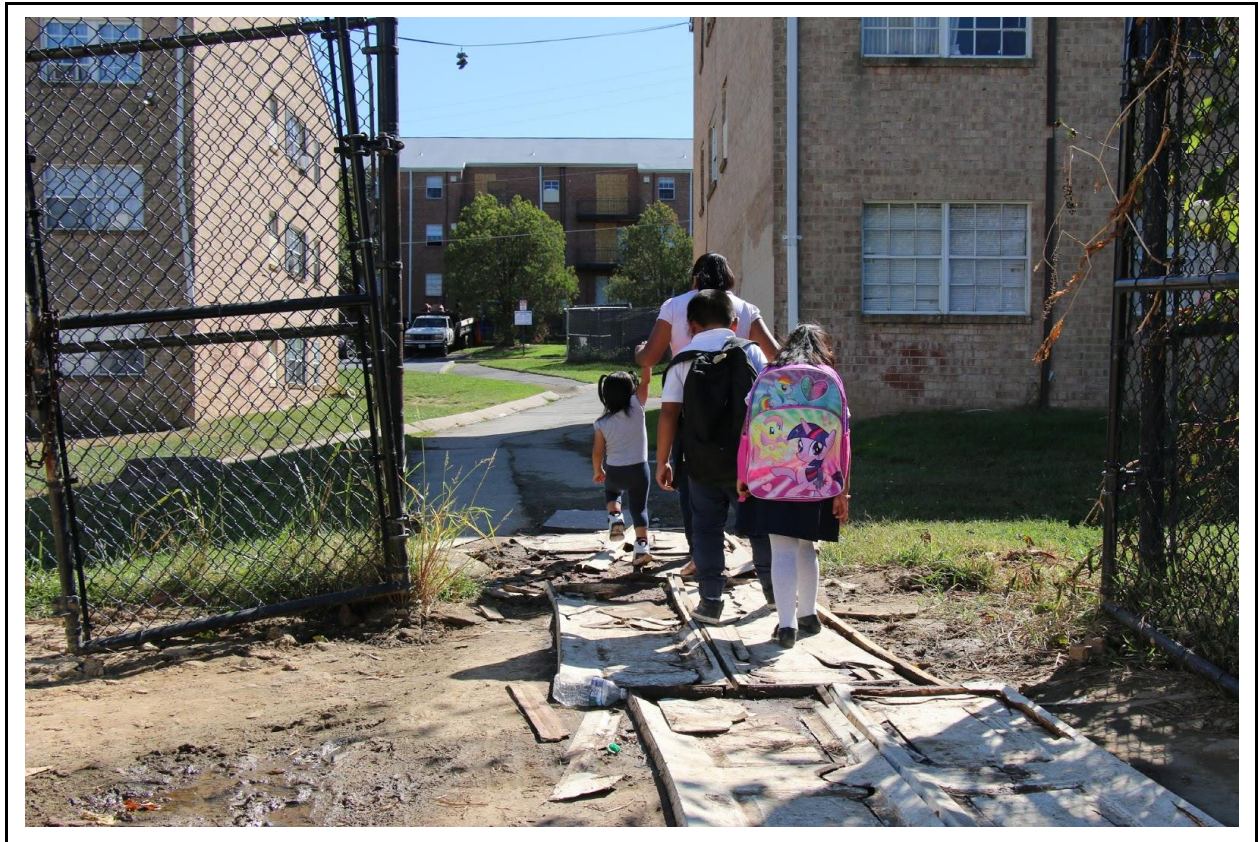


HOUSING MATTERS:

Ensuring Quality, Safe, and Healthy Housing in Langley Park, Maryland



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Executive Summary

In 2016, CASA, an immigration services and advocacy organization based in Langley Park, Maryland, launched the Langley Park Housing Matters Campaign (HMC). The project aimed to advance healthy housing and improving environmental conditions in the neighborhood by establishing a broad multi-stakeholder coalition, educating and engaging residents on how to avoid home health hazards, and developing policy recommendations. This report details the outcomes of HMC's efforts, and recommendations for policy and practices at the state, county, and community level that can continue to advance the goals of the coalition. These recommendations draw upon an analysis of the decline of inner-ring suburban housing conditions across the U.S., existing housing quality and safety policies and practices in Prince George's County, housing conditions and challenges in Langley Park, best practices in the U.S. and the region, and resources available at the regional, state, and federal levels.

