

# Barrio de Langley Park

A Planning Newsletter Published by Action Langley Park

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## APARTMENT CONDITIONS

### Some Are Awful

Residents of Langley Park face many challenges: health, jobs, school, language, and more. And there is another challenge, one that no resident of the USA should have to face: badly maintained apartments that not only are unpleasant but also at times dangerous to the health, safety, and upward mobility of the tenants.



Victoria Station

This serious matter was discussed at the 29 November 2012 meeting of the Transitional Neighborhood Initiative team focusing on Langley Park. TNI is the county-formed team that is working to improve the quality of life in the neighborhood.

It is a situation that for a long time has existed in two apartment complexes, Bedford Station and Victoria Station. Several months ago, county officials inspected the approximately 550 apartment units in these complexes and found at least 1,600 code violations: leaks; bed bugs, rats, and other pests; mold; and much more. Shocking. Most residents have complained numerous times to management yet few problems were corrected. Residents are now exercising their right to file formal complaints with the County. However, inspectors are few and do not speak Spanish, making it difficult to correct the multitude of problems that exist.

The team that found 1,600 code violations acted in response to requests from the TNI team and the advocacy of the tenants' coalition. In this matter, staff members of CASA de Maryland proved to be very helpful.

Note: many of the apartments rent for \$1,000-plus.

Most of the code violations were fixed according to a revisit by the officials, but others continue to exist and of course new problems arise.

Why don't the residents complain more? One reason is that the management might throw the occupants out. Recently, a family with three children was reportedly being forced out for organizing! Further, there are reports that security guards have threatened and even beaten some resi-

"Both Bedford and Victoria Stations are owned by the same management. There's no controlled access so everyone loiters in the buildings. It's completely unsafe. Cleaning staff only works M-F so on weekends the buildings are completely dirty with trash everywhere. The buildings are unkempt and dirty. I will not recommend this community to anyone; it's a total disgrace."

"I sure as hell ain't renewing my lease. Roaches... bugs... infestations... lousy service... the list goes on. Worse yet, they refuse to lock the front door of the buildings to make their tenants safe. The place stinks and cleaning personnel come whenever they feel like it."

From [www.apartmentratings.com](http://www.apartmentratings.com); these quotes appear to reflect what the inspection team found.

## THE IMMIGRANTS OF LANGLEY PARK

A Research Report by

Gerson Elias, Valeria Nogales, Marcela Lovo, Byron Marroquin and Bill Hanna

with the help of Chris Guerra and Florencia Ramirez

Langley Park is a set of neighborhoods living within a very dense 0.83 square mile area west of the University of Maryland in Prince George's County. A majority of the residents are from Central America, especially Guatemala and El Salvador. The area is adjacent to the Montgomery County boundary, south of Northwest Branch, west of 23rd Avenue, and north of University Boulevard. (See map on page 5.)



The area was developed in the early 1950s, and in the first two decades residents were almost entirely Euro-Americans with a significant Jewish sub-population. In the 1970s, African-Americans began to move in and by 1980 they were the majority. During the 1980s, largely due to the civil wars in Central America, many residents of those distressed countries left to come to "El Norte"—and two parts of the USA received a disproportionate number of immigrants: Southern California and Langley Park.



One of the divides in Langley Park is between apartment house dwellers and those who live in the mostly small houses (910 square feet—although some now have additions). The residents of two Census tracts (8056.01 and 8056.02) are predominantly apartment dwellers ("a jumble of garden apartments and strip shopping centers," said one observer), and the third Langley Park Census tract (8057) has mostly the small houses. The that the first two tracts are heavily Latino/a and heavily male. Additionally, the tracts are young: the median age for both is 29; for 8057 it is 30. The apartment tracts clearly characterize an immigrant residential area.



The Authors

There are some social separations between Latinos and others, and among Latinos due to home country or region, behavior during the civil wars, immigration status, and more.

In Summer 2012, our bilingual research team set out to learn more about the immigrants of Langley Park using census data and, especially, interviews with an accidental sample of over 150 residents. Our team was composed of seven researchers, six current bilingual students and a professor at the University of Maryland, College Park. Four of the student (pictured above) were the lead authors of this report.

The sample's composition was 78% in the 25-49 age range, 58% male, 88% Latino/a (Census: 77%), and 56% resident in the neighborhood for six or more years. Our respondents were slightly less mobile: Only 12% had

# NEWS AND NOTES

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## From A.C.L.U.\*

With the recent unprecedented DREAM Act victory, Marylanders have spoken loud and clear once again that immigrants are an important part of our community. By supporting the DREAM Act and rejecting anti-immigrant bills, Marylanders have repeatedly shown that we do not endorse programs that alienate, racially profile, and harass immigrant communities.

The federal 287(g) program in Frederick County deputizes local police as immigration enforcers, with virtually no training, oversight, or accountability. Frederick County is the only county in Maryland to participate in the program, damaging the community's trust in its Sheriff's Office and alienating victims and witnesses of crime. This program has resulted in countless complaints of abusive police practices and racial profiling, and has developed a reputation for being one of the worst in the nation.

