely side-step 1D to go directly to a few local civic groups to set policy for Mt Pleasant. These initiatives bear no safeguards for breadth of engagement and consideration of the interests and consequences on all groups.

The action items in the summary matrix should be replaced with funding and assistance for all groups, starting with 1D as the Charter designated DC government entity, to develop ideas, build on past work, and organically find the consensual core that serves all at the expense of no vital interests.

2. Include a new section that addresses the issues raised by 1D - both in the unanswered initial resolution asking for a study, and in follow-on meetings - on preserving the vital history and identity of Mt Pleasant as a neighborhood with unusual economic and ethnic diversity.

2.1 1D advises OP that its current Draft raises the possibility that OP will further accelerate the homogenizing forces of gentrification. One civic noted that there is a

realistic fear that perhaps - of ten thousand people from non-gentrified economic and ethnic demographics now present - all but a thousand will be forced out. This long-standing part of Mt Pleasant history was mostly ignored. This almost-likely huge wrench in local demographic diversity and urban identity was not considered. 1D advised OP to address this momentous change directly with ideas based on best, not just fashionable, practices.

2.2 OP recognized early that "density" is a key disagreement in Mt Pleasant, as it has been elsewhere. The Urban Land Institute has published a summary of research on this issue which concludes that in almost every aspect, density provides net benefits for urban areas. Despite this early recognition, and the thrust of the original 1D resolution, this issue has been ignored in OP's Draft. If anything, the Draft seems to side with those seeking lower density - and a strong decrease in population and diversity. 1D advises OP that this ignorance of the condition of the preponderance of the people here is a major flaw in the report. 1D advises that this huge condition should be addressed forthrightly so that fears and evasion of scientific research do not result in further "urban removal".

1D advises OP that this is a chance for it to reverse its world-wide notoriety as being a principal force in "urban removal", most tragically about 50 years ago, many of whose refugees migrated to Mt Pleasant, and are now faced with a new onslaught from OP.

2.3 Informally, but never as legally required, OP suggested that the norms of Historical Preservation would prohibit any increase in density, even when currently allowed by zoning. 1D advises OP to grasp this blockage directly in two ways, below, and to work with Mt Pleasant to identify extrapolations from best practices to consider other alternatives. 1D advised OP to refocus its draft to facilitate these processes.

2.4 OP now is engaged in a rezoning process. This Draft does not consider the alternatives possible to assist Mt Pleasant in maintaining its current diversity and population base. 1D advises collaboration in opening that specialized process to include a comprehensive local plan for Mt Pleasant.

2.5 As explained above, the consideration of social benefits is included in DC's historic preservation law. However, in practice, these considerations seldom are given substantial much less Great Weight. OP's Draft could work with 1D to develop language that would give future and present economic and human/cultural benefits a more explicit and rational framework. 1D advises OP to collaborate, and reformulate its Draft to include, as a long-lasting probe, clear instructions to introduce these concerns as major factors to be rationally and explicitly considered.

3. Establish Mt Pleasant as an innovation Zone. The innovations should be discrete and be made plausible in terms of the benefits that could be expected to others in DC.

3.1 About five years ago, 1D resolved to advise the DC government to assist Mt Pleasant in becoming an innovation zone. The current comprehensive plan for Mt Pleasant makes innovation a central thrust for the neighborhood. 1D advises OP that the current Draft does not constructively address these items - as embodied in 1D's resolution and the Comp Plan - as a guiding principle. It does not address the well-researched need for inexpensive space, for diversity as an urban cover from social pressure and conformity, and the need for spaces that combine working and living

either together or nearby. 1D advises that OP's Draft should systematically address this issue if it is to keep faith with the Comp Plan and the usual economic driver for sustainable urban economic and ethnic diversity.

3.2 1D advises OP to support a framework for developing a viable and diverse common infrastructure by legislative changes that facilitate innovation. For example, OP's market advisor in a public meeting guessed that the addition of shuttle and/or jitney service could greatly expand the convenience range of resident to shop in Mt Pleasant Street's commercial corridor (strip) and thereby increase profitability by half. This effect would seem to be far more assured by its mechanical simplicity, and perhaps even ten times greater than the other OP proposals. 1D has passed resolutions urging this adoption, ignored by the DC government.

The Draft ignores this idea (along with similar 1D resolutions) even though it could be a far better, cheaper, and stronger improvement. This is the kind of innovation that expresses real creativity for Mt Pleasant as called for in the Comprehensive Plan.

1D advises OP to refocus its Draft to recognize 1D resolutions, collaborate on innovation, and help persuade the DC Council to adopt Mt Pleasant as an innovation zone that could introduce improvements with beneficial impact for all DC.

*Resolution passed, 4 to 0.*

## **Adjournment**

[8:55 pm] By unanimous consent, the meeting was adjourned at 8:55 pm.