Located just outside the border of Washington, DC, Langley Park has experienced housing conditions that are typical of inner-ring suburbs across the United States. Many inner-ring suburbs have aging infrastructure and housing that have not seen investment in decades. Poor housing conditions contribute to poor community health, including a variety of respiratory, neurological, psychological, and behavioral disorders. Low-income minority and immigrant families are not only more likely to live in declining inner-ring suburbs, but also lack the resources to address these housing conditions.

Langley Park is a predominantly Latino immigrant neighborhood with a large concentration of undocumented residents and low-income households. About three-fourths of residents live in one of the neighborhood's many garden-style apartments that are an average of more than 60 years old. The neighborhood suffers from multiple housing issues, such as a lack of affordable housing, overcrowding, poor maintenance and upkeep, and multiple environmental health hazards. The most common health hazards are related to potential exposure to mold and lead paint. Two of the neighborhood's 13 apartment complexes are on the county's distressed properties list. Historically, Prince George's County has struggled to use their housing code to effectively improve housing conditions in Langley Park. The county not only has a large number of older, multifamily rental housing, but also a limited staff, resources, and leverage to enforce the housing code.

HMC meetings and other efforts to engage residents, county code enforcement officers, and property managers highlighted the challenges that often contribute to poor housing maintenance and safety issues in Langley Park. These include communication issues and a lack of trust among stakeholders, residents' fear of landlord retaliation, a lack of knowledge and resources for tenant organizing, and a lack of resources for county code enforcement. HMC's efforts helped to provide a productive space for

communicating about these issues, educating and empowering residents, and pushing several new county regulations aimed at improving housing conditions. But more can and must be done to ensure that Langley Park residents do not continue to suffer unsafe and unhealthy living conditions. Other communities across the country and region provide examples, and the county has many existing resources at hand to chart a positive path forward.

Our recommendations emphasize four key areas where action needs to be undertaken by local and state governments and agencies as well as private and nonprofit organizations and developers. These strategies include:

1. Strengthening tenant advocacy and empowerment

We recommend the establishment of an Office of the Tenant Advocate to support the rights of tenants in Prince George’s County as well as a Tenant Right to Organize Act to support and encourage tenant organizing and tenant associations.

2. Ensuring adequate property maintenance and upkeep

We recommend requiring training and certification for all property managers in Prince George’s County as well as providing continual education to tenants on how to maintain a healthy home. We also recommend that the county and nonprofit organizations leverage the development of the Purple Line to improve housing quality in Langley Park.

3. Improving code compliance and enforcement

We recommend increasing county code enforcement staff and resources, including upgrading their technology and database systems, which would allow them to conduct annual inspections of all rental-housing complexes in the county. We also recommend policies aimed at increasing penalties and providing incentives for landlords to comply with the housing code.

4. Encouraging landlord and tenant intervention

We recommend that the county establish a quasi-judicial commission or other body to mediate between landlords and tenants, and encourage the use of alternative dispute resolution to resolve such disputes outside of the court system.

These recommendations stress the need for cross-sector collaboration and efforts that build stronger relationships between communities, government agencies and property owners. Over the past two years, HMC has built community and political will, and communication across sectors that often sit on different sides of the table. This report provides community, county, and state leaders the tools to build on that good will and collaborative spirit to improve not only homes, but also the health and well-being of residents in Langley Park now and into the future.