We have a unique opportunity because the 287(g) program in Frederick County is set to expire in January 2013. Now is the time to make Maryland a "287(g)-free zone." So let your Senators and Representative know how you feel!

\*The American Civil Liberties Union is one of the country's great organizational champions of liberty. The quotation is from a 28 November 2012 memo.

## CASA de Maryland

The 2012 annual report of this organization is now available. It highlights the work on the Maryland Dream Act, job placement, helping permanent residents to become citizens, and much more. ALP congratulates CASA for its many contributions to the quality of immigrant life.

Check the report out at [http://issuu.com/casademaryland2/docs/annual\\_report\\_2012\\_final](http://issuu.com/casademaryland2/docs/annual_report_2012_final).

## 287(g)

The Immigration Policy Center just released a report about the 287(g) immigration enforcement program, concluding that it is "a flawed and obsolete." The program allows a state and local law enforcement entity to enter into a partnership with ICE in order to receive delegated authority for immigration enforcement within their jurisdictions. Thus every police officer can become an ICE agent, thus discouraging residents from contacting the police about a crime or more. Here are a few findings (*ital* comments added):

• In Maricopa County, Arizona there is a pattern and practice of constitutional violations, including racial profiling of Latinos. *No surprise! The critics have been right.*

• In 87% of the jurisdictions with 287(g) agreements the rate of Latino population growth was higher than the national average. *Too many people fear change! Hey, change is opportunity!*

• ICE and its local law enforcement partners have not complied with the terms of their 287(g) agreements; standards by which deputized officers are evaluated contradicted the stated objectives of the 287(g) program. *It's the "get a Latino" program.*

• While ICE officials have stated that the purpose of the program is to address serious crime, such as narcotics smuggling, ICE has never documented this objective or provided statistics to validate it. As a result, local police have used their 287(g) authority to detain immigrants for

traffic violations and other minor crimes. *The Federal Government must insist upon the serious crime focus or terminate the program.*

The full report is at [http://www.immigrationpolicy.org/sites/default/files/docs/287g\\_fact\\_sheet\\_11-2012.pdf](http://www.immigrationpolicy.org/sites/default/files/docs/287g_fact_sheet_11-2012.pdf)

**Baltimore!**

In an attempt to reverse decades of population decline, Baltimore Mayor Stephanie Rawlings-Blake is trying to attract "new Americans" to the city. Her idea is that the new Americans—that is, immigrants—will bring the skills, entrepreneurship, and tax base needed to revitalize blighted neighborhoods that are now full of boarded-up buildings rather than thriving businesses and family homes. The available evidence suggests that immigration can indeed be a powerful force for urban renewal. Go Stephanie! Maybe Prince George's County should follow Baltimore's lead.

**Achieve Act**

Republican Senators Hutchison and Kyl have proposed that Dream-eligible young people be given an opportunity to remain legally in the USA. They must finish a higher education or equivalent degree or serve in the military, then obtain a visa which allows them to work for four years in the country, and then if all goes well obtain a W-3 degree permitting four more years of work, renewable, but that gives the immigrant young people (a) no eligibility for public welfare benefits, (b) no pathway to citizenship. Thus no opportunity for permanence with political rights. Senators: chew and swallow your proposal, and within about a day, it will come out where it belongs: in the toilet—or wherever you "do it."



**Cops' Party for Kids**

The Prince George's County Police Department's Community Services Division, along with several community partners, will host the 29th Annual Cora Rice Community Christmas Party for Deserving Children. More than 500 children, selected by their teachers and school staff, will attend the party. They will be treated to a day filled with games and activities, food, pictures with Santa and gifts. [Darn: No member of the BLP editorial staff was invited! Age discrimination!! But good idea anyway.]

## FOOD TRUCKS

"They're an old story by now, but I'm still a big fan of food trucks. I see them not only as signaling a local foodie scene, but as an indicator of an entrepreneurial ecosystem. Aspiring chefs who may not be able to afford their own restaurant can outfit a truck and off they go.



"The best food trucks tend to be in large metros, which is not surprising given their large populations."\* The best food truck metros include LA, San Francisco, and Washington DC. Of course, some small minds in charge of PG County have banned the trucks. It's a shame given the many benefits they offer, including entrepreneurial opportunities, affordable food, and focal points of socializing in immigrant neighborhoods.

\*Source: Atlantic Cities, 27 November 2012.

"Apartment Conditions" continues from Page 1

dents. (ALP has not verified these reports.)

Also, there are a few apartments that have more occupants than are specified by management (that is a way to manage the high rent, especially with lots of unemployment in the neighborhood), and so the occupants are afraid to report violations and the occupancy discovered.

Maybe there will be improvements in the future: there will be random inspections of the apartments every sixty days.

Praise is due to the initiative of the TNI team. But one does wonder how such dreadful conditions could have persisted for so long. Did the county ignore complaints? Or was it just inspector overload? Or something nasty?

