

# **Long Branch Sector Plan**

## **Appendix 1**

### **History and Development of Long Branch**

At the turn of the century, Long Branch was largely a farming community. The community was centered at the crossroads of Bladensburg Road (now known as University Boulevard) and Blair Road (now known as Piney Branch Road) and consisted of a general store, school, and several houses.

The 1920s and 1930s witnessed the construction of limited single-family homes in Long Branch. However, when the New Deal era brought large numbers of government workers into the Washington region, the Silver Spring area offered prime land for development. In 1934, Developer E. Brooke Lee advertised his land for sale in Highland View, touting its proximity to downtown jobs: "Average driving time, 20 minutes..." from the White House. Most of the single-family houses in the western part of the planning area date from that era.

In the post-Depression era, Lee and his real estate partners had a new vision for the area, with well-designed affordable houses on smaller lots built for middle class families. Lee played a major role in broader development of Montgomery County, the Silver Spring area in particular. He was instrumental in establishing the Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission. He worked with the State Roads Commission to establish East-West Highway, an early beltway connecting Silver Spring with Chevy Chase and Bethesda. In the Silver Spring area, Lee established schools and donated land for parks, including Sligo Creek Park. Lee and his cohorts established their own bank, real estate, and construction companies. He also established a liquor control board.<sup>1</sup>

Lee had several construction and development businesses, his main company being the North Washington Realty Company. He promoted three major planned components in the area: parks, highways, and residential communities, as depicted in his promotional map of 1933. Flower Avenue stretched from Takoma Park to the Indian Spring Golf Club, while Piney Branch connected University Boulevard, a new State Highway, with Sligo Creek Park and downtown Silver Spring.<sup>2</sup>

Flower Avenue, in the 1930s, was envisioned as a boulevard lined with handsome houses. Located directly north of the Flower Shopping Center, Highland View was subdivided in several sections beginning in 1932 by Lee's affiliated companies. The deeds included restrictive covenants giving the developers design review for proposed houses until January 1, 1952. The deed restrictions followed the model set in the 1890s by the Chevy Chase Land Company, with minimum costs set for construction of houses, with higher costs set for corner lots fronting Flower Avenue. By 1936, Flower Avenue was considered "a fine concrete State Highway" and public utilities were installed.<sup>3</sup>

In 1937, Lee offered custom houses for his Forest Hills subdivision, located west of Flower Avenue, along Sligo Park. The development had small lots, with the focus on well-designed houses. The following year, Highland View featured custom houses designed by George DeFranceaux's Permanent Homes Company. In its first year, the company designed 90 houses, 75 of which were in Highland View. Permanent Homes featured furnished model homes for prospective buyers, and was approved by the Federal Housing Administration.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>MacMaster and Hiebert, *A Grateful Remembrance*, 1976. Sam Stavinsky, "Gamble Paying Off in Coin of Big Business," *The Washington Post*, 9-5-1948. Sally Gagne, *North Hills of Sligo Creek*.

<sup>2</sup>North Washington Realty Company brochure, 1933.

<sup>3</sup>Highland View Section One, August 1932, Plat 447; Silver Spring Investment Company. Example of deed restrictions in Deed 542:53, 8-29-1932. "Highland View of Sligo Park Tract Opened" *The Washington Post*, April 19, 1936.

<sup>4</sup>"New Residences Easily Modified to Suit Buyer" (Jun 13, 1937), "Corporation Sells 90 Homes in First Year" (July 30, 1939) and "Home Sold in Highland View," (November 20, 1938), *The Washington Post*.

In the World War II era and beyond, developers and builders in the Washington D.C. area experienced high construction costs, shortages of material, and government restrictions. As a result, many projects planned between 1942 and 1948 were not built. The Washington Post reported in 1947, “For every home, apartment or commercial structure under construction here, two more have been postponed.” One of the cited projects caught in the backlog was the Indian Spring Clubhouse in Silver Spring, with an estimated cost of \$250,000.<sup>5</sup>

The decades following World War II introduced enormous changes to Washington. As the federal bureaucracy expanded, newcomers flocked to the government boomtown. Returning veterans and newly arrived government workers contributed to the transformation of Washington from capital city into metropolitan region. Seeking new homes, they joined an exodus to the Maryland and Virginia suburbs.

Housing developments in the Washington area mushroomed in this era. In the 1940s and 1950s, the Washington, D.C. suburbs were third in the country in terms of growth. Most houses east of Long Branch date from 1947-1952, as do those north of Wayne Avenue and east of Sudbury Road. By 1948, the Long Branch area was mostly built out as a mainly residential area, with single-family houses as well as several apartment complexes, largely with the help of FHA and Veterans benefits.<sup>6</sup>

One of the last undeveloped areas was west of Flower Avenue to Piney Branch, including the Flower Shopping Center tract and the area east to Long Branch. In 1948, it became a new commercial complex at the northwest corner of Piney Branch Road and Flower Avenue.<sup>7</sup>

Abraham Kay acquired the Indian Spring Golf Club in 1939. He open membership to Jewish residents, who had been excluded elsewhere, providing a new recreational place for that segment of the population. Members were all or nearly exclusively Jewish.<sup>8</sup> Kay developed adjoining residential districts that became one of the area’s first largely Jewish communities and was where the first Jewish organization, Montgomery Lodge of B’nai B’rith, was organized.

Before World War II, Long Branch residents shopped in downtown Silver Spring, Takoma Park, or in the District, because few stores were available in the neighborhood. An exception was the ZigZag Shopping Center, established about 1939 at the northwest corner of Piney Branch and Flower Avenue. In his June 4, 1948 “Business Briefs” column in the *Maryland News*, Blair Lee heralded the construction of the Flower Shopping Center on the northeast corner, affirming that “the long awaited shopping center is actually on its way.” This center opened in 1950, followed by Donald Johnson’s shopping center at the southeast corner. During the 1950s, additional multi-family units were constructed along Piney Branch between Flower Avenue and Barron Street.

One of the last commercial developments was the construction of the Giant grocery store on Arliss Street in the 1960’s. Limited development occurred in Long Branch during the ensuing decades.

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<sup>5</sup>Conrad P. Harness, “Can’t Hurdle High Costs, Restrictions.” *The Washington Post*, 5-18-1947.

<sup>6</sup>Hiebert and MacMaster, p328. M-NCPPC GIS database. In 1948, the FHA announced 2,186 new apartment units in the Washington area. The Long Branch area included significant amounts of FHA housing, including the Charles A Block Apartments, on Flower Avenue, and the Goodacre Apartments, at Domer and Glenview, featuring 300 apartments in 37 buildings designed by architects Corning and Moore.

<sup>7</sup>Klinge Real Estate Atlas, 1941, 1948. *The Washington Post*, 3-21-1948.

<sup>8</sup>Sally Gagne, *North Hills of Sligo Park*. William Offutt, *Montgomery County Story*, November 2003.

# Development in Long Branch 1910 - 2000