Acknowledgements

The HMC was supported by funding from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency’s Environmental Justice Collaborative Problem-Solving grant for projects to address community environmental and public health issues. This report and HMC’s work would not have been possible without the dedication of its members that, through many hard meetings, always kept the shared goals of coalition at the fore. The efforts of the National Center for Smart Growth Research and Education (NCSG) and CASA to produce this report relied on assistance from staff and students to which we are indebted. A special thanks to Valerie Cary, Timothy Holden, Renee Palacios and the rest of the Enforcement Division staff at the Prince George’s County Department of Permitting, Inspections, and Enforcement, who not only participated in the HMC, but also generously donated their time to ensure access to data for this report. We are particularly inspired by and grateful to the relentless efforts of Langley Park residents who over the past two years continue to show up and voice their concerns and demand better quality homes.

About the Authors

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Introduction

Langley Park is an inner-ring suburban community and unincorporated area in northwest Prince George's County, Maryland. It borders Montgomery County and is just over a mile from the Washington, DC border. Beginning in the mid-1920s, the area began to be developed into a neighborhood characterized largely by low-rise apartments, and semi-detached and small, single-family homes. The area continued to grow during the 1940s and 50s due to wartime and immediate regional postwar population increases and subsequent housing demand. The neighborhood's affordable housing initially attracted young couples and families, who were largely white and Jewish. Increasing numbers of African Americans moved into the area during the 1970s after desegregation, precipitating white flight to the outer suburbs. Langley Park's African, Caribbean, and Hispanic populations grew for the next three decades, particularly among Central American immigrants. By 2016, the area's Hispanic population reached 82 percent. Immigration corresponded with increasing levels of poverty. Today, the neighborhood consists of an older housing stock that suffers from general aging, a lack of maintenance, and environmental health hazards that threatened the health and safety of its diverse residents.

In 2016, the Langley Park Housing Matters Campaign (HMC) was formed and led by CASA, a leading immigrant rights organization in the Mid-Atlantic region whose headquarters are located in Langley Park. The HMC seeks to reduce the risk of exposure to household environmental hazards that threaten the health of low-income families and the environment in Langley Park. Its strategies are three-fold:

1. **Build a New Coalition.** Establish a multi-stakeholder coalition dedicated to advancing healthy housing and improving environmental conditions;
2. **Educate & Empower Tenants.** Educate and engage residents on ways to avoid environmental health hazards and work with housing managers and Prince George's County to resolve complaints; and
3. **Develop Policy Recommendations.** Research and develop a list of policy recommendations for strengthening existing regulations and creating new ones to improve environmental conditions in Langley Park.

To improve housing quality in Langley Park, the coalition engaged multiple stakeholders including CASA, the National Center for Smart Growth Research and Education (NCSG), Prince George's County Department of Permitting, Inspection, and Enforcement (DPIE), Langley Park tenant associations and property managers, and elected officials, including State Delegate Carlo Sanchez and County Councilmember Deni Taveras. NCSG is a research center based at the University of Maryland that

focuses on smart growth issues locally, nationally and internationally, including housing and community development. DPIE oversees the regulation and approval of economic development, redevelopment, and preservation of residential, commercial and retail properties within Prince George's County, including the enforcement of the county's housing code.

This report provides a summary of HMC's educational, engagement and research activities from 2016-2018, findings and policy recommendations.

Our analysis relies primarily on data available from secondary sources, including county and state agencies, the U.S. Census, and previous reports on the neighborhood. We also collected primary data about existing housing conditions and inspection concerns during HMC meetings held over the two-year period and from focus groups with residents during a 2018 town hall meeting. Further information on the data and methods can be found in Appendix A.

We hope that this report will set the stage for discussions among county and state officials and agencies, community-based organizations, developers, and Langley Park property owners and residents as they work together to create a more sustainable, equitable, and inclusive future for the neighborhood.

Importantly, this report adds to the longstanding efforts of NCSG and CASA to protect and promote quality, affordable housing in Langley Park. It builds off of the 2017 report co-authored by NCSG and CASA, *Preparing for the Purple Line: Affordable Housing Strategies for Langley Park, Maryland*, which examines strategies to leverage the coming of a new light rail to protect and promote affordable housing that will not result in significant displacement of existing residents.