Every renter in Bedford Station, Victoria Station, and other apartment houses should know that he or she can call 311 to file a complaint about code violations.

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**TNI:** The November 29th meeting covered much more ground than the apartment disorder. For instance, the "Clean Up Green Up" event was said to be a great success with more than 100 volunteers picking up trash, planting 1,000 bulbs, and more. An important partner was Puente Inc. headed by Modesto Ulerio.

The divide between Latino/a and Black teens was discussed, and it was agreed that it is necessary to find ways to bring these groups together in positive situations. The Extreme Teens program at LPCC might be one vehicle. The police reported on the homicide and shootings in nearby Lewisdale. It's nice to be in a safe neighborhood such as Langley Park, and to be alert to Lewisdale's dangers.

## TOYS FOR CHILDREN

● The Langley Park Community Center and the Northern Area MNCPPC-PG are organizing a toys for children event that will be held on December 12 from 6 a.m. to noon adjacent to the Community Police Building on New Hampshire Avenue in the Langley Park Plaza. Toys are needed! So if you have a new toy worth no more than about ten dollars, please deliver it to the Center before the day of the event. And thanks in advance.

For information, call the Center at 301 445-4508.

● The county's police have organized a toys for tots. The distribution will take place on December 22 at the central police office, 7600 Barlowe Road, Landover, from 8 a.m. to 6 p.m. For information about the national event, go to [www.toysfortots.org](http://www.toysfortots.org).

For information, go to this site: <http://pgpolice.blogspot.com/2012/11/toys-for-tots-toy-drive-underway-at-pgpd.html>.

## US BIRTHRATE DROPS

The Pew Research Center reports that the U.S. birth rate dipped in 2011 to the lowest level ever recorded, led by a dramatic drop in births to immigrant women after the onset of the Great Recession.

"According to preliminary data from the National Center for Health Statistics, the overall birth rate, which is the annual number of births per 1,000 women in the prime childbearing ages of 15 to 44, was 63.2 in 2011. This is the lowest since at least 1920, the earliest year for which there are reliable numbers.

The overall U.S. birth rate peaked most recently in the Baby Boom years, and was nearly double today's rate in 1957. The birth rate sagged through the mid-1970s, but stabilized for most years after that. It fell again after 2007, the beginning of the Great Recession.

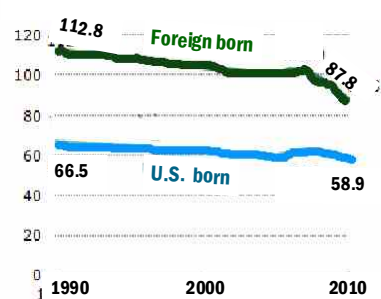
"From 2007 to 2010, the overall birth rate declined 8%. The birth rate for U.S.-born women decreased 6% during these years, but the birth rate for foreign-born women plunged 14%—more than it had declined over the entire 1990-2007 period. The birth rate for Mexican immigrant women fell even more, by 23%."

The drop among immigrant women might also be a reflection of enhanced out-of-the-house opportunities—too often denied in the home country. Thus there is more to do than make babies.

The trend underlines the transformation of the country to an older population. Are we ready? Do we have sufficient funds for such programs as Medicare and Social Security? Do we have sufficient assisted-living facilities? Granny-flats? Are there enough medical doctors and nurses specializing in gerontology? Will the foreign-born who age face special problems? What about language? Customs? There are challenges ahead.

Source: <http://www.pewsocialtrends.org/2012/11/29/u-s-birth-rate-falls-to-a-record-low-decline-is-greatest-among-immigrants/>

**Foreign-Born Women Led Recent Decline in Birth Rates**  
(Births per 1,000 women ages 15 to 44)  
Source: Pew Research Center



## Notes on Immigration

**Politics Makes Strange Bedfellows:** From the *San Francisco Chronicle* (2 December 2012): "Richard Land endorsed Mitt Romney, opposes same-sex marriage and abortion rights, and is a leader in one of the nation's largest organizations of Southern Baptists. But on Tuesday he and other conservative Christians - as well as antitax leader Grover Norquist - will be in Washington to lobby for a major goal of President Obama's second term: opening the path to citizenship for immigrants. It's the right thing to do from a moral perspective, say Land and other evangelical Christian leaders. But after Obama won 71 percent of the Latino vote, Land, a onetime President George W. Bush federal appointee, acknowledged the political rationale behind backing immigration reform: 'It's called reality.'"

**Let's Do More:** From the *Atlanta Journal Constitution* (3 December 2012): "North Georgia's top Catholic official is calling for comprehensive immigration reform on the eve of a national conference on immigration policy that is scheduled to take place in Atlanta this week. Archbishop Wilton Gregory praised the Obama administration for offering certain illegal immigrants work permits and a two-year reprieve from deportation. But he said more should be done. 'Helpful as that program may be to some, we must continue to advocate for comprehensive reform that creates opportunities for many more, particularly for families and for those who are already living here, working and benefiting this country.'"

