DEAR SANTA:

*WORKING CLASS RESIDENTS: Let the new year prevent the bi-county planners from creating a sector plan designed to gentrify Langley Park without provision for affordable housing in the neighborhood. The housing crisis will delay the processes of gentrification and displacement, but in a few years residents will be forced out by the plan that appears to be written by gentrifying developers. There is time for people-focused change.

*FOOD VENDORS: Let the new year restore the forty or more micro-businesses that were forced to close by the actions of a few local government officials for perhaps selfish reasons. Micro-businesses have been proven around the world to be important for employment, upward mobility, and food affordability, and in Langley Park they were also social centers and cultural bridges. They should be allowed to resume their work—to resume their contributions to the quality of neighborhood life.

*POVERTY: In the United States and many other countries, people struggle against the devastation of poverty. Let there be a concerted battle against the blight which leads to ill-health, poor education, inadequate housing, violence, and more.

*PEACE: Let the new year bring peace with an end to violence in such troubled parts of the world as the Middle East and Central Africa. Peaceful cooperation will lead to new possibilities for millions of struggling men, women, and children.
SHORT TAKES

DISFUNCTIONAL IMMIGRATION POLICY

In the November 23 issue of The Washington Post (p. B1), Edward Alden of the Council on Foreign Relations writes: "Of the many mistakes we made in the reaction to the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks, one of the most damaging was slamming the door on our friends in an ill-considered effort to keep our enemies out. Instead of continuing to embrace the massive flow of talent, energy and initiative that the rest of the world has long offered the United States, we launched an expensive, futile experiment to see whether we could seal our borders against the ills of the world, from terrorists to drugs to illegal migrants. This effort has betrayed both our ideals and our interests. ... The current system was built in the wake of 9/11, but it will have to be reformed in the shadow of the economic crisis. That will be a political challenge, but we have already driven away too many talented immigrants through shortsighted policies that see them more as a threat than as a windfall for the U.S. economy."

ASSAULTING IMMIGRANTS

An Ecuadorian immigrant on Long Island was assaulted in November by a gang described as having "a hobby of hunting Latinos." Alas, hate crimes and fearful immigrants can be found in a number of places in the USA. Of course, there's no way to stop violent crime, but we do know that the anti-immigrant sentiment that prevails in some social circles in the country contributes to anti-immigrant actions. Hopefully, the new leadership in Washington will include as a high priority the civilizing of rhetoric and the passing of immigration legislation that deals with all human beings as equals.

FOREIGN-BORN WORKERS

Foreign-born workers are quite different from the native-born in occupation, earnings, and in other ways. This Bureau of Labor Statistics report provides some basic information.

Occupation: Foreign-born workers in 2007 were more likely than their native-born counterparts to be employed in service occupations (22.8% vs. 15.4%); in natural resources, construction, and maintenance occupations (16.4% vs. 9.7%); and in production, transportation, and material moving occupations (16.2% vs. 11.7%). In contrast, native-born workers were more likely than foreign-born workers to be employed in management, professional, and related occupations—37.0% vs. 27.2%. In 2007, about 1 in 4 foreign-born men were employed in natural resources, construction, and maintenance occupations, while nearly 1 in 3 women were in service occupations. As compared with the foreign born, a larger share of native-born women and men were employed in management, professional, and related occupations.

Earnings: In 2007, the median usual weekly earnings of foreign-born full-time wage and salary workers were $554, compared with $722 for the native born. Among men, median earnings were $585 per week for the foreign born, compared with $809 for the native born; the median for foreign-born women was $509, compared with $627 for the native born. As with the native born, the earnings of foreign-born workers increased with education. Foreign-born workers 25 years of age and over with less than a high school education earned $405 per week in 2007, while those with bachelor's degrees and higher earned about 2.6 times as much—$1,057 a week. The gap between the earnings of the foreign-born and the native-born workers narrows with higher levels of education. Among those with less than a high school diploma, full-time workers who were foreign born earned 84.6% as much as their native-born counterparts. Among those with a bachelor's degree and higher, foreign-born workers earned almost the same (98.3%) as native-born workers.

FOR IMMIGRANTS, A RIPPLE EFFECT

The title of this item is the approximate heading for Nurith Celina Aizenman's interesting article in The Washington Post (28 November 2008). Here are some brief excerpts: "While the economy's talkshop is spreading pain across the Washington region, it has hit many of the area's close-knit immigrant communities with particular speed and force. The dependence on one another that has contributed so much to their economic success has now created a domino effect in which the misfortune of one segment of the group almost immediately affects the rest. ... The consequences reach beyond the financial, altering local immigrant culture in small but significant ways. Economic pressures are straining some cherished customs and strengthening others. ... Low-income Latino immigrants for whom it was customary to cover part of the mortgage by renting out rooms are taking the practice to new levels. ... Because Latino immigrants are so heavily concentrated in construction work, they appear to have been hardest hit by the mortgage crisis and subsequent housing slump."

Certainly, in Langley Park those in the construction industry as well as many others are suffering severely from the economic downturn. And so are families in the home countries because remittances are declining. If earnings drop, remittances drop. Alas, the downturn is likely to last for another year. During that time, public, private, and nonprofit help will be needed. But as the next item indicates, help in Prince George's County probably won't meet the need.

