



Long Branch Advisory Committee



Report and Recommendations
January 31, 2008



Letter to County Executive Leggett and the Montgomery County Council

January 31, 2008

The Honorable Isiah Leggett
County Executive
Montgomery County, Maryland

The Honorable Michael Knapp and Council members
Council President
Montgomery County, Maryland

Dear County Executive and Council President Knapp:

As the Long Branch Advisory Committee comes to the end of its term, we are pleased to transmit a report of our deliberations and recommendations for our community. The final report contains twenty-two recommendations in six areas. However, there is much more that remains to be addressed. Like the Long Branch Task Force that preceded us, we do not want this report to sit on a shelf, but to be actively considered, funded, and implemented. Our report is a working document to guide the County in planning, budgeting and implementation of tangible improvements to our community.

In the interim period between now and the time commercial development is energized, the committee requests that the County Executive and County Council return to the Long Branch community annually to provide a progress update on the following issues:

- Redevelopment of the commercial core
- Implementation of the Advisory Committee recommendations, and
- Trends and community indicators

The Committee also requests that a Long Branch Redevelopment Steering Committee be empanelled by the County Executive and County Council to guide an open planning process for the Neighborhood Center (commercial core) when the market and other issues are resolved.

Thank you for your confidence in our ability and for providing us with a special opportunity to improve the health and sustainability of the Long Branch community.

On behalf of the Long Branch Advisory Committee,

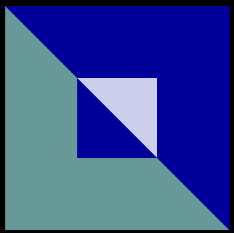


Cynthia Rubenstein
Chair



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Introduction History and Purpose

In its approval of the year 2000 East Silver Spring Master Plan, the County Council supported the appointment of a task force to address quality of life concerns and residential and commercial revitalization in the Long Branch area of East Silver Spring.

The Long Branch Task Force was established by the County Council in May 2002 with a term of three years. During the three year term of the Long Branch Task Force, the members determined a joint vision, gathered data, and developed preliminary recommendations. These recommendations were reported to the County Executive and County Council. In the Second Annual Report the Long Branch Task Force notes that “We consider this community a work in progress. We have quite a few successes so far, but we have much more to do.” The Long Branch Task Force recommended that a volunteer council of Long Branch business and civic community leaders be established by the County Executive and County Council to advise on the implementation of the Long Branch Task Force Neighborhood Revitalization Strategies.

The County Executive and the Council of Montgomery County, Maryland recognized that there was a need to continue the work of the Long Branch Task Force; move from strategy development to implementation and continue the high level of community participation in the Long Branch initiative.

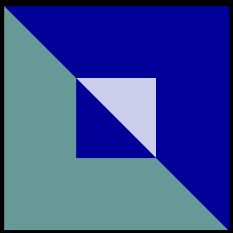
The County Council and County Executive of Montgomery County established a Long Branch Advisory Committee in 2006 for a two year period. Fifteen members representing homeowners; educational, faith-based and or civic association members; commercial property or business owners; renters; and non-profits serving the community were appointed by the County Executive and confirmed by the County Council.

The objectives of the Long Branch Advisory Committee were:

Provide continued local community input on the direction and implementation of the Long Branch neighborhood revitalization strategies, such as the Village Center Linkages Project, office development, pedestrian/personal safety and street lighting improvements; and,

Advise the County Executive and County Council on priorities for Long Branch on an annual basis.

Primary staff support was provided by the Department of Housing and Community Affairs and the Silver Spring Regional Services Center. Additional support was provided by Montgomery County—Maryland National Capitol Parks and Planning Commission (Planning Department and Police Department), Montgomery County Police Department; States’ Attorney’s Office; Department of Health and Human Services; Montgomery County Public Schools; Department of Environmental Protection, Department of Economic Development; Department of Recreation; the City of Takoma Park; and the County Department of Public Works and Transportation.



