CAN YOU BELIEVE?

¡OBAMA!

Let us hope that Mr. Obama's past support of comprehensive immigration reform will result, during his first term (and after a few "small" matters such as the economic recession and the flawed wars in the Middle East), in an appreciation of the many significant contributions made by immigrants in the USA, with and without documents.

Mr. Obama's website lists immigration as an agenda item, but not an urgent, pressing one. Perhaps that's a fair assessment of what's urgent and politically possible, but supporters of positive immigration reform should not sit back and wait for wonderful legislation to pass. Rather, supporters should remind the President Elect and members of Congress that positive immigration reform should still be high on the agenda, and compromises with anti-immigrant organizations will not be acceptable.

HEALTH CHECK 2008

Sunday, November 9th, was the day of Health Check 2008, the annual health event organized by Action Langley Park in cooperation with the Langley Park Community Center and the Prince George's County Department of Health.

Of course, many organizations contributed significantly to the event. In addition to the Department of Health, participants came from the American Kidney Fund, University of Maryland's School of Dentistry, School of Medicine, School of Nursing; Identity Inc., Adventist Health, Amerigroup, CASA de Maryland, CCS Medical, Centro Catolico, Columbia Union College, the Hispanic Institute for Blindness Prevention, Mary's Center, the Maryland Citizens' Health Initiative, Planned Parenthood, Suburban Hospital, TAYA, and many others. Thanks to all for improving hundreds of peoples' health.

An international public health expert came to Health Check 2008. Her comment: "I was very impressed by the variety of services offered and the amount of information disseminated." Encouraging; but of course there are improvements to be made.

The next Langley Park health event takes place as a major segment of Langley Park Day 2009 on May 3 from noon to 4 p.m. Mark your calendars now! Be there!

Langley Park’s Day Labor Center Opens

The ceremonial opening of the CASA-run Langley Park Day Labor Center took place on 19 November. The facility is at the northwest quadrant of the University - New Hampshire Crossroads. From the CASA website: "In a strategic attempt to mitigate the ill-effects of the economic crisis in the multicultural and multiethnic area of Langley Park, Prince George's County and CASA de Maryland are opening the country's largest Workers' Center. ... The center will include a state-of-the-art vocational training lab which will be operated in partnership with Prince George's Community College. This center is a historical stepping stone for empowering low-wage immigrant and minority workers living in these communities. Our leaders understand that in this current economic crisis, education, training, and workforce development programs for workers are essential to improving our economy. ..." [Gustavo Torres] The center will also host CASA de Maryland's 'Crossing Border Project,' an initiative to break cultural and historical differences between Latinos, African American and Africans. CASA de Maryland is working in partnership on this project with NAACP Montgomery and ... other organizations." This has been a remarkable month for CASA de Maryland. First, the restoration of the mansion began in mid-October, and now there is a large day labor center almost ready at the Crossroads. What a remarkable pair of successes for CASA—and for Langley Park. Great praise must go to CASA leader Gustavo Torres, CASA development specialist Jennifer Freedman, and many others. Now let's hope that the economy turns around soon so that there will be jobs for day laborers.
SHORT TAKES

EDUCATION: CONGRATULATIONS!!!

TO PGCEPS! Students’ scores on standardized tests sufficiently increased in the 2007-08 school year for the system to move towards removal from the “corrective action” category.

TO AMBER! Amber Waller has been elected to the county’s Board of Education as an at-large member. Congratulations! (She entered the board by appointment.) We know that you have a strong commitment to the county’s youth—including the youth of Langley Park.

TO BUCK LODGE! Buck Lodge Middle School is one of four in the county to receive funds under the “Getting Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs” federal program to offer a range of college-readiness activities such as tutoring, mentoring, and financial planning. The US Department of Education states: “This discretionary grant program is designed to increase the number of low-income students who are prepared to enter and succeed in postsecondary education. [It] provides six-year grants to states and partnerships to provide services at high-poverty middle and high schools. [It] grantees serve an entire cohort of students beginning no later than the seventh grade and follow the cohort through high school.”

CONGRATULATIONS TO FRED

Fred Nordhorn has been selected to serve on the county’s Commission for Veterans. Fred is an activist in and around Langley Park.