RESIDENTS LOOK FOR HELP ELSEWHERE

The Washington Post (30 November 2008) draw upon a 2007 report to conclude: "Prince George's County has more people living in poverty than any other Washington suburb, yet its charitable support system is far smaller than those in other large suburbs or the District, studies show. This imbalance has consequences: Prince George's families sometimes travel long distances for health care, counseling and youth programs -- or never get help. Fortunately, CASA de Maryland will soon have two facilities, the Mansion and the Workers' Center, but more is needed. As but one example, there's a great need for a health clinic in Langley Park serving the uninsured poor area residents. Of course, the county budget is in deficit, so new initiatives are unlikely in the near future. But such a clinic should be very high on the county's priority list once the tax-based income starts to rise. Otherwise, the county will be contributing to disease and early death.

CHIEF HYLTON AND MAJOR DAVIS: GOOD WORK THE POST: DON'T STIGMATIZE LANGLEY PARK!

On Wednesday, November 26, Prince George's County's police shut "The Setting" restaurant-club because of repeated occurrences of violence. Both Chief Hytton and Major Davis are reported to have been active in the effort. Chief Hytton was quoted by The Washington Post: "I'm serving notice to all establishments within Prince George's County that condone an environment of violence that this department and this chief is not going to tolerate it." Good! Alas, the Post wrote about "a nightclub in the Langley Park..."
area.” Well, the club is across the street from Langley Park, but it is in Chillum. Why not write “Chillum”? Could it be that the Post wants to heighten the stigma that unfairly paints Langley Park by linking crime to it? Or maybe it’s just the writer’s laziness or ignorance. Very sad.

IMMIGRATION HELPS HOUSING MARKET

The Congressional Budget Office, in a report entitled “The Outlook for Housing Starts, 2009 to 2012” (November 2008), links a healthy housing industry to immigration: “Over the past 25 years, the annual change in the number of households due to population growth has trended neither upward nor downward, as a rise in net immigration has offset a decline in the natural increase of the adult population. … The annual number of births in the United States decreased from almost 4.3 million in the early 1960s, during the latter stages of the post-World War II baby boom, to less than 3.2 million in the mid-1970s, before climbing back to about 3.9 million by the late 1980s. That pattern triggered a corresponding decline in the number of Americans turning 20 between the early 1980s and the mid-1990s, followed by a steady increase since then. … Offsetting that slowdown, net immigration climbed sharply between the 1980s and the 1990s and remains strong in the 2000s.”

HELP TO COMPLETE THE MANSION

“CASA recently received an award of $1 million from the Kresge Foundation dedicated towards the development of the CASA Multicultural Center. But the grant is a challenge grant—CASA must raise an additional $2.3 million by June 30, 2009, in order to receive the $1 million grant. … Help us meet the Kresge Foundation challenge with your donation. Buy a brick for $100 or a patio block for $500. CASA also offers permanent donor recognition and naming opportunities on the grounds and building of the future CASA Multicultural Center.” For further brick information, go to http://www.casademaryland.org/docs-pdfs/BUYABRICK.pdf.

IMMIGRANT POPULATION DECLINE?

Anecdotal reports from around the country indicate that some immigrants to the USA have returned to their home countries, thanks largely to the economic downturn. The anti-immigrant organization, Center for Immigration Studies, sees it this way: “Monthly data collected by the Census Bureau through May 2008 shows a significant decline in the number of less-educated, young Hispanic immigrants in the country. The evidence indicates that the illegal immigrant population may have declined by over one million in the last year (from 12.5 to 11.2 million). There are strong indications immigration enforcement is responsible for at least part of the decline. The economy also is likely playing a role.” Perhaps enforcement has had some influence on immigrants’ decisions to stay or return; after all, how many of us would want to be in a situation where a military would grab us at our workplace and throw us in jail? But most economists and labor specialists focus on the economic downturn, especially in the hard-hit construction industry. Certainly, the many day laborers who live in and near Langley Park have seen a dramatic decline in opportunities.

GOOD NEWS ON IMMIGRATION REFORM?

Various politicians predict that comprehensive immigration reform will be brought to Congress by mid-2009. Let’s hope!!

PHOTO IDENTIFICATIONS

Page 1, clockwise from upper left:
Demonstration for immigrants’ rights
Demonstration against immigrants
President-Elect Barack Obama
Wall mural at Piney Branch Rd. and New Hampshire Ave.
Wall between Mexico and USA
Acting Police Chief Robert Hylton

Page 4, clockwise from upper left:
The dream of a home is destroyed by a bank auction (the highest bid was about 1/3 the original purchase price)
Musicians at the Holton Lane farmer’s market
Purple Line light rail proposed equipment
Gustavo Torres at opening of Workers’ Center, the largest such facility in the county
Ceremony launching the mansion project
Congressman Chris Van Hollen at Langley Park Day
Sector plan indicating roads to be requiring demolished apartment houses to make way for the gentry
Health professional at work during Langley Park Day
Clown and friends at National Night Out
Center above: Caribbean dancers who performed at Langley Park Day
Center below: the confining pedestrian fence along University Blvd.

LANGLEY PARK CALENDAR

Thursday, 11 December 2008: Action Langley Park meeting at the Langley Park Community Center, 7:00 to 8:30 p.m
Wednesday, 21 January 2009: Rally on the Mall for more immigrant-favorable legislation and actions, details TBA.
Thursday, 12 February 2009: Action Langley Park meeting at the Langley Park Community Center, 7:00 to 8:30 p.m
Thursday, 9 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, 11 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, usually on Thursday evenings at the Langley Park Community Center. 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
MORE PHOTOS FROM 2008

See Page 3 for photo identifiers.