

“Open Agenda” Notes for the April 24, 2018 meeting of ANC1D

Agenda approval

MPD Lieutenant Jonathan Munk: PSA 408 discussion

Public discussion

“Each Commission shall set aside a portion of each public meeting *to hear the views of residents* within the Commission area and other affected persons on problems or issues of concern within the Commission area and on proposed District government actions that affect the Commission area.”

Chair's report

Vice-chair's report

Committee reports:

Transportation (Jon)

Public Space (Stuart)

Housing (Paul)

Secretary's report

Minutes of the March 20 meeting (draft sent out March 21).

Treasurer's report

Consent items: Checks to James True, \$75, postering for the April meeting; HearSay Interpreting, \$100, interpreting at the April meeting; Julio Lopez, \$30, for assistance at the April meeting.

Q2FY18 quarterly report

Unfinished business

Adequate Time to Review Office of Planning Staff Reports (Stuart)

Resolved, that ANC1D advises the Office of Planning (OP) to publish staff reports for zoning relief and historic preservation review cases at least five business days in advance of the hearing at the relevant District of Columbia board or commission (including but not limited to hearings before the Board of Zoning Adjustment, the Zoning Commission, and the Historic Preservation Review Board).

Why: As ANC Commissioners, we are members of the community who serve our neighbors as representatives to the District of Columbia government. Although each of us brings a diverse array of experience to the ANC, we are not experts in architecture, historic preservation, or zoning law.

Therefore, we often rely on the staff reports published by the Office of Planning to provide background on zoning relief or historic preservation cases. The ANC uses these reports to inform our resolutions that advise relevant District agencies.

The ANC deeply appreciates the hard work that goes into producing each staff report from OP. However, for recent cases, the OP has not released the staff reports until only days before the associated hearing. For instance, as of March 18, 2018, the OP has not yet published a staff report for case 19629, which the Board of Zoning Adjustment will hear on March 21, 2018.

The fact that ANC Commissioners and community members typically have—at most—two or three days to review OP staff reports is unacceptable. The lack of time to review the OP reports places an undue burden on commissioners and community members alike, as we all rush to familiarize ourselves with the report before the relevant hearing occurs. If OP is unable to publish reports at least five business days before hearings, then OP should require that applicants submit their paperwork earlier or automatically postpone hearings. Both options would ensure that ANC commissioners and community members have adequate time to review the reports.

New business

1. 1800 Kenyon Street NW, HPA 18-252, concept/roof deck on top of single story brick garage

Resolved, that ANC1D advises the Historic Preservation Review Board to judge the plans for a garage rooftop deck at 1800 Kenyon Street NW (HPO 18-252) compatible with the character of the Mount Pleasant Historic District.

Why: the District's historic preservation law requires that "alterations of existing structures [be] compatible with the character of the historic district". Compatibility does not entail replication of what exists, but only similarity, so that the altered structure does not visibly clash with the architecture of the district, that is, clearly appearing to have been built at a different date. This is essentially what the residents of Mount Pleasant wanted when the historic district designation was made, in 1985: that old structures not be demolished and replaced by modern buildings, clearly different from the old. As a previous chairman of the HPRB, Tersh Boasberg, frequently said, historic preservation does not freeze a neighborhood in amber, resistant to all change. the requirement is only that changes -- alterations -- not clash with the traditional style of the neighborhood.

The HPO staff report advises rejection of this garage-deck concept. ANC1D challenges the HPO reasoning, as follows.

(1) "[T]his property is located at a street corner, prominently visible. . . There is no opportunity to tuck away the structure deep in an alley." This implies that the proposed deck is inherently "incompatible", and hence, is acceptable only if it is invisible from the public street. But if the deck is not judged inherently incompatible, and in fact looks like much of the rest of Mount Pleasant, then there is no need for it to be hidden.

(2) The "character of the alley must also be considered, and not just the three [?] streets from which the deck would be visible. The surrounding garages support no decks." Indeed, but one does not have to go far to find garage=roof decks and similar backyard structures along Mount Pleasant alleys. Certainly by 1985 these were generally accepted elements of Mount Pleasant architecture. One may not be pleased

by their appearance, in particular the stake fencing commonly used in their construction, now decades old and weathered. There is no record that advocates of historic district designation stated, 33 years ago, that such decks would no longer be considered allowable. In fact, the filings for historic district designation make no mention of alleys, evidently not considering them to be significant elements of the neighborhood architecture. (See below for a couple of examples of rooftop decks in Mount Pleasant, close to the proposed site.)

(3) "[T]his deck comes with a privacy fence around it. By definition, fences stand on the ground. A fence atop a building is an incongruous and historically incompatible element." In fact, the garage-rooftop decks in Mount Pleasant generally have fence enclosures, so this has been a commonplace style in Mount Pleasant for at least the past half century. It is true that these can be unattractive structures, but that does not necessarily make them "not compatible". The revised design calls for steel railing, surely an esthetic improvement over the stockade fencing, and overcoming this HPO objection.

In sum, the HPO objections do not meet the legal requirement that the design be shown to be not "compatible with the character of the historic district". The District's historic preservation law does not demand reversion to the architectural standards of long ago, but requires only that alterations be "compatible", and ANCID judges that this proposed design meets that standard.



2. install curb ramp at southeast corner of 18th St and Newton St

Resolved, that DDOT should install accessible sidewalk curb ramps for crossing Newton Street on the eastern side of 18th Street and may relocate the antique fire alarm call box on the southeast corner to a more convenient location at the corner of this intersection, consistent with feedback from the Historic Preservation Office.

Why: This crosswalk directly serves Bancroft Elementary School, but the sidewalk does not extend to the curb on the southeast corner of the intersection and necessarily lacks a ramp. Reworking the sidewalk on these corners would greatly improve accessibility for school community members. The current location of the call box means a compliant ramp cannot be installed without moving the call box. So long as care is used not to damage it, there's little harm in relocating the call box to another location at the corner of this intersection, perhaps to the 18th St side where there's more room.