

November 18, 2010

**MEMORANDUM**

**TO:** Montgomery County Planning Board

**VIA:** Rollin Stanley, Director  
Bill Barron, Team Leader, Area 1

**FROM:** Kathleen A. Reilly, AICP, Planner Coordinator (301/495-4614), Area 1

**SUBJECT:** Long Branch Sector Plan Preliminary Recommendations

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**Recommendation**

Provide guidance to the staff regarding the direction of the Long Branch Sector Plan.

This memorandum contains preliminary recommendations for the Long Branch Sector Plan, including the Plan's vision, concept, and recommendations for diversity, connectivity, design, and environment.

**Vision**

Long Branch is envisioned as a compact, pedestrian-friendly, mixed-use, multicultural, transit-oriented community with a more defined identity. Long Branch has diverse uses but doesn't always serve all its residents' needs. This Plan makes recommendations to round out that diversity with new housing and commercial options, defining the Arliss Town Center as the focus of community life located between the established single-family and multifamily neighborhoods, near the library and community center, and eventually a Purple Line station. This vision will allow incremental growth that unifies all of the community's components to create one Long Branch.

**Location and Character**

Long Branch is located less than two miles from both Old Town Takoma Park and the revitalized Silver Spring Central Business District. The area is accessible to regional employment centers such as the U.S. Food and Drug Administration in nearby White Oak, and downtown Washington D.C.



The Long Branch community is located in the eastern portion of Montgomery County between Langley Park and Silver Spring. The Sector Plan boundaries are roughly, Plymouth Street on the north, Carroll Avenue to the east, Long Branch Creek and Wabash Avenue to the south, Sligo Creek Parkway and Manchester Road to the west. The main thoroughfares are Piney Branch Road, University Boulevard, Flower Avenue, and Arliss Street. A small portion of the City of Takoma Park lies within the Sector Plan area.

The Washington D.C. region has been a destination for immigrants from Central America, South America, the Caribbean, Asia, and Africa for the last 30 years. Long Branch represents a large concentration of people from many countries. Hispanics with origins in Central American countries are one of the larger ethnic groups. Other immigrant groups include Asians and West Africans. The existing local retail and neighborhood mirror this diversity.

The Long Branch neighborhoods surrounding the Sector Plan area are diverse.

Population	Long Branch Study Area			County
	Single-family	Multi-family	All Types	All Types
<b>Household Population</b>	9,840	10,490	20,330	939,200
<b>Average Age (years)</b>	41.7	35.5	38.5	38.1
<b>Race</b>				
% White	54.7%	43.4%	48.9%	66.3%
% Black	26.3%	40.1%	33.4%	16.4%
% Asian or Pac. Islander	6.9%	7.8%	7.4%	13.3%
% Other	12.0%	8.7%	10.3%	4.0%
<b>Hispanic or Latino and Race <sup>1</sup></b>				
% Hispanic or Latino <sup>1</sup>	20.8%	28.1%	24.6%	15.6%
% Not Hispanic White	42.7%	19.6%	30.8%	53.7%
<b>% Foreign-born</b>	30.7%	48.2%	39.7%	28.6%
<b>Language Spoken at Home</b>				
Persons 5 Years & Older	9,280	9,565	18,845	876,445
% Speak Language Other than English	34.9%	56.3%	45.7%	32.6%
% Speak English less than "Very Well"	12.6%	18.4%	15.5%	8.8%

\* *Insufficient data for reliable estimates.*

<sup>1</sup> *Those of Hispanic origin may be of any race.*

Source: 2008 Census Update Survey, Research & Technology Center MCPD, M-NCPPC April 2010

Long Branch is a first tier or urban ring community of Montgomery County. It is composed of older single-family and multifamily units, one story neighborhood commercial areas, and institutional uses. Many of the residential units served as a first home for new residents through either rental or ownership options. The community benefits from the presence of both the Long Branch Library and Long Branch Community Center, which are well used by residents and visitors. Long Branch is well served by public transportation as many of its residents are transit dependent.

Today, Long Branch is a vibrant multi-cultural community with good community facilities, established residential neighborhoods, various affordable housing options, and a well developed park system with recreational opportunities. Residents walk, bike, drive, and ride buses within and outside the community. The retail establishments reflect the many cultures and tastes of the residents and draw customers from beyond the immediate community. These characteristics create Long Branch's unique synergy.