Introduction Membership

Appointments as of January 31, 2006

Co-chair: Ms. Cynthia Rubenstein
Co-chair: Mr. Juan Carlos Chedrauy

Rev. Eymeris Acevedo
Mr. Guy F. (Jeff) Campbell III
Ms. Rose Crenca
Ms. Henrietta Dagadu
Ms. Anissa Perez
Ms. Philippa Jackson
Mr. Andrew Kleine
Ms. Yen Le
Mr. Alphonse MacDonald
Ms. Anita Morrison
Dr. Brad Stewart
Mr. Hans Riemer
Ms. Jacquelyn S. Van Croft

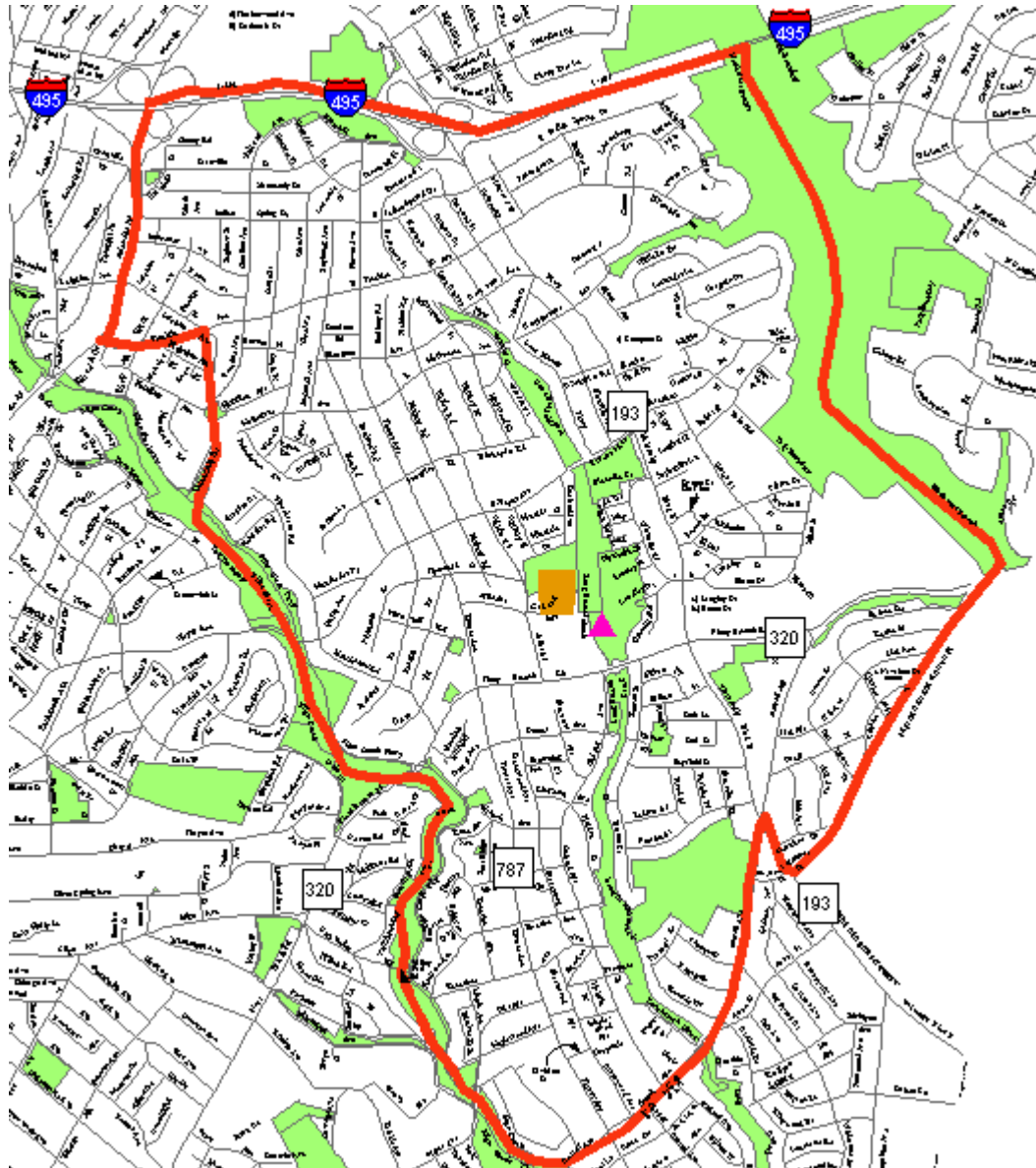
Appointments as of January 31, 2008

Co-chair: Ms. Cynthia Rubenstein

Rev. Eymeris Acevedo
Ms. Rose Crenca
Mr. Edmund J. Kenny
Mr. Andrew Kleine
Mr. Alphonse MacDonald
Ms. Alexia Martinez
Ms. Anita Morrison
Ms. Alicia D. Powers
Dr. Brad Stewart
Mr. Christian Walther

Introduction

Long Branch Study Area





Committee Activities Discussions

The Long Branch Advisory Committee initial meeting was February 2006. The committee was charged to build on the work of the Long Branch Task Force (2002 – 2005) continue community input on the direction and implementation of the Long Branch neighborhood revitalization strategies. The first few meetings focused on a review of the deliberations and recommendations of the Long Branch Task Force.

Discussions

Task Force co-chairs Mary Bradford and Maria Elva Maldonado spoke about their commitment to Long Branch, the Long Branch Task Force, and its 263 recommendations covering economic/commercial development, housing, pedestrian/personal safety, and youth/schools/childcare/enrichment. Co-chairs urged members to make the most out of each meeting, frequently report to the Executive and his staff, as well as Council members. They commented that there has been some progress, but there is much more that remains to be addressed.

The committee received separate briefings on Long Branch Task Force work group recommendations such as Economic and Commercial Development Work Group; Personal/Pedestrian Safety; and Housing. A briefing on the Urban Land Institute (ULI) Technical Assistance Panel Report of Findings was provided. In February 2005, eleven ULI panel members spent an intensive one and one-half days, touring the community sitting down with the Task Force members and area stakeholders to discuss their hopes and concerns for the large commercial area bounded by Piney Branch Road, Flower Avenue and Arliss Street and developing recommendations. Each panel member received detailed briefing material prior to the visit. The conclusions provided a foundation for further discussions of the commercial core.