The report consists of eight sections and is organized as follows. The first section discusses the decline of housing conditions in inner-ring suburbs. Section 2 describes Prince George's County's current policies and practices for promoting housing quality and safety. Section 3 presents Langley Park's demographic and housing characteristics. Section 4 describes the housing quality and safety conditions and challenges in Langley Park. Section 5 presents the outcomes of the Housing Matters Campaign. Section 6 discusses best practices in housing quality and safety from around the Washington, DC region and the United States. Section 7 provides local and state policies and resources that can be leveraged to improve housing health and quality in Langley Park. Section 8 offers policy recommendations for county and state agencies, property owners and managers, and tenants.

Decline and Reinvestment in Inner-Ring Suburban Housing

Similar to many inner-ring suburbs across the U.S. and in the Washington, DC metropolitan area, Langley Park has faced significant housing challenges in recent years. Inner-ring suburbs are communities located just outside central cities that were generally built out during the early to mid-twentieth century.¹ These suburbs tend to have older housing and aging infrastructure that are experiencing signs of distress. Many have lost population to outer-ring suburbs with newer homes and other amenities that have depressed their home values and increased poverty levels.² In the years following the Great Recession (2007-2009), the number of extremely poor suburban neighborhoods rose by 45 percent as concentrated poverty spread beyond the urban core. Between 2000 and 2014, the number of suburban poor living in concentrated poverty had nearly tripled.³

As of 2000, 79 suburban neighborhood census tracts within the Washington, DC Metropolitan Area were “in crisis.”⁴ These tracts experienced significant decline in housing and other infrastructure relative to other suburbs in the region and had a median income at least 25% below the suburban regional median income. These trends have only increased in recent years.

While faced with decline, inner-ring suburbs like Langley Park are limited in their ability to engage in revitalization. They exist within a “policy blind spot” that limits their eligibility for poverty and community development funding. State policies for revitalization tend to overlook inner-ring suburbs, in part because these areas often lack the capacity and “political visibility” to lobby the state.⁵ Compared to outer-ring suburbs, they pay higher tax rates for services, such as public safety and sanitation, but have less revenue-generating development and more service costs.⁶ Many inner-ring suburbs also face declining federal aid as programs, such as the Empowerment Zone and HOPE VI initiatives, tend to be tailored for central cities, and many suburban communities do not qualify because of certain population criteria.

Another obstacle to revitalization is government fragmentation. Beyond the District of Columbia, the Washington, DC metropolitan area has 157 local governments. Many suburbs are too small to generate the revenue necessary to combat decline, may suffer from inadequate state funding, and lack coordination. Political will and tools for revitalization often vary among jurisdictions; one community’s attempts at revitalization may be undermined by their neighbors’ unwillingness to match their efforts.⁷

Suburbs that have been successful in spurring revitalization have often done so by forming coalitions of local governments. In Ohio, the Cleveland First Suburbs Consortium (FSC) formed in 1996 to address the concerns of inner-ring suburbs that had been experiencing significant population and job loss for decades.

FSC responded by providing below-market financing for repairs to older homes, a loan program to promote the preservation of historic homes, and a low-interest loan program to help landlords renovate their apartment buildings. Cleveland suburbs also formed coalitions to lobby for state policies to maintain existing infrastructure and target funds to distressed areas.⁸

Some states have also spurred suburban revitalization through legislation. Maryland's iconic growth management legislation, known as Smart Growth, limits sprawl and encourages revitalization in existing communities. Introduced in 1997, it establishes priority-funding areas, areas of growth within already existing communities, for which the state targets spending for public infrastructure and housing. Although these programs have been nationally lauded, they are incentive-based and with no state authority to enforce their adoption by local governments.⁹

While such regional and statewide efforts are critical to combatting suburban decline, the most readily available tool for most local governments is enforcement of their housing code. Code enforcement strategies vary widely among jurisdictions. In some cases, code enforcement is used to compel landlords to improve housing conditions and make repairs. In the process, however, tenants can be temporarily displaced and property improvements can trigger rent increases that permanently displace residents. Local governments can also use code enforcement to condemn and redevelop housing, resulting in the displacement of existing residents. As a result, tenants can be hesitant to engage with code enforcement when there is a violation.¹⁰

Clearly, the proliferation of housing decline in many inner-ring suburbs due to older housing, aging infrastructure, increased poverty, and lack of funding to support revitalization efforts has created several challenges at the local-level. A closer examination of these factors in Prince George's County highlights the struggles it has faced with maintaining healthy, safe housing conditions.