## REPORT FROM PGCPs

The following item is copied from <http://www1.pgcps.org/communications/press.aspx?id=170247>. The photos are not from PGCPs.

More Prince George's County Public Schools (PGCPS) students are taking – and passing – Advanced Placement (AP) exams than ever before. According to data released by the College Board this month, 5,395 students took AP exams during the 2011-2012 school year, up nearly a half-percent from the previous year.



“Our school district is making steady progress in preparing students for the rigors of college-level work,” said Dr. Alvin L. Crawley, Interim Superintendent of Schools. “We have expanded opportunities for AP coursework, aligned curriculum to the content of AP exams, and covered the costs of AP testing so that all students – regardless of their economic status – can take part.”

Through the PGCPS AP-8 initiative, the current standard is to offer a minimum of 8 AP courses in each high school. Enrollment in AP courses has steadily increased over the past several years, with 9,633 students enrolled in 2012, compared to 9,339 in 2011. The number of AP exams that were graded a “3” or higher increased 9.7%, from 2,222 in the 2010-11 school year to 2,437 in 2011-12. Additionally, the number of Hispanic students taking AP exams rose dramatically, increasing 17.6% from 550 to 647.



The data also demonstrate that more PGCPS students are taking the SAT. During the 2010-11 school year, 5,145 seniors took the SAT; this past year, that number rose to 5,192. The number of Hispanic students taking the SAT rose significantly, increasing by 19.9%. Although participation in

the SAT grew, overall scores dropped slightly from an average of 1500 to 1498 in 2012.

*Congratulations to PGCPS for covering the costs of AP testing, offering a minimum of eight AP courses in each of the system's high schools, increasing in the number of Latino/a test-takers (which we hope is more than a reflection of the increase in Latino/as in the county), and also increasing “3” grades across the county. Yes, the overall scores dropped, but that surely is the result of expanded test-taking. One suggestion: don't be too proud of a half-percent increase.*

### The Purple Line et cetera

One of the active pro-Purple Line organizations is “Purple Line Now.” From its recent bulletin, the cry is made for needed help. Here's a slight rewrite of the key paragraph:

Unless the Maryland legislature addresses funding for new construction transportation projects (the Purple Line, the Corridor Cities Transitway, and the Red Line in Baltimore)—as well as long overdue bridge, highway and other transportation infrastructure improvements—these vital projects may simply not happen, at least in our lifetime.

Money is indeed scarce, and that's a barrier to federal, state, and local project funding. And the local situation is a piece of the larger need for \$2.2 trillion (yes, it is a T) to address the country's infrastructure needs. And infrastructure supports economic development.

## WHAT & WHEN



Here we list upcoming ALP activities and other events that are called to our attention. Have an event to list? If so, send information well in advance to [actionlangleypark@yahoo.com](mailto:actionlangleypark@yahoo.com).

### 2012

Dec 8—Governor's Open House, 1-4 p.m. at Government House, 110 State Circle, Annapolis MD 21401. Bring a photo ID. Say hello to Martin O'Malley and family!

Dec 10—District 47 “Town Hall” meeting, 7 p.m. at Rollingcrest Recreation Center, 6120 Sargent Rd. RSVP 301.858.3745 or [victor@victoramirez.com](mailto:victor@victoramirez.com).

Dec 15—Hernandad Fiesta, 11 a.m. - 1 p.m. at Langley Park Community Center. Gifts, games,, snacks, more.

Dec 21—Capital Area Food Bank at Langley Park Community Center, 11 a.m. One share of food per household. Bring your own bags.

### 2013

Jan 1—HAPPY NEW YEAR!! Let's hope that the new year brings in civil politics at the national level, more opportunities for marginalized immigrants, international peace, and more!

Jan 8—Mis Quince Open House at the Community Center, 6:30 to 8:30 p.m. Check it out! It's a great experience for a young girl becoming a young woman. →

Jan 8 - Montgomery College Open House, 5:30 p.m., 7600 Takoma Avenue. CM 211 (English session), CM 210A (Spanish session). This information session will provide information for adult

students who are new or returning to college. The sessions will cover basic information about the enrollment process and include information on turning work experience into college credit, transferring previous college credits, balancing multiple priorities, and applying for financial aid. A session in English and Spanish will run simultaneously. For the full list of events college-wide, visit this webpage: [www.montgomerycollege.edu/openhouse](http://www.montgomerycollege.edu/openhouse). Information: 240 567-3961.

March 14—Action Langley Park meets at 7 p.m. in the Langley Park Community Center. It's an open meeting: come one, come all!

May 5 —Langley Park Day, a festival of music, dance, food, information, and especially health (there's a big



Dentists at Health Check 2012

health fair included as part of the event). The whole world is invited!!! Everything is free except purchases of foods or crafts. Time: Noon to 4 p.m. Location: Langley Park Community Center. Volunteer doctors, nurses, dancers, musicians, clowns, and guides will participate; other volunteers are all welcome (let us know).



been in the neighborhood for less than one year; the 2010 Census has same-house one-year-plus residents at 75%. An apartment is where 96% of the respondents live.