Members of the Advisory Committee chose to outreach to the community and seek community perspectives on the commercial area redevelopment. Members created a power point presentation and met with several community associations, seeking their input.

Washington Adventist Hospital (WAH) President Jere Stocks provided a presentation on March 21, 2006 concerning the history of the hospital and its proposed “Washington Adventist Health Center of Long Branch”. The proposal includes a 55,400 square foot medical office building planned for Flower Avenue at Arliss Street. On May 15, 2007, Robert Jepson of Adventist Health Care updated the committee on the progress of the medical office building. The hospital decided to lease approximately 15,000 square feet of space in the building instead of leasing the whole building as originally proposed. Between March 2006 and today the scope of services expected to be provided at the Long Branch Medical Office Building has dramatically changed.



Committee Activities Discussions

Committee members were briefed on the Capital Improvements Program and specifically the three CIP projects which relate directly to Long Branch; Cost Sharing which includes earmarked financial support for the proposed medical office building, Long Branch Town Center Conceptual Development Plan and Long Branch Village Center Linkages.

The committee received several briefings on the progress of the first phase of the Village Center Linkages, Long Branch Walkway Bridge. Department of Housing and Community Affairs staff and consultants provided an overview of the project scope, analysis of the issues associated with the project and a projected time line. The Advisory Committee hosted two public meetings to hear from the community. The Advisory Committee provided support for the curved alignment for the Long Branch Walkway Bridge.