Nonetheless, through observations, field work, and discussions with residents and property owners, the following concerns about Long Branch were raised:

- Limited or little pedestrian safety along sidewalks, streets, and at intersections
- Retain and protect small businesses
- Absence of an east-west connection in the community
- Preserve established residential neighborhoods
- Desire for new housing options to serve different life stages
- Maintain affordable housing stock
- Lack of community gathering spaces
- Improve the community's sense of place
- Desire for safe and secure community

### **Long Branch in the Future**

The Sector Plan's vision will build on existing community assets and add new ones that build on its present synergy. The Plan seeks to maintain the community's fabric but over time, incremental change will adapt to available opportunities. The Sector Plan's recommendations will set the stage for a paced pattern of growth and development, while maintaining the overall community vision. Outreach efforts shaped the proposed Sector Plan's vision and guided the recommendations in this report. The following four planning principles describe the Plan's concept.

#### *Diversity*

The Sector Plan will increase Long Branch's diversity through new commercial and housing uses as well as new transportation options. New housing options near the proposed Purple Line stations will offer existing residents new options and draw new residents, such as professors, students and researchers with the University of Maryland who might overlook this community. The established mix of single-family and multifamily residential neighborhoods will be retained and continue the area's diversity. New commercial uses will offer a larger variety of goods and services for shoppers. Existing small businesses will be retained. The Purple Line offers another transportation mode (light rail) for residents and visitors. There are no decreases to the existing affordable housing inventory along Piney Branch Road proposed under this Sector Plan.

- Preserve affordable housing and create new housing choices for different life stages near transit, commercial areas, and community facilities and services.
- Help retain local businesses through entrepreneur assistance.
- Create a community development corporation and continue the Maryland State Enterprise Zone tax credit.

#### *Connectivity*

Improved connections through wider sidewalks, safer intersections, new streets and trail connections will link the entire community together. When constructed, the Purple Line will connect residents, workers, and visitors to the greater Washington metropolitan area. Improved connections to shopping, housing, public facilities, recreational opportunities, and transit options will unify Long Branch as one community.

- Create a recreational loop to link community together and encourage walking throughout the community to commercial, residential, park, and community uses.
- Improve bicycle and pedestrian mobility in the community through improved road crossings, widened sidewalks, and increased safety features.
- Increase University Boulevard and Piney Branch Road rights-of-way to implement a boulevard cross-section with a divided median for the proposed Purple Line.
- Implement Purple Line stations as recommended in the *Purple Line Functional Master Plan*—within the median of University Boulevard just south of Piney Branch Road and within the median of Arliss Street just north of Piney Branch Road. Maryland Transit Administration continues to refine the recommended location for the Arliss Street station.

### *Design*

The Arliss Town Center and Piney Branch Neighborhood Village will be incrementally redeveloped to provide a full range of community services and housing with connections to transit.

- Create the Arliss Town Center as the community's focus, providing residents and visitors with gathering spaces, in addition to new housing and commercial services.

Arliss Town Center will contain the majority of transit-oriented, mixed-use development and reinvestment in Long Branch. Buildings will be up to six stories high, with retail and offices on the ground floor and new housing on upper floors. Designation of the Flower Avenue Shopping Center and Theater as a historic resource will be incorporated into the town center design. Arliss Town Center will be the activity generator for the community—a place where residents can shop, dine, work, and live, with civic gathering spaces and pedestrian connections linking the Town Center to the community. It will be a destination place and have a visible image that anchors Long Branch's identity in the greater Silver Spring area.

- The smaller commercial area of the Piney Branch Neighborhood Village will offer commercial goods and services also.

The Piney Branch Neighborhood Village will also be a transit-oriented mixed-use area, but at lower scale than Arliss Town Center. Reinvestment and new development in Piney Branch Neighborhood Village will be up to four stories high, with locally serving commercial uses on a ground floor and new housing above it. Commercial uses are geared towards smaller purchases and will complement the commercial uses at Arliss Town Center.

- Create a gateway and urban boulevard along Piney Branch Road.

Piney Branch Road will function as a gateway and urban boulevard connecting the Town Center and Neighborhood Village and tying the Long Branch community together. Offering residents opportunities to live, work, and play near transit, reinforces the Plan's concept that Long Branch is a walkable community and will continue as one in the future. Redesigning Piney Branch Road as an urban boulevard completes the missing east-west connection requested by the community.