There are five characteristics of the residents that seem especially important in shaping the lives of the Latino/a immigrants: their neighborhood, marginalization, crime, fragmentation, and not-quite-home.

## I. It's a Neighborhood

The Langley Park area—the Census CDP—has the attributes of a neighborhood; its type is sometimes referred to as an ethnic enclave. Many immigrant residents feel that it is a home-away-from-home for them, being that Langley Park somewhat resembles their country of origin, primarily in Central America. There are many residents who share the Spanish language and draw upon the food and other resources with which they are familiar. "You come outside and it's friendly. It is stress relieving." "I like how everything is close by."

Of course, in an area with 20,000 people, not everyone knows everyone else. A very tentative plotting of interactions suggests that there may be as many as seven "sub-neighborhoods." The two large apartment complexes, Villas at Langley and University Garden, are in many respects among the sub-neighborhoods. In this study, we do not distinguish among the three Census tracts or the more-or-less seven sub-neighborhoods. We seek patterns emerging from interviews and observations not linked with specific home location within Langley Park.

We should note that there is significant evidence from research over the past several decades that the neighborhood in which one lives influences the lives of the residents.



## II. Public and Private Marginalization

The public and private sector actions by outsiders have the consequence of marginalizing the residents. That is, they are pushed away from the mainstream, perhaps in some matters not intentionally. For instance:

**FOOD VENDORS** The food trucks and tables operated by immigrant microentrepreneurs that functioned as sources of inexpensive food and places to socialize (as had been the case for immigrants in their home countries) were banned. That was after more than ten years operating in the neighborhood without administrative trouble. In contrast, the District of Columbia has a major food truck program meeting the needs of thousands of residents and visitors to the area. Perhaps there is hope: some discussions have begun to create a small plaza in the neighborhood; at the least, a plaza could offer space for a handful of food vendors. (See below.)



**SCHOOLS** A plan by the school system to close the neighborhood's elementary school (to be replaced by a district-drawing middle school) was thwarted by a massive outpouring of opposition by the community. However, many elementary school children who live one or two blocks away from the neighborhood school are, thanks to those who draw school boundaries, bused to a distant school with the consequence of creating a social divide. Clearly, the impact is a lack of neighborhood coherence. Requests for reconsideration have not been acted upon.

The schools serving Langley Park do not perform well, and in secondary school the dropout rate is high. This is not surprising given the low-income non-English-speaking families that prevail as well as insufficient school funding. Extra resources are needed to improve the performance, but they have not been forthcoming. Indeed, many of the vital "parent liaisons" who drew families into the school orbit were fired. Note that 86% of our study's respondents said they were familiar with the schools, and about two-thirds of them were satisfied with the schools. The negative responses might have been due to some cultural differences. One response: "It is very bad. The education system does not allow parents to discipline their children the way that we want to."

**HEALTH CARE** There is no clinic in Langley Park with the exception of an expensive "Walk-In" unit. Two Mary's Center facilities are about a mile from the center of Langley Park, and a Community Clinic Inc. unit is on the Takoma Park side of University Boulevard. For health care, location and cost are factors. The County began to set up a public clinic in La Union mall across the street from Langley Park, and an M.D. was stationed there. However, the county withdrew the doctor. A sliding-scale ability-to-pay clinic is needed in the neighborhood. Some free screenings are provided by semi-annual health fairs organized by the Langley Park Community Center staff and officials of the nonprofit Action Langley Park. Based on our research, most respondents are not familiar with the quality or even availability of medical care. Most of the people do not have health insurance and rely on over the counter products or home remedies to cure their medical maladies.

**APARTMENTS** Many apartments have been over-priced but under managed; a recent inspection of two apartment complexes found more than one thousand code violations. And yet the county government's oversight of the apartments' conditions has been absent—until a very recent tour by the Neighborhood Initiative team leading to many necessary corrective repairs. Calls to the county for help had apparently not been acted upon.



Most respondents are unhappy with their current housing. This is due to an array of reasons including old and deteriorating structures plagued with rats and insects. Additionally, tenants feel that when things in the apartment stop working, such as fixtures, they are not promptly fixed despite their numerous complaints to the landlord or renting office. Here is a small sample of responses: "I am not satisfied because the apartment's administrators show up in two weeks when I need something fixed like the stove." "I am not satisfied because rent is too high and there are not many commodities." "I am not satisfied because there is no good service or management." "I am not satisfied because I do not have A/C." "I am not satisfied because there are bed bugs, rats, and roaches." There have been reports from elementary school principals and teachers about the bug bites students have when arriving in class.

Continued on next page

The rental costs have soared over the past few years, and income has declined. The result led many families to double-up, thus creating crowded living which in turn has negative consequences such as the easy spread of illness and the lack of quiet space for studying. Fifty-nine per cent of the respondents who gave a positive or negative answer stated that many people they know left the neighborhood because of rent increases.

