WHO CARES?
Attacking the Food Vendors

If all goes according to the recently developed plan, the women who sell fruits and drinks along the interior roads of Langley Park will be removed, presumably by force if necessary. This may happen as early as February 1st. Why would the county government take such action? Apparently, this action is meant to beautify or Americanize the neighborhood. It also may help some Latinos to distance themselves from the working-class culture of their homeland that is symbolized by the vendors.

Ah beauty? But in the eyes of whom? The American way? But which Americans? The enforcers of such values usually have the middle class in mind. It’s we-they, and the “they” are the “other.” When the names of some officials were mentioned during January interviews conducted by the Langley Park Project of the University of Maryland, the women expressed the view that there was a socioeconomic gap. Here are two quotes from interviews: “I’m not his people; his people are rich and prosperous.” “He wants to attack honest, hard-working people. He has a salary, but we struggle every day to earn a few dollars.”

A dozen or more women have set up fruit/drink stands in the neighborhood, and many of them report that they have worked there for five to ten years. (With very brief exceptions, the county has looked the other way rather than enforced anti-vendor regulations.) Why do the women sell? In the interviews, the women’s common theme is to make money to pay the rent and perhaps to send some dollars back to family members in the home country. One woman has a low-paying hourly job and stated that she must earn extra money to pay the rent. Another woman stated that the extra money she earns goes to support her family in her home country.

What will the women do if – perhaps when – their micro-businesses are forced to close? One woman said, “We may starve. I don’t know what I will do.” Another woman thought that she might have to return to her home country.

Why are there so many customers, including residents as well as people who drive by (including some police officers)? Because the food is inexpensive, easily available, tasty, and in conformity with food customs in the home country. (Most of the customers interviewed were at the lower end of the working class.) Another benefit is the socialization that takes place at these locations; this is important in a neighborhood with no public spaces for socializing. The vendors also constitute cultural linkages to the home country, thereby easing the immigrants’ transition into American culture. The vendors and many customers appreciate this element of the home country.

A puzzling question is why county officials have not waited on the vendor “clean up” until appropriate alternative locations are found so that the women can continue to operate their micro-businesses. There are potential sites, for instance, the southeast corner of

LAYC: PG OR MoCo?
A Plea to County Decisionmakers

What a great opportunity is available to provide critical services to the residents of Langley Park and nearby neighborhoods! The Latin American Youth Center’s Maryland initiative wants to locate in or near Langley Park, but so far no affordable facility has been found in Prince George’s County. Of course, there is a perfect place for this non-profit organization’s work: the Langley Park Community Center. The east wing of the center is now occupied by regional administrators who do not provide direct services for area residents. But the LAYC would. So here’s a suggestion from the Action Langley Park Board of Directors to Prince George’s County’s decisionmakers: Move the administrators, and let LAYC move in. Otherwise, the LAYC facility will almost certainly be located in Montgomery County. Please do it! Now!
the Langley Park Community Center property and the space immediately east of the police substation. Suggestions by officials that a search will be made for a site seems to suggest that there will not be a serious effort to relocate these businesswomen.

The mobile food vans will also be impacted, but apparently not right away. We understand that fifteen licenses will be issued to fifteen families, perhaps by lottery, and the locations of their business will be limited. Thus about two-thirds of the vans will be out of business, at least in this suburban area. Two of the vendor owners stated that in the last political campaign, a hands-off policy was promised. Ah, politics. The vans often cost in the $20-$40,000 range, and this heavy investment might be lost.

Why is the county moving first against the women street vendors? Might it be that the mobile food van owners have an association and the support of some CASA de Maryland lawyers? We are not aware of a similar organization or supporters of the women.

Some people will be happy with the planned changes. After all, perhaps a majority of the area’s residents neither sell nor purchase food from the street and mobile vendors. But others will suffer. Isn’t democracy characterized by majority rule? Well, no, true democracy is founded on minority rights. But perhaps not always in Prince George’s County.

**NEWS ABOUT EDUCATION**

**NORTHWESTERN H.S.:** There’s good news about Northwestern High School. That school now ranks second in the county measured by the percentage of students who achieve a passing grade on at least one AP exam while in high school. The figure is 17.9%, which compares with a national average of 14.1% and High Point’s 11.7%. (Eleanor Roosevelt, partially a magnet school, had a percentage in the stratosphere.) The leading fields of AP success were Spanish and Studio Art. Kudos to former principal Bill Ritter and current principal, Jerome Thomas. (An article about this success appeared in the 19 January 2006 Prince George’s County section of the Washington Post.)