### *Environment*

The parks and trails system are heavily used in Long Branch. New civic gathering spaces, a network of green spaces, a proposed recreational loop and improved park and trail connections will join the natural environment to the built environment. Sustainable design and green building practices will be incorporated into all reinvestment and new development projects.

- Use compact mixed-used development in reinvestment or redevelopment projects to reduce impervious cover, increase on-site tree canopy, improve stormwater management practices and employ LEED standards in building construction.
- Create a hierarchical park network that protects all parks and open spaces in the Sector Plan area.

# Long Branch Sector Plan - Key Recommendations

## Diversity

- Preserve housing affordability
- Increase housing options
- Retain small businesses
- Encourage new commercial uses that serve the entire community
- Create healthy-community infrastructure

## Connectivity

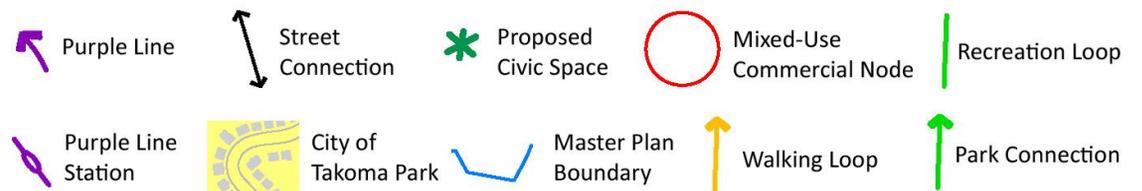
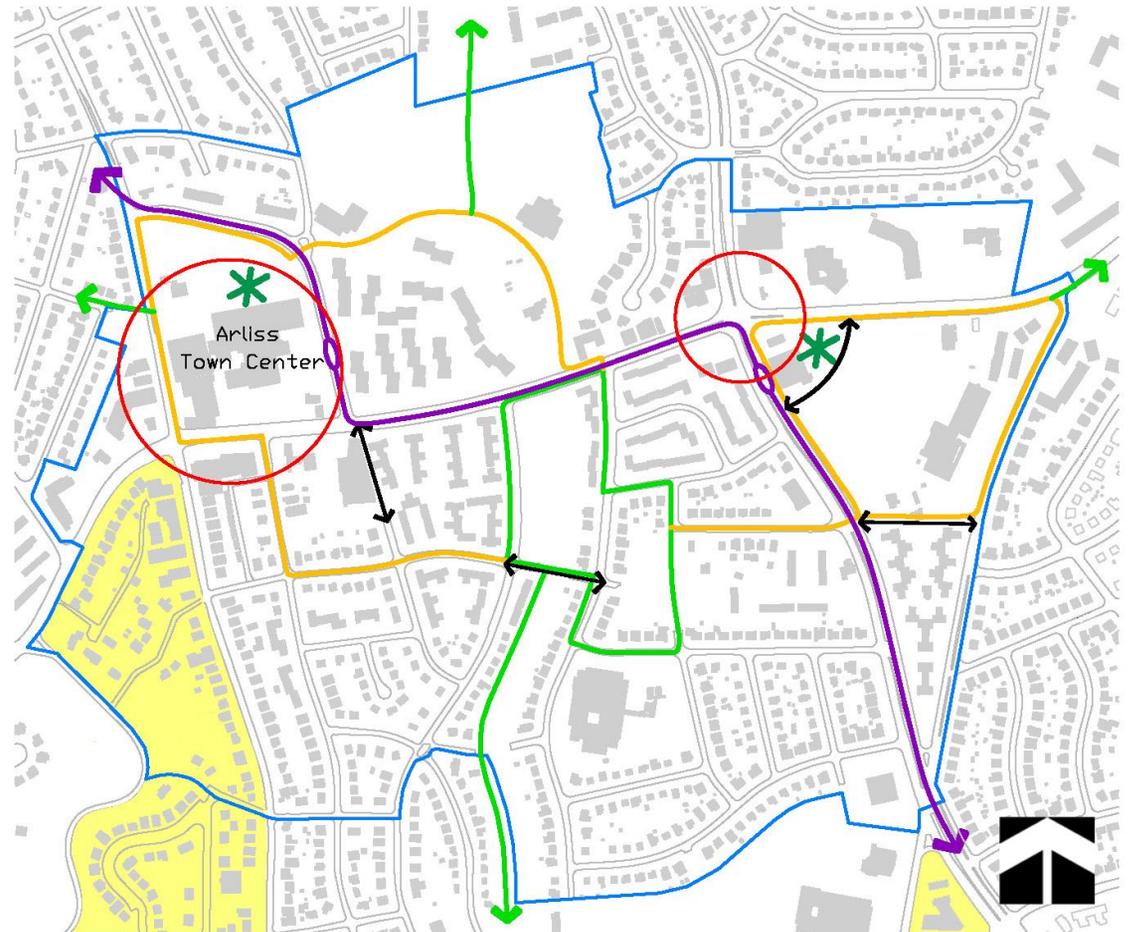
- Improve pedestrian safety and mobility
- Improve accessibility and connections to buses and future Purple Line
- Support the Purple Line along University Boulevard, Piney Branch Road, and Arliss Street