**COMMUNITY CENTER** Langley Park's Community Center, originally an elementary school, has four main occupants: a senior center (which rarely has seniors from the neighborhood), a pottery studio (ditto), space for some local use (classes and after-school care for which participation is charged, and Action Langley Park meetings and events without charge), and regional bureaucrat offices.

The bureaucrats occupy almost half of the so-called community center, making little space available for meeting and/or services to the neighborhood. Had the bureaucrats moved out—as many people have urged, there now probably would be a health clinic and room for some nonprofits that serve the area. Langley Park's poorly equipped and maintained Community Center has few resources including a weight/exercise room containing only eight machines, a "library" with no books, and three meeting rooms. The Long Branch Community Recreation Center, on the other hand, which is merely 1.3 miles away (a five minute drive) has an Art Room with kilns and work tables; a Community Room with an overhead screen; a Game Room with a table tennis and foosball table; a full size Gymnasium that includes basketball, volleyball, badminton courts, an electronic scoreboard, and telescoping bleachers; not to mention a Social Hall that accommodates up to 230 people; and a Weight/Exercise room that includes full circuit weight machines, treadmills, incumbent and recumbent exercise bikes, and an elliptical trainer. The evident disparity between the resources available at the Long Branch Community Recreation Center compared to the resources at Langley Park's Community Center is baffling. Without an imaginative director, there would be emptiness.

**THE SECTOR PLAN** The most severe blow to Langley Park has been the drafting of a "sector plan" that calls for eliminating almost all of the affordable apartments, to be replaced by higher-priced rentals and condos. The plan was approved by the county's planning department as well as the councilman who "represents" the area.

The top image is a satellite photo of the area; below it is the official plan. Buildings in the red areas are the first to be demolished. Several estimates are that more than 5,000 people currently live in the to-be-demolished area. There is no arrangement for relocating those displaced.

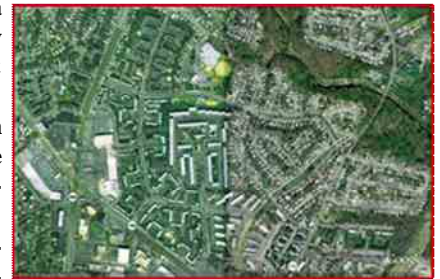
Regarding the Sector Plan, answers during our interviews indicate that many respondents are not satisfied with their apartments, but they are sensitive to rent increases and therefore do not favor a plan that would gentrify the area. For instance: "As long as the rent does not increase, it would be good because the apartments are in a bad condition." "It would be a bad idea because the rent will go up." "It's good and would be nice but it would be difficult to find somewhere to move to." Yes, satisfactory alternative locations are difficult because of affordability as well as some race/ethnic tensions in some of the affordable neighborhoods in the county and nearby counties. The kind of relocation planned in D.C.'s Fort Totten neighborhood was apparently not considered by county officials.

A similar pattern was revealed with regard to the commercial areas. "I hope that they don't do that. I prefer the small shops to the [big] commercial stores." We know some small businesspeople who are very afraid of the plan because it calls for rebuilding (upgrading!) areas where the small businesses are currently located.

**TRANSIT** The Sector Plan was an outgrowth of the plan to build a light-rail line along University Boulevard. Asking about the Purple Line evoked the familiar pattern of some liking the idea and others not. For instance: "I would not like it because the prices would go up." "It will benefit me and others with better transportation." "It would affect the apartments but there would be better transportation." "It would be a good idea because it would provide jobs for people who work in construction." At this writing, the future of the Purple Line is uncertain because of funding problems. Thus implementation of the Sector Plan will probably be slowed.

**TRANSITIONAL NEIGHBORHOOD INITIATIVE—A PLUS** TNI is a county effort to improve the quality of six neighborhoods—including Langley Park. Agency representatives have been meeting for months trying to identify ways to make improvements despite not having a special new-money budget for the work. The approach is to redirect resources to the target neighborhoods. So far, there has been trash removal, the identification of apartment maintenance problems, and more. While some county actions have been marginalizing, the TNI gives one hope that the current county administration will approach working class immigrant areas differently.

Our interviewing revealed that 98% of the respondents did not know about the Transitional Neighborhood Initiative. After some explanation was provided, the responses were positive: "It would be good to have better maintenance." "It would be a good idea so the streets are safe at night." "It's good for lighting." "It would be good; they will be more attentive to tenants' needs." It is regrettable that the TNI meetings have not included local residents and businesspeople—clearly the people who are best able to provide information about needs.



### III. Crime and Reputation

The neighborhood has a reputation—within the neighborhood and beyond—as a high crime area. In fact, there was considerable crime in the early 1990s; now, the *per capita* crime is about equal to the crime rates throughout Prince George's County. But the reputation persists, and sometimes it is supported by crimes near but outside the neighborhood said to be in Langley Park. The reputation keeps many children indoors after school and at other times, and it reduces the neighboring after dark. The neighborhood, 44% of our respondents indicated, is dangerous; 30% said it was safe. (We did not ask exactly where the respondents lived.) One respondent: "It is dangerous because of so many deaths. It is scary to be here." And another: "It is dangerous at night, anything can happen." To deal with the reputed criminality, many people go straight home after work and don't go out after dark. "It depends. I hear that it's supposed to be dangerous at night, so I mostly stay in."