**SHORT OF MONEY FOR SCHOOLS?** According to economics professors Joseph Stiglitz and Linda Bilmes, cost estimates for the Iraq War have been vastly understated. While the Congressional Budget Office estimates the cost at $500 billion through 2006, Stiglitz and Bilmes put the war’s total cost at $2 trillion. Their detailed analysis includes long-term costs such as ongoing healthcare for wounded troops and the war’s related effects on investment, oil prices, and the growing budget deficit. (Boston Globe, 8 January 2006) What else might we have used that money for? Maybe for education? Maybe for health?

**NEWS ABOUT HEALTH**

**HEALTH CARE DISPARITIES:** Health care access in the United States is not blind to race, ethnicity, or wealth. Quite the contrary: being Asian-American, European-American, or rich in any racial-ethnic category makes a great difference. According to the recent National Healthcare Disparities Report, the biggest gaps between Latinos and European-Americans are (1) new AIDS cases, (2) illness-injury care as soon as wanted, (3) children with patient-provider communication problems, and (4) lack of medical insurance.

An important question is whether the situation is getting better, and for Latinos the answer is no. About six of every ten measures of disparities have gotten worse! Among the indicators revealing an increasing access gap are substance abuse treatment, adult patient-provider communication problems, and illness-injury treatment as soon as wanted. The extensive report can be found at this web site: http://www.ahrq.gov/qual/nhdr05/nhdr05.htm.

**BE A HEALTHY EATER!** The Nutrition Action Healthletter lists ten foods that can lead to better health. Of course, many other foods are healthy too. The good ten: Sweet potatoes, tomato grapes, fat-free or skim milk, blueberries, salmon, crisp-breads (e.g., Wasa, Ry Krisp, Ryvita), ten-minute microwaveable brown rice (e.g., Uncle Ben’s), oranges, butternut squash, and greens such as kale, spinach, and broccoli. The publication also lists ten foods that probably will lead to poorer health. Of course, there are many other foods that one should avoid. Here are the bad ten: Pepperidge Farm’s crust pot pie (packaged), McDonald’s chicken breast strips, Cheesecake Factory’s cheesecake, Marie Callender’s herb roasted chicken, Ms. Field’s chocolate-walnuts cookie, Starbucks’ venti strawberries and cream, Burger King’s french fries, Campbell’s red and white label condensed soups, Hershey’s Swoops candy, and Haagen-Dazs Mint Chip dazzler.

“Health” continued on Page 3
LATINO HEALTH INITIATIVE: The goal of Montgomery County's Latino Health Initiative, in place for about five years, is "to improve the quality of life of Latinos living in Montgomery County by contributing to the development and implementation of an integrated, coordinated, culturally and linguistically competent health wellness system that supports, values, and respects Latino families and communities." Among the initiative’s components are (a) the Health Promoters Program which trains volunteers throughout the county to educate Latinos about health-related issues and to enhance health care access, and (b) the Latino Cancer Prevention and Control Program which provides free or reduced-cost medical services for low-income Latinos. There is even a mobile unit that provides mammogram tests. Are there some ideas here worth transporting to the sister county?

DIVIDED LATINOS
National Patterns & Local Manifestations

Based upon the 2005 National Latino Survey, Latino Coalition president Robert Deposada comments: "This survey shows there are two very different segments within the Hispanic community: recent immigrants and those who have been here for years. Those who have been here longer tend mostly to speak English, are registered voters, are in better financial status, and tend to be more focused on issues that affect their pocket books like taxes, education and health care. The more recent immigrants tend to have lower incomes, mostly speak Spanish only, and are more concerned over immigration policies and language barriers. Their views on political issues are many times at odds."

The national division may well be reflected in the opinion differences with regard to the vendors in and around Langley Park. Clearly, the long-term immigrants are the most established and do not usually make purchases from the vendors. Many of them are moving up the socioeconomic ladder. In contrast, the newcomers do make food purchases from the vendors – sometimes of necessity due to a limited income and perhaps free-time limitations. The full report of the survey is at this web site: http://www.TheLatinoCoalition.com.

WISDOM FROM ERWIN MACK

Action Langley Park’s friend, Erwin Mack of the Takoma-Langley CDA, sent along the wise sayings below, which BLP is happy to share with its readership. (The CDA has helped to subsidize several ALP initiatives.)

- The nicest thing about the future is that it always starts tomorrow.
- Money will buy a fine dog, but only kindness will make him wag his tail.
- If you don't have a sense of humor, you probably don't have any sense at all.
- Seat belts are not as confining as wheelchairs.
- A good time to keep your mouth shut is when you're in deep water.
- How come it takes so little time for a child who is afraid of the dark to become a teenager who wants to stay out all night?
- Business conventions are important because they demonstrate how many people a company can operate without.
- Why is it that at class reunions you feel younger than everyone else looks?
- No one has more driving ambition than the teenager who wants to buy a car.
- There are no new sins.... The old ones just get more publicity.
- There are worse things than getting a call for a wrong number at 4 a.m. It could be a right number.
- No one ever says "It's only a game" when their team is winning.
- I've reached the age where the happy hour is a nap.
- Be careful reading the fine print. There's no way you're going to like it.
- The trouble with bucket seats is that not everybody has the same size bucket.
- Do you realize that in about 40 - 50 years, we'll have thousands of old ladies running around with tattoos!