The Montgomery County Council provided funding to improve the Community Center sign on Piney Branch Road, which was a longstanding request of community members. The Marquee sign would enable staff to electronically highlight community meeting and programs at the center. The Advisory Committee worked with Department of Housing and Community Affairs, Department of Recreation and the Silver Spring Regional Services Center staff to choose a design for the Marquee sign.

The Task Force work groups identified *a vision* for the community, *indicators* to monitor changing community conditions, *root cause* preventing positive change and *strategic recommendations* for short and long-term health of Long Branch. One of the Task Force recommendations was to develop an annual Community Report Card which would monitor indicators to determine progress in meeting community visions (goals).

Advisory Committee members discussed various ways to develop an annual Community Report Card and formed a sub-committee to explore the possibilities and report back to the Advisory Committee.

A Long Branch Public Safety Plan based upon the work of the Long Branch Task Force was developed by the Department of Housing and Community Affairs in partnership with other county departments and the Advisory Committee. The goal of the Safety Plan is to:

Focus on specific measures that would increase public awareness of safety issues

Expand efforts to make Long Branch a safer and more inviting community for its residents and businesses

Establish a working plan that can be revised regularly as revitalization begins and strengthens.

Committee Activities Accomplishments

Long Branch was designation as a Priority Place by the State of Maryland. As a Priority Place, Long Branch will have priority access to major state agencies, which will work directly with the County and provide technical assistance on different projects. Priority Place will focus on revitalization of the commercial area as well as the pedestrian linkages that connect neighborhoods with the commercial area.

The Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) implemented two environmental quality initiatives in the Long Branch community. “Shade to Save” pilot project was implemented at a Long Branch apartment complex. Shade trees were planted near exterior air-conditioning units. These trees shade the air-conditioning units and help to decrease the energy needed to provide cooling to the apartments. In addition, DEP began an outreach to businesses in an effort to reduce on-site pollution. They are targeting auto repair and dry cleaning businesses.



Streetscape Standards were prepared and adopted for the Long Branch commercial area. They build upon existing standards developed twenty years ago. The streetscape standards include improved lighting, street furniture and construction details. Developers are required to include the standards in their development

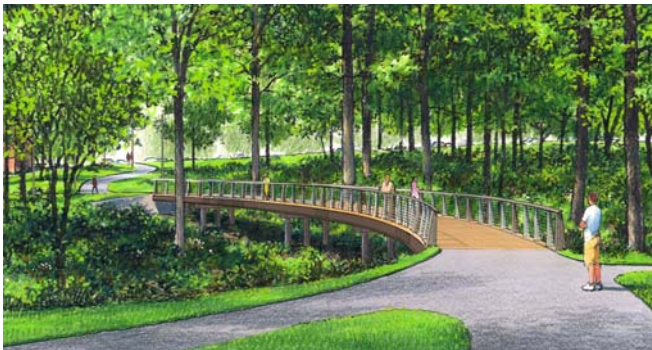
projects. The Department of Housing and Community Affairs will use these standards in their streetscape projects.

The Long Branch Community Center Marquee sign was installed in May 2007. The existing brick base was modified with a prominent signage above the brick cap indicating the Long Branch Community Center, Park and Pool. In addition, a variable message electronic sign board was attached. The community center staff can change the sign board from the office. This was a long awaited improvement to the community.



Community Center Sign

The Long Branch Village Center Linkages, Walkway Bridge received Facility Plan and Mandatory Referral approval by the Maryland National Capital Park and Planning Commission (MNCPPC) Board on May 31, 2007. This approval includes the alignment and 30% design for the handicapped accessible walkway and bridge between the community center and library. The bridge was initially conceived by the Task Force as a small scale pedestrian passage. MNCPPC requirements have expanded the scope to a bridge which meets the American Society of Transportation Officials (ASTO) requirements meaning a bridge ten (10) feet wide, able to support a vehicle, line of site vision from each end of the bridge. The bridge will include the curved alignment, wood deck and railing. The bridge will be located to the south of the current alignment. There are numerous procedures, requirements and permits required before the project moves to construction in 2009/10.