Preserving and Promoting Safe & Healthy Housing in Prince George's County

Prince George's County is the second largest county in Maryland, with 897,693 residents. It is also the most diverse county in the state. African Americans make up 63 percent of the population, and the county is considered one of the wealthiest majority-African American counties in the nation. Foreign-born residents make up 21 percent of the population, and account for about 24 percent of the population growth between 2000 and 2010. The fastest growing racial or ethnic group is Hispanics, whose population increased by 126 percent between 2000 and 2010. The majority of Hispanics live in inner-ring suburbs inside the Capital Beltway, such as Langley Park, East Riverdale, Riverdale Park, Edmonston, and Brentwood.

The area with the highest population densities and poverty levels are also largely located inside the Beltway. Langley Park, East Riverdale, Bladensburg, Greater Landover, Seat Pleasant, and Suitland/Silver Hill all have large concentrations of low- to moderate-income households.¹¹ These inner-ring suburbs also have poverty rates that are significantly higher than the county.

Over the past several decades, Prince George's County has struggled with an aging inner-ring housing stock, increasing poverty, and lack of reinvestment, particularly compared to nearby counties such as Montgomery County and Fairfax County.¹² The county suffered disproportionately during the Recession, with the highest foreclosure rates in the region and its economy has not recovered at the rate of its neighboring counties.¹³ In 2012, it had 4,265 foreclosures, a quarter of all those in the state.¹⁴ Langley Park and other inner-ring suburbs were hardest hit. Compared to its neighbors, the county also has a relatively dense and aging housing stock. In 2016, there were roughly 99,000 multifamily housing units in Prince George's County, which comprised 30 percent of the county's total housing stock. Nearly a quarter of its housing was built in 1959 or earlier. Older, multifamily housing tends to be located in the inner-ring, such as Langley Park where over half (54 percent) of the housing units are 55 years and older.¹⁵ The primary tool that the county uses to ensure the quality of its housing stock is its housing code.

Housing Quality & Property Maintenance Standards

Prince George's County establishes housing quality standards through its housing code. The Prince George's County Housing Code standards are largely taken from the International Property Maintenance Code.¹⁶ The provisions apply to all residential structures in the county and constitute the minimum standards for premises, structures, equipment, and facilities for issues such as lighting, ventilation,

heating, sanitation, life safety, and fire. Enforcement and administration is the responsibility of the Prince George's County Department of Permitting, Inspections, and Enforcement (DPIE).

The housing code applies to any building with one or more rental dwelling units. Its provisions state that the responsibility for maintaining a clean, safe, and habitable rental is shared by both the landlord and tenant. The landlord must provide a home that is clean, safe, and habitable, make necessary and agreed-upon repairs, and tenants must ensure that units are kept clean, safe, habitable, and free of trash and debris.^{17 18}

Landlord Tenant Code

In addition to the standards set by the housing code, the county further establishes the legal rights and responsibilities of landlords and tenants through the Landlord Tenant Code. It sets out the responsibilities of the landlord and tenant in the maintenance of the property, and stipulates required content for rental leases. It also invokes the “non-retaliation” provision of the Maryland Code, which prohibits landlords from terminating the lease, arbitrarily increasing rent, failing to provide services, or filing suit against a tenant as retaliation if the tenant has filed a complaint to the landlord or county, filed a lawsuit against the landlord, or participated in a tenants’ organization.¹⁹

Prince George’s County is also subject to state tenant protection laws, among which include: 1) The right of a tenant to pay rent into an escrow account established by the local district court upon a landlord’s refusal to redress housing code violations; and 2) A landlord must give the tenant one month’s notice and stated reason for eviction. Both parties then must undergo a district court proceeding to receive an eviction judgment.²⁰

Code Compliance & Enforcement

In order to ensure that the requirements of the housing code are met, Code Enforcement Inspectors within DPIE visit and inspect single- and multi-family housing throughout the year. DPIE conducts inspections of housing for several reasons: 1) when a property is up for license renewal; 2) if a property is on the county’s distressed properties list; and 3) if a complaint has been reported. Inspections are most commonly the result of complaints.