STAY SAFE!

KEEP IT TOGETHER!
CRIME & FEAR

The front page of the Washington Post’s Metro section on 22 January 2006 carried a story entitled “Frustration and Fear Boil Up in Pr. George’s: Hundreds at Forum Complain of Growing Crime.” The frustration and fear are undoubtedly warranted, but the question remains: what is to be done? Here is how the article begins:

“Hundreds of Prince George's residents packed an Upper Marlboro church yesterday to warn county officials that they are fed up with increasing crime and want some relief. ‘We are pushing not because we are antagonizing, but because we are terrified,’ said the Rev. C. Anthony Muse, one of the organizers of the meeting. In 2005, Prince George’s tallied 173 homicides, a record for the county. Additionally, sexual assaults increased by 3 percent, robberies by 24 percent and carjackings by 45 percent from the previous year. Residents and a few county officials painted a grim picture of some streets and school halls, where criminals and unruly teens often have more control than law enforcement and principals. ‘If you walk into almost any school, you will see things that shock you,’ said State's Attorney Glenn F. Ivey, a panel member at the forum. ‘You've got kids cussing each other out, parents cussing out teachers, teachers are getting stay-away orders for parents.’”

(The full article can be accessed at [http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2006/01/21/AR2006012101217_pf.html].) An example is the mini-riot that reportedly broke out at Bladensburg High School recently, leading to a call for a sizeable police presence. At the crime meeting, County Executive Jack Johnson and Police Chief Melvin High sent a message indicating that they were unable to participate. That’s unfortunate; the more collaboration against the evil of crime, the better for all county residents.

Of course, the key questions is: what is to be done? Adding 100 or more police officers each of the next few might not make a difference because however dedicated and skilled the officers are, they cannot be at every street corner and every school hallway. Youths’ frustrations that lead to acting out need to be addressed. Clearly, more after-school, weekend, and summer programs would help. Perhaps first-rate vocational education in various parts of the county will keep teenagers focused on what may pay off for them later with good jobs. We hope that the key crime-fighters in the county meet with the key educators in the county to develop a plan that will meet the needs of teenagers who are too prone to dropping out or acting out.

The county must also address the issue of priorities. Reports indicate that the police have been asked to focus on consensual professional adult entertainment. But why march into an adult activity that causes no harm when school hallways and neighborhood streets are the danger zones? Because it's easy? That's not a good excuse!

AFFORDABLE HOUSING

The arrival of Starbucks a year or so ago raised the issue of gentrification and displacement. Will the cost of purchasing a house increase? Will rents soar? Many people still find Langley Park to be affordable, especially when houses or apartments are shared among families or others. But the trend is towards increases and therefore displacement.

This month, houses just north of Northwest Branch sold in the $290,000 to $397,000 range. Within Langley Park, many houses have recently sold for more than $200,000. In about three years, one apartment complex raised the cost of a studio unit from $485 to $725. The history of most of the housing in Langley Park is that they sold in the early 1950s for $10,000 or $12,000, and they were 900 square feet.

The explanations for the increases include national inflation, improvements (for instance, the “pop up” houses that have added a second storey – see photo), and probably some gentrification pressures given the excellent location near bus routes, the Beltway, and a wide variety of retail establishments. The challenge facing county decisionmakers is to decide whether affordable housing is desirable in the county, and if so, how to maintain affordable housing at least in some neighborhoods and sections of complexes. Will the decisionmakers meet the challenge?

Barrio de Langley Park is the monthly publication of Action Langley Park working with the Langley Park Project of the University of Maryland. Bill Hanna is the editor. The Spanish edition is prepared by Professor Manel Lacorte and his graduate student team.

Action Langley Park is a nonprofit 501c3 organization working to improve the quality of life in Langley Park and its nearby neighborhoods. It holds monthly open meetings to exchange information, plan service activities, and develop advocacy strategies. For further information about ALP or BLP, write to this address: actionlangleypark@yahoo.com.

Langley Park Day 2006 will take place on Sunday, May 7th at the Langley Park Community Center from noon until 4:30 p.m. (The earlier tentative date, April 23, has been changed.) Planning is now taking place, and we need your help. If you are a doctor, nurse, other health professional, dancer, singer, musician, other performer, immigration lawyer, craft or food vendor, children’s activity organizer, or just want to help, please let us know. Contact ALP at actionlangleypark@yahoo.com.