Long Branch Walkway Bridge Concept

Committee Activities

Community Outreach



Earth Day 2006

The Long Branch Advisory Committee supported the Annual Earth Day event held along the Long Branch Creek at the Long Branch Community Center. In 2006, over 300 community members braved the constant showers and collected tons of trash from our creek. The sun shined on Earth Day in 2007.

The Earth Day event helps to preserve and restore the natural stream bed and embankment of Long Branch Creek. It helps to preserve the wetland area and the woodland surrounding the creek. Elimination of litter and debris helps to control stream bank erosion.

This project was possible by a partnership with Discovery Communications, Montgomery County Department of Recreation, Department of Housing and Community Affairs, the Volunteer Center, Department of Environmental Protection, Long Branch Neighborhood Initiative with their community associations, and the Anacostia Watershed Society.

Committee members participated at the Annual Community Unity Day held at the Long Branch Community Center in May. The Annual Community Unity Day is a neighborhood festival. It provides a venue for community groups to highlight their programs; neighbors to share their talents, fun and games for the entire family. The Advisory Committee booth displayed information on the Long Branch commercial area development. The Advisory Committee members used this opportunity to inform the community and seek their input on possible redevelopment opportunities. In 2007, the County Executive and Council Members celebrated the completion of the new Marquee sign.





Recommendations Economic Development

Economic Development

1. Place priority on redevelopment to create a Long Branch Neighborhood Center on the “Super Block” bounded by Piney Branch, Flower Avenue and Arliss Street that:
 - Creates a quality people place with a pedestrian environment where neighbors can gather and see friends;
 - Combines retail, restaurants, housing and office uses to create a vibrant mixed-use center;
 - Relocates the County liquor store to a less prominent location;
 - Serves primarily neighborhood residents;
 - Serves the whole community of different income levels;
 - Builds on the area’s diverse cultural identity with ethnic restaurants and other small businesses but with out diminishing the commonalities which help make Long Branch a cohesive community;
 - Provides new mixed-income housing;
 - Preserves the Flower Shopping Center/Flower Theater – an important historic resource;
 - Strengthens pedestrian and bicycle links to the Long Branch Library, the Long Branch Community Center and the Long Branch Park; and
 - Complies with all County Development Regulations.

2. Engage the community in an open planning process for the Neighborhood Center including the proposed medical office building at Arliss Street and Flower Avenue before proceeding with development. Encourage the selected developer to continue the process much in the way that the Downtown Silver Spring project was planned with continued community input.

3. Encourage near-term development of the Purple Line including a station serving the new Neighborhood Center.

4. Continue to provide assistance to new and existing small businesses, including façade loans.



Recommendations

Housing and Pedestrian & Personal Safety

Housing

1. Make Long Branch revitalization efforts a model of the County Executive's pledge to ensure no net loss of affordable housing and provide diversity of
 - housing types
 - income levels
2. Strengthen code enforcement in Long Branch
 - resume annual inspection of rental housing
 - toughen penalties on repeat violators
 - establish a housing court to expedite code violation cases
 - improve quality control of inspections. i.e.: rotating inspectors and periodic spot checking of inspections by supervisors
 - foster better communication between code enforcement staff, tenants, property managers and property owners
 - monitor upkeep of foreclosed property to ensure compliance with property maintenance code.
3. Monitor and develop intervention purchase program for foreclosed properties in Long Branch including both single family and multi-family homes.
4. Include diverse range of household types and incomes in the "Super Block" redevelopment, including consideration of senior housing units.