FOOD VENDORS

No action has apparently been taken by Langley Park’s County Council “representative” to restore the micro-businesses of about three dozen immigrant entrepreneurs who were deprived of their right to a livelihood—and the right of many neighborhood residents for places to obtain affordable food and to engage in socializing. So the streets of the neighborhood remain dead rather than having the liveliness of the prior decade-plus. Thus the advocates of gentrification and displacement continue to be in charge. Sad. (See next item.)

SECTOR PLAN = STAGGERED DISPLACEMENT

The Takoma/Langley Sector Plan, once adopted, will provide a framework and guidance for anticipated regulatory changes including zoning that will govern future public and private investment. The study supports the addition of 2,800 new residential units (4,800 if subsidized affordable housing were included in the mix), 460,000 square feet of new commercial space, and an additional 340,000 square feet of office space with development concentrated around the New Hampshire Avenue/University Boulevard and the Riggs Road/University Boulevard intersections. Recognizing the impact of the proposed Purple Line and transit stations, any new development that would be allowed would be staggered, with different densities permitted before a commitment is made to the Purple Line project, prior to and during the construction of the Purple Line, and once the line is fully operational. (From the report of a 6 November presentation on the plan.) So development will be staggered, and therefore gentrification thanks to the 2,800 new market-rate units will be staggered, leading to staggered displacement of working class residents. Probably staggered means work will not begin until the recession ends. Too bad the planners aren’t committed to a form of transit-oriented development which includes a commitment that no resident will be displaced and no property will be gentrified.

Of course, small “mom and pop” businesses will be displaced too—as has happened in Silver Spring. But with dollar signs in the eyes of some politicians and businesspeople, a no-displacement commitment is an idle dream.

The Sector Plan team in Prince George’s County will be issuing a draft of the plan this winter, with public comment in January. Then the “displacement plan” will be issued.

SEXUAL ASSAULT LEGAL INSTITUTE

This Institute provides direct civil services for victims and survivors of sexual assault as well as technical assistance and training for attorneys, rape crisis and recovery center staff and volunteers and other professionals working with survivors. For more information, go to www.mcasa.org.

DEEP JOB CUTS BY COUNTY?

The Washington Post (19 November) reports that there is talk of deep cuts in Prince George’s County’s budget for the next fiscal year starting July 1. A document obtained by the newspaper indicates that there might be layoffs in such service areas as health inspections, building permitting, animal control, library staffing, child immunizations and prenatal care. That’s scary!

INFORMATION FOR LIVING

HEALTH ON THE INTERNET: There are many sources of health information available to everyone on the internet. Most are in English, but some are bi- or multi-lingual. Here are a few: http://medlineplus.gov/, http://www.webmd.com/, http://www.drugs.com/, http://www.mayoclinic.com/

LOW INCOME ASSISTANCE: The Maryland Energy Assistance Program provides low-income individuals and families with help to pay energy costs during the winter. And there is a range of other programs offered through the State of Maryland. Here’s the list: food stamps, cash assistance, disability assistance, medical assistance, children’s health program, and child care subsidy program. To learn more about these programs, go to https://www.marylandsail.org/WhatIsSail.aspx.

PROGRESS: DENTAL CARE

The Deamonte Driver Dental Project, a mobile van that will target schools in the Prince George’s County area to help low-income and underserved children in need of dental care, is a major positive step. Of course, the idea didn’t arise until the tragic death of young Mr. Driver. However, the step is still important given the lack of free or low-cost dental services.

KEY: PURPLE LINE DECISIONMAKING

Opinions are currently being sought by the Purple Line planners. Should it be built? If so, should it be light rail or express bus? Should it have two stops in Langley Park? Et cetera! If you can’t make a hearing session, then send your views via http://pcms.company39.com/bicounty/pcms_public/comment.aspx. Need more information about the Purple Line? One source is www.PurpleLineNOW.com.