## Environment

- Strengthen environmental systems
- Create a green space network with parks and open spaces
- Encourage sustainable design and green building practices in reinvestment and new development

## Design

- Establish the Arliss Town Center as a commercial node with community gathering spaces
- Designate the Flower Avenue Shopping Center and Theater as a historic resource
- Establish the Piney Branch Neighborhood Village as a smaller commercial node
- Use a mixed-use zone for reinvestment and new development in commercial areas



## **Planning Framework**

The Long Branch Sector Plan will amend the Montgomery County 1964 General Plan, On Wedges and Corridors, and incorporate recommendations of the 1993 General Plan Refinement. The 1993 General Plan designated Long Branch as an urban ring community and this Plan will continue its recommendations to:

- preserve existing neighborhoods
- expand transportation options while accommodating pedestrian needs
- emphasize compact development and housing in transit station areas
- address needs and desires of a diverse population and economic community.

The Sector Plan will also amend portions of the 2000 approved and adopted master plans for East Silver Spring and the City of Takoma Park. Both plans recommended creating a Commercial Revitalization Overlay Zone (CROZ) to foster commercial revitalization. The CROZ was adopted to provide flexibility in development standards such as height, to reduce setbacks and parking standards, to allow residential uses and limit other uses and to provide design review. To date, the CROZ has not been effective in fostering commercial reinvestment in Long Branch. The Sector Plan's recommendations will provide a comprehensive blueprint to direct the community's future economic growth and development.

Since 2000, the County Executive appointed two separate groups to examine the Long Branch area. The Long Branch Task Force recommended in the East Silver Spring Master Plan was appointed by the County Executive in 2002 for a term of three years. The task force worked on commercial reinvestment, pedestrian and public safety issues, improved recreational opportunities, and designating Long Branch as a State Enterprise Zone.

After the task force's three-year term, the County Executive appointed the Long Branch Advisory Committee in 2006, for a two-year period. The committee provided additional community input and direction for the task force's recommendations. Committee actions implemented installation of a community center marquee sign, establishment of environmental quality initiatives, and various volunteer activities.

The *Purple Line Functional Master Plan* was approved and adopted in September 2010. It recommends two transit stations in Long Branch—one in the median of University Boulevard at its intersection with Piney Branch Road and the other in the median of Arliss Street at its intersection with Piney Branch Road. The Sector Plan incorporates these recommendations as elements that shape the vision for this community.

## **Outreach Strategy**

Throughout the development of the Long Branch Sector Plan, the project team and our partner the City of Takoma Park, met and worked with various stakeholders and sought to include stakeholders that would not otherwise participate in the planning process. Initial outreach for the Sector Plan began with a listening session in fall 2009. Subsequent to that listening session, the project team was invited to present and solicit input at a monthly meeting of tenants organized by CASA MD.

Community meetings were held in winter 2010 to further refine stakeholder input. In spring 2010, stakeholders participated in an intensive workshop to discuss and develop a future for Long Branch. At the workshop, stakeholders broke into four groups. Each group generated and developed a concept for Long Branch's future that contained a vision statement, characteristics, and land uses. At the end of the workshop, each group presented their concept to the entire meeting. The project team refined the four concepts into two and presented them to the stakeholders at a subsequent community meeting.

Staff's monthly office hours at the Long Branch Library allowed residents to bring issues and questions to the project team's attention. Additionally, traditional community outreach methods such as flyers, postcards, and websites were also used. Bilingual documents were provided at public meetings, during community office hours, and in the traditional community outreach methods. Interpretative services were provided at public meetings and office hours. This outreach will continue during the Plan process.

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