Pedestrian and Personal Safety

1. Support for implementation of Long Branch Public Safety Plan with particular attention to the following actions:
 - support funding for the Police Department
 - increase funding for Spanish speaking police officers
 - restore resources such as overtime previously provided by Weed & Seed Program
2. Recalculate the staffing ratio formula with a sensitivity to the need for more "free patrol", community policing, individually initiated service calls and walk in service requests and less reliance on "911" generated calls for service.
3. Improve lighting in Long Branch using the results of the recent commercial area lighting audit.
4. Make Long Branch a model "walkable" community by investing in improved pedestrian linkages and using the strategies outlined in the recently announced Pedestrian Safety Initiative and the Long Branch Safety Plan. We urge the County to implement these specific improvements identified by the Long Branch Task Force, such as
 - Traffic signals, signage and lane design to help reduce speed and traffic control
 - Speed and red light cameras to encourage compliance with traffic laws.
 - New and alternative bike paths
 - Improved crosswalk striping and "count down" cross walk signalization
 - Maintenance of sidewalks to provide safe handicapped accessible pedestrian passage



Recommendations

Youth, Schools, Enrichment & Childcare; Environmental and Overarching

Youth Schools, Enrichment and Childcare

1. Support the on-going work of the County Executive's Community Based Collaboration for Positive Youth Development Initiative in Long Branch.
2. Increase staffing and funding for the Long Branch Community Center to fund after-school programs such as homework clubs.
3. Increase staffing at the Long Branch Library sufficient to provide Sunday hours throughout the school year; it is a documented fact that many children, especially in the smaller or more crowded apartments, have no place else to study.
4. Aggressively pursue opportunities to purchase/enhance recreational facilities and athletic fields such as the Wayne Avenue Park and Takoma Academy.
5. Support additional parent education initiatives including adult English as a Second Language (ESL), parent effectiveness training, American customs and culture and citizenship classes.
6. Encourage the private and non-profit community to provide an accessible, affordable network of child care choices in Long Branch with more non-traditional hours of operation that match the varied work schedules in the community.

Environmental

1. Maintain funding support for the annual \$60,000 appropriation for the maintenance of the Long Branch commercial area including trash and litter pick-up.
2. Develop partnerships between the Parks Department and schools in the Long Branch area through outreach and public education. Engage children in caring for the parks including stream valleys; stress the environmental and recreational benefit of parks; stewardship; and monitoring park conditions.

Overarching

1. Provide funding for a Long Branch community report card. Modest resources from the County and other partners would make it possible to produce a baseline report on important trends in the Long Branch quality of life indicators, such as crime, health, economy, civic engagement, environment, education, housing, etc. This should be completed in conjunction with Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission's County-wide indicators effort.
2. Maintain funding support for staff to plan, design and monitor the revitalization effort in Long Branch including support to the Long Branch Business League, implementation of the recommendations of the Long Branch Advisory Committee and coordination with the community concerning redevelopment efforts.



Attachments

Long Branch Public Safety Plan

The Long Branch Safety Plan was developed in partnership with the Long Branch Advisory Committee and Department of Housing & Community Affairs (DHCA). The Plan is meant to encourage new private sector investment in the core by creating conditions that attract shoppers and residents who will make purchases at local businesses. Residents and businesses need to feel the local environment is safe and inviting, before they will participate and invest fully in their neighborhood. The plan makes several recommendations in six areas.

- A safe atmosphere, including Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CEPTED)
- Positive Policing
- Physical Improvements
- Pedestrian Safety
- Comprehensive Communications Campaign
- Maintenance

Long Branch Advisory Committee Outreach PowerPoint

The Long Branch Advisory Committee decided to reach out to other community members and hear their thoughts on redevelopment of the Long Branch commercial core. Committee members sought input on desired amenities, retail, parking and housing. Several meetings were held in the spring and fall of 2007. A copy of the presentation used to facilitate the discussion is attached.

ULI Technical Assistance Panel Report

The Urban Land Institute (ULI) Washington was invited to conduct a Technical Assistance Panel (TAP) in February 2005. The objective was to provide expert, multidisciplinary advice on land use and real estate issue. The TAP was focused on the large commercial area bounded by Piney Branch Road, Arliss Street and Flower Avenue in Long Branch. The experts reviewed background information prior to the event. The panel made several recommendations that build upon the Long Branch Community and respond to concerns expressed to the panel. Their recommendations are contained in the attached report.



For more information contact
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www.montgomerycountymd.gov

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