

# Takoma/Langley Crossroads

sector plan



## Appendix 1 Background

This planning effort was formally initiated in January 2008 as a joint master plan between Montgomery County and Prince George's County with the participation of the City of Takoma Park. The major goals of this effort were to provide for transit-oriented development (TOD) around planned transit facilities, enhance the community character and improve the quality of life in the Takoma/Langley Crossroads. The collective vision was to use the proposed transit center on the north side of MD 193 and the proposed Purple Line as catalysts to develop a transit-oriented, pedestrian-friendly community that will meet the needs of the existing and future residents.

This project was a complicated effort from the start, given the policies and procedures in the three jurisdictions. Budget constraints in Montgomery County and resulting schedule changes caused a separation of the Montgomery County and Prince George's County plans in November 2008. However, each County remained committed to the creation of plans with shared elements (i.e. Transportation, Land Use and Density).

### Community Outreach

As part of the Bi-County project team's preplanning activities, community outreach for the Takoma/Langley Crossroads (TLC) Sector Plan actually began in July 2007 with the initiation of stakeholder meetings. A pedestrian safety and mobility study funded by COG was also prepared. Various traditional and non-traditional mechanisms were utilized to publicize the upcoming sector plan effort including the creation of a Community Leadership Team (CLT) to assist in outreach and educate area residents about the TLC sector planning effort. This non-traditional approach was designed to reach out to all elements of the community, including those who have not actively participated in the past and prepare them for community leader roles and commit them to acting as liaisons for the TLC Sector Plan. The CLT was designed to bridge the gap between the planning team and the community-at-large. Charged with soliciting input from community members and identifying issues of importance for the staff and consultants, the CLT members were responsible for leading their own community outreach program with the bi-County staff serving as a resource.

Traditional community outreach methods such as flyers, posters, websites, door to door recruiting, open houses, worksessions, and outdoor meetings proved more successful. The Bi-County Team held a total of four open house meetings, three outdoor meetings and two worksessions, all of which took place within the Takoma/Langley Crossroads Sector Plan area. These meetings were more successful as they allowed opportunities to address the issues and concerns of area stakeholders. Due to the diverse nature of this community, translation services and bilingual documents were provided at all public meetings. This will continue as a part of the outreach process.

The TLC Sector Plan seeks to address the following quality of life, connectivity, diversity, design, and environment issues that were identified by the community as well as the more specific issues identified in the January 2008 Outreach Strategy Report for the TLC Sector Plan:

- preservation of existing affordable housing
- desire for a safe and secure community
- pedestrian fatalities caused by heavily traveled roads with inadequate pedestrian networks and inadequate trails and bikeways
- inadequate community services, recreational facilities and gathering places
- insufficient open space and poor green networks
- concerns about the community's continuing affordability (commercial and residential) as a result of the development of the proposed Purple Line and Transit Center
- lack of community awareness, identity, and sense of place
- impact of the proposed Transit Center and Purple Line along University Boulevard
- poor image of commercial areas along University Boulevard and New Hampshire Avenue.

## **Community History**

The area known as Takoma/Langley Crossroads is located along the border of Montgomery and Prince George's Counties. A group of community business leaders gave Takoma/Langley Crossroads its name during the 1980s. The name refers not only to geographic characteristics of the intersection between two corridors, University Boulevard and New Hampshire Avenue, but also was an attempt to bring together the communities of Langley Park in Prince George's County and Takoma Park in Montgomery County. This was especially significant because until 1997, the City of Takoma Park straddled the two counties.

The Takoma/Langley Crossroads area has developed into a densely populated place with a mixture of single-family residences, multifamily units, offices, and retail spaces. The community's demographics have changed dramatically over time. Moreover, for a period of almost thirty years, the region has served as a destination for immigrants from Central America, South America, the Caribbean, Asia, and Africa. Given the community's diverse racial and ethnic makeup and the eclectic collection of businesses, which cater to the neighborhood's multicultural residents, Takoma/Langley Crossroads has become known as the heart of Maryland's International Corridor.

## **Takoma Park: Community Development**

Benjamin Franklin Gilbert purchased the approximately 10 acres that become known as Takoma Park in 1883. Those 10 acres contained land in Washington, D.C. and Maryland including both Montgomery and Prince George's Counties. He developed the wooded and hilly land to offer Washington residents a respite from the urban environment. With proximity to the railroad and several major roadways, Takoma Park was an attractive locale for individuals who wanted to live outside the metropolitan area but commute into the city for work. Also, at a time when many urban residents had environmental concerns related to city living, Gilbert promoted Takoma Park's healthful characteristics by advertising its fresh water springs and clean air.

During the next half century, the land developed steadily along the borders of the Montgomery County and Washington, D.C. with primarily single-family houses. The residents who occupied these homes were white professionals and their families. There was also a small enclave of African-American residents who were located somewhat separately from the rest of the community near Colby and Cherry Avenues. After WWII, the community experienced rapid growth, with the construction of single-family homes filling in the remaining vacant areas of Takoma Park and also the development of new multifamily apartment buildings near the University Boulevard. Some older homes were subdivided to serve as housing for the new population.

African-American students received their education in a two-room schoolhouse called the Colored Takoma Park Elementary School on Geneva Avenue. In 1955, following the Supreme Court's *Brown v. the Board of Education* ruling, Takoma Park integrated its elementary schools. Further desegregation in the following decades increased the community's African-American population and opened the way for other racial and ethnic groups to migrate into the area. Presently, Takoma Park is home to a mixture of residents from various backgrounds.

For over one hundred years, Takoma Park was a city split between the jurisdictions of Montgomery County and Prince George's County. As the population grew, this division complicated governing and policing. Takoma Park citizens refused to allow these jurisdictional obstacles to overtake their community. The residents, working alongside neighboring communities, successfully fought against a plan to raze the area to accommodate a new highway. Their victory created the strong spirit of activism that still exists in Takoma Park today. In 1995, residents voted in a city-wide referendum in favor of unification. The Maryland legislature granted the Takoma Park petition for unification, which became official in 1997. The city is now a destination for individuals who are attracted to the cultural and political diversity of its government and citizens.

### **Past and Future Challenges in the Takoma/Langley Crossroads Area**

The Takoma/Langley Crossroads area suffered through a period of decline in the latter half of the 20th century when many urban centers and first-tier suburbs across the country struggled through economic and social depression. The community grappled with blighted residential and commercial areas, as well as with the crime related to the illegal drug trade in the 1980s. Residents in some apartment complexes were subjected to open air drug markets and other criminal activity. The longtime residents and the new immigrant communities were both victims of crime.

Some homeowners organized to address neighborhood concerns about rising crime. The elementary school implemented bus service for children who lived in walking distance to school, as a method to ensure their safety. The police department also increased their presence to target crime. Apartment complexes initiated safety measures to discourage drug activity such as installing new lighting, security doors, and ensuring general upkeep of their properties.

During the late 1990s, police in Prince George's County conducted multiple raids in various communities, including Takoma/Langley in an effort to shut down drug activity in the County. Through these combined efforts the community fought back against the criminal elements that threatened their neighborhood, however public safety remains a concern for some in Takoma/Langley Crossroads area.

Because of the Takoma/Langley Crossroads area's uniqueness as a multi-ethnic enclave, a major commercial center, and crucial transportation corridor, both Prince George's and Montgomery Counties have been challenged in best serving the needs of the community's established and new residents. Each group has its own set of concerns including the need for social services, congestion, housing, and public safety that affect the entire Takoma/Langley Crossroads community. The County governments, community organizations, and residents are working together to address these issues and improve up the community's existing assets.