Many school children are "latch key" (no adults at home to greet them after school), and they are told to return to their apartment or house immediately after school because of the reputed danger. For most children, this means returning to an empty house—often to sit in front of a television set watching a Spanish- or English-language program. So the concern about crime impacts children's play and after-school activities.

We should note that members of our research team have been outside after dark and have noticed no threats or crime.

The police department has employed a "community policing" approach, and decisionmakers have tried to assign bilingual officers to the area. Some respondents listed police inaction as a neighborhood negative, although clearly saturation if needed is not possible. "The police need to be more alert with the sale of alcohol inside the apartments." (Some drunk men can be threatening, and some of them can be easy victims.) "There is no police action at night and this is why there are so many thieves out." (There is some nighttime police patrol, but perhaps more could be employed.) "It is dangerous in certain places. You can't trust the police, they send us inside if we are outside at night." This may refer to the tendency for an officer to disperse groups of Latinos.

Data on crime rates in Prince George's County and in the 4a police district that includes most of the neighborhood's apartment houses reveal that crime has been going down—which is the national trend. But reputations are hard to change.

## IV. Fragmentation

Communal activities and social capital within the apartment house area appear to be minimal, thus creating a fragmented community. There are at least five factors:

**ANTI-IMMIGRANT** The mood in the USA towards immigrants is fairly negative. This mood is the basis of anti-immigrant (and anti-undocumented immigrant) actions in legislatures, in stump speeches, and vicious blogs. It is also the basis of policies such as "Secure Communities" with its threat of deportation after a contact with a police officer. The recent political campaign drew such comments by candidates as "Give them no jobs, let them self-deport" and "The Arizona laws should become national laws." So it seems wise to many Langley Park residents to stay in one's apartment as much as possible, and especially to avoid anyone in uniform. This has depressed reports of crime, perhaps especially domestic violence.

It is worth noting that in the recent election, a majority of Maryland's residents supported the Maryland Dream Act, the bill enabling undocumented young people to pay in-state tuition at college. There are anti-immigrant groups in Maryland, but the state is certainly among the more liberal in immigration matters.

**WORK DEMANDS** The work lives of residents are often very demanding (physical labor is common, and long commutes lead to reduced time at home), leaving little time or energy for community involvement—with the major exception of Catholic Mass. Tired people with a television set are not the people who socialize informally away from home or join activist organizations. And of course fear of crime is a factor.

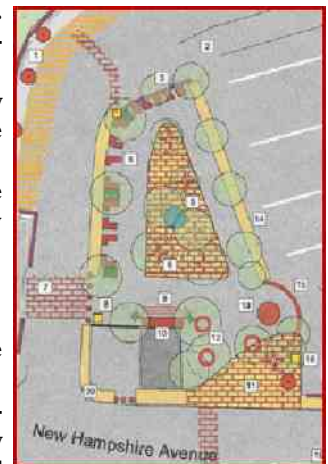
**EFFICACY** The efficacy of many Latino/a residents is low. Among the reasons appear to be home-country socializing experiences (ordinary farmers and workers are not expected to participate in local decisionmaking), and the hierarchical nature of the most prominent religion in the area (Catholicism). The local Mass is held in the elementary school gymnasium, and attendance runs into several hundred. The communal mood is strong. Neighborhood and PTA meetings, by contrast, are not well-attended.

**GROUP BREAKUP** Some of our respondents report that groups of residents outdoors, perhaps talking while sitting on a stoop, have been dispersed by the police. The sensitivity to gang activity is the explanation, but anti-gang sometimes becomes anti-group. Of course, in the U.S.A. there is freedom of assembly; that is superior to often-misapplied loitering laws or warnings.

**LACK OF MEETING PLACE** The neighborhood has no real community center, as indicated above. There are some indoor meeting rooms in the center, but no plaza or other space for outdoor casual socializing.

There has been a proposal to develop a plaza in a rarely used part of a parking lot near Langley Park's community police substation. This would require cooperation and some funding from the private and/or public sectors. These are so far lacking.

The graphic (right) displays the proposed outdoor plaza. (The dark grey area locates the police substation.) The full proposal is available from the Urban Studies and Planning Program at the University of Maryland.



## V. Not Quite "Home"

Home is where most people want to commit their attachments and improvements. But for some immigrants, home is where they came from rather than where they happen to live now.

**KNOWING HOME** Many of the interviewed respondents were not familiar with some of the markers of the area. One clue arose several years ago when a researcher in an ESL adult class in the Langley Park McCormick Elementary School asked the adults if they knew where the Community Center was and where the Northwest Branch was. None did although both places were adjacent to the school.