PEDESTRIAN SAFETY

Washington’s COG has initiated a “Street Smart” program combining public awareness of pedestrian rights with stepped-up enforcement. Good. This adds to Erwin Mack’s locally led effort to reduce pedestrian injuries. (Thanks, Erwin!)
HIGH POINT STUDENTS’ 11TH GRADE SCORES

County schools’ scores have overall improved in recent years. Thanks to the state’s data collection and reporting, we can now look at the scores of 11th grades at High Point HS across demographic categories. Scores at the school in Algebra/Data Analysis and English appear below.

In Algebra/Data Analysis, the “Hispanic” (Latino) students have reached the level of all students and exceeded two other demographic groups. Students in the “Limited English” category are a bit behind. High Point’s scores are above the county levels, and the Latinos at High Point do better than those aggregated to the county level.

The English scores of Latinos at High Point are disappointing but not surprising: just under half of the Latino students passed the test, and more than a third of them didn’t take the test. Among the Limited English students, fully eight out of ten did not take the test.

The “little secret” of these scores is that by the 11th grade, almost half of the children in immigrant families have dropped out of school. (Based upon an examination of High Point HS and feeder middle school enrollments.) So the scores that are reported represent those who persisted—presumably the better students or those whose families don’t need an extra pair of hands to earn money. The hope is that many of the dropouts will in future years return to obtain a GED or get other formal education. A school official in Virginia is quoted in the Washington Post (11 November 2008): “They would be counted among our dropouts, but sometimes they are our greatest success stories.”

The challenges facing High Point and indeed the entire school system are dual: First, the high dropout rate must be reduced. That will take, among other things, better outreach to families to get the adults to support their children’s continuing education. Second, the English skills of the children of non-English-speaking families must be improved, perhaps with additional tutoring, more summer classes, and again better contacts with parents. (Alas, funding is a severe constraint.)

Latinos are of course not the only demographic category of students who should do better and apparently are in need of more help from the schools and the parents. Of particular concern are the African-American young people, whose scores are disappointing.

Of course, the needed improvements are far from limited to the high school. English learning and a commitment to schooling start at the elementary school level. The effort might well be most critical at the middle school level. Hopefully, the new funds—and new leadership—at Buck Lodge MS can keep the young people in school and better prepare them for the challenges of high school.
SAD ENDING: A HOUSE SELLS AT AUCTION

On the grey afternoon of 12 November 2008, a house on 17th Place in Langley Park sold at auction for $130,000. Earlier in the year, the house was purchased through normal channels for $324,000. These owners defaulted, a bank took the property over, and commercial auctioneers disposed of the property after an auction that lasted about ten minutes. How swiftly the dream of ownership for Walter and Evangelina became a tragedy. Let us hope that the Federal government figures out how to save some dreams.

LANGLEY PARK CALENDAR

Wednesday, 3 December 2008: Crossroads Pedestrian Safety Event at the Crossroads, 11 a.m. to 2 p.m. (Santa will be there!) Want to volunteer to help? If so, contact Gretchen Hilburger at 301 439-0972.

Thursday, 11 December 2008: Action Langley Park meeting at the Langley Park Community Center, 7:00 to 8:30 p.m.

Thursday, 21 February 2009: Action Langley Park meeting at the Langley Park Community Center, 7:00 to 8:30 p.m.

Thursday, 10 April 2009: Action Langley Park meeting at the Langley Park Community Center, 7:00 to 8:30 p.m.

Sunday, 3 May 2009: Langley Park Day at the Langley Park Community Center, 12 noon to 4:30 p.m.

Thursday, 12 June 2009: Action Langley Park meeting at the Langley Park Community Center, 7:00 to 8:30 p.m.

ACTION LANGLEY PARK

The nonprofit 501c3 organization, Action Langley Park, is a coalition of residents, businesspeople, workers, academics, church leaders, and others, founded in 1998, to improve the quality of life for residents in and near Langley Park. The means includes information-sharing, services, and advocacy. The organization's service activities focus on a Fall Health Check and a Spring Langley Park Day. Meetings of the organization take place about every other month. All meetings are open, and participation is encouraged. For information, send an email to actionlangleypark@yahoo.com.

BARRIO DE LANGLEY PARK

The periodical Barrio de Langley Park is edited and published by Action Langley Park. It appears approximately every two weeks. Submissions and suggestions are welcome; send them to actionlangleypark@yahoo.com.