The current research found support for the view that most respondents were not familiar with some components of their new Langley Park home. For instance, only 11% of the respondents had "heard of" the Sector Plan that calls for demolishing most of their apartment homes. (And "heard of" doesn't mean details are known.) Only 2% were familiar with the Transitional Neighborhood Initiative that works to improve the quality of life in the neighborhood. (As noted, residents do not attend the TNI meetings.) Fully 19% said they knew about Langley Park Day, the annual May festival in Langley Park. The Crossroads Farmers' Market had

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been heard about by 29%—but we did not ask if the respondent had been there. The greatest familiarity reported was about the Purple Line: 57%. We did not probe for detailed knowledge.

**HERITAGE HOME** Many immigrants have family members in the home country, and one reason for their move to the U.S.A. was to earn money to improve the lives of those left behind. Thus "home" to many immigrants is where they came from, not where they are. The focus on improving lives may be in the heritage home rather than the current one. The link to the heritage home often means remittances; for some Langley Park residents, for every \$100 earned perhaps as much as \$50 cannot be used to live here because it goes to those at home.

The monetary tie to the heritage home also means that a strong emotional tie to those at home influences one's behavior in Langley Park. Work may be for longer hours because the extra money earned fulfills remittance obligations. That may leave less time and emotional connection for the local situation.

The basic economic principle of remittance flows in the Americas and throughout the world is quite simple: developed countries need migrant labor, and families back home need the money that comes from their earnings. Each year migrants leave their villages and hometowns to seek jobs and better lives for themselves and their families. The equation over the years has not changed: people move "North" by the millions and money moves "South" by the billions. A commitment to family values is the driving force of the remittance flows linking these transnational families that live in two countries and contribute to two economies and two cultures at the same time. (See *Sending Money Home*, Inter-American Development Bank, nd.)

Another connection to the heritage home is via telephone. Many residents of Langley Park make weekly calls to relatives and friends. The telephone card sellers have successful businesses.

**OPPORTUNITY** The global recession is also a factor because available jobs and other opportunities have shrunk for many. (Of course, globalization provides a setting for the recession's impact.) This has had the consequence of creating distance between the world of work and the Langley Park home. It may keep in the mind of the immigrant the option of returning to the heritage home. Current data on flows into and out of the USA indicate that for the first time in years net immigration is near zero. (See Pew Research Center report, 3 May 2012)

For Native Americans without an immigrant connection, at least in the minds of some, means there is a zero-sum situation: If the immigrant gets a job, the native may not be able to get one. (Many immigrants from Central America have low skills, and many low-skill jobs have disappeared due to globalization and technology improvements—especially in urban areas.) The imagined job competition is a contributor to anti-immigrant sentiment, even though research indicates that the situation is not zero-sum.

**ISOLATION AND LONELINESS** Away from most family members and friends, often with language barriers and financial challenges, many of the residents of Langley Park are lonely. In the heritage country, interaction among family members and neighbors is typically intense; that is rarely the case in the new home.

Loneliness has been recognized as a public health problem both as a condition in itself and in its relation to other conditions. One immigrant writes: "People leave their country of origin thinking they can make a better life for themselves and their families somewhere else. Many succeed in the sense of being able to get a job and have a somewhat decent living that they probably wouldn't be able to have under different conditions. This, however, comes with the rampant intolerance, racism and ignorance of many and a big deal of just feeling lonely. It doesn't matter how many people we meet, we still simply don't belong outside our home countries." (<http://www.betizuka.com>)

Psychologist Sadia Saleem writes: "The first generation to immigrate usually do so for safety and security, family reasons, business, or seeking a better quality of life, including health and education. These factors play a role in the immigration experience. Also, the number of years in the new country, language acquisition and fluency, ability to find employment, family and community support are all factors affecting that experience."



"As exciting as a new country can be, many soon miss familiar things taken for granted in the home country and no longer available in the new one. Immigrants usually make this the biggest move of their lives hoping for a better quality of life and a more secure future for their children. But one of the biggest losses they experience is the family system and extended community support. Most immigrants come from cultures with a sense of interconnectedness and interdependence. Once here, ... where they find themselves part of a world where individualism and independence are valued, they may experience loneliness and disconnection." (*Healthy Living Magazine* 8/2, 2011)



**NOT QUITE HOME** Langley Park is not quite home, and yet 55% of the respondents who chose between satisfied and unsatisfied with living in the neighborhood gave the positive answer. So clearly Langley Park is a positive "home" or "home away from home" for many residents despite the marginalization, lack of local familiarity, and other negatives. Future research will try to pinpoint the dissatisfactions that led those not satisfied with their lives to so indicate.

Of course, many positive actions could be taken now. The work of the Transitional Neighborhood Initiative team is a step in the right direction. Changing school boundaries so that the neighborhood residents are together would be a positive step. Cancelling or dramatically altering the Sector Plan is essential. And as explored above, there are other steps that would improve Langley Park residents' quality of life—if that is the goal of those in the public, nonprofit, and private sectors.

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