DPIE’s primary mechanism for enforcing the housing code is the regulation of rental licenses. A rental license is required to operate a multifamily rental property of three or more units. DPIE issues rental licenses only after finding that all requirements of the housing code have been met. The license fee is \$75 per unit and lasts two years. Three months prior to the expiration of a rental license, DPIE must conduct

an inspection for the property to qualify for a renewal. During these inspections, at least 10 percent of the property's units receive an interior inspection and at least 50 percent of the property's buildings must receive an extensive exterior inspection. If the county has received multiple complaints about a property, they will conduct a full inspection for license renewal. A full inspection may include 100 percent of the apartments, or a smaller number depending on the property's condition and history. However, regardless of the percentage of apartment units inspected, all common areas, storage rooms, boiler rooms, hallways, stairways, and the exterior of all buildings are inspected. During this inspection, any "life safety" violations must be corrected immediately. For all other violations, the landlord is given 30 days to bring the property into compliance. If correcting a violation requires an outside contractor, the county requires a signed contract with an estimated time frame for completion. Inspectors will then visit the property every 30 days until the contract is completed. If the violations are not corrected in the allotted time period, the rental license is suspended until the repairs are completed. Upon suspension, the landlord is given 15 more days to complete the repairs. If they are still not completed, the rental license is revoked. The landlord may be issued fines up to \$1,000 per month for operating a rental property without a license. The landlord must then pay the fee to re-apply for a license, or DPIE can revoke the license for failure to address the violations.

DPIE also conducts regular inspections of the county's "distressed properties." A property is placed on the distressed property list when it displays at least one of the following conditions: improper management, inadequate maintenance, failure to comply in a timely manner with violation notices, failure or refusal to meet minimum code standards, failure to satisfy tenant requests for repairs, or any such cause that provides an unsafe and/or unhealthy living environment. Distressed properties undergo a full inspection every 60 days. As of August 2018, there were six properties on the county's list. These include Bedford Station Apartments and Victoria Station Apartments in Langley Park, Marlow Plaza Apartments and Colebrook Manor Townhomes in Temple Hills, Forest Village Apartments in Suitland, and Walker Mill Apartments in District Heights. Four of these properties have been on the distressed list since 2012; one has been on the list since 2013, and one has been on the list since 2014. Two out of the six are located in Langley Park.

DPIE also encourages residents to identify properties in need of maintenance or those that are abandoned by reporting them to county's 311 call center or citizen web portal. Complaints that come in through the 311 reporting system involving housing code violations are disseminated to DPIE's Enforcement Division. Once a complaint is received, a code enforcement inspector will contact the individual who filed the complaint to schedule an inspection of their unit. Upon inspection, a violation notice will be issued to

the landlord for any observed violations. Landlords are given a time limit to bring the unit into compliance, and inspectors follow up to ensure the violations have been corrected.

In addition to their regular inspection processes, DPIE is also involved in the county's Transforming Neighborhoods Initiative (TNI), an effort started in 2012 that targets struggling neighborhoods to receive additional cross-departmental resources.²¹ It aims to improve the health of neighborhoods by focusing on public safety, economic development, education, health and human services, and blight. In bi-monthly inspection tours of targeted TNI areas, DPIE assesses the condition of homes, identifies properties not in compliance with county codes, and determines candidates for cleanup, fix-up, board-up or demolition. Langley Park is a county-designated TNI area.

Langley Park's Demographic and Housing Characteristics

Langley Park is a vibrant, largely immigrant community with a mix of small businesses and dense, multifamily housing. Its Census Designated Place (CDP) boundary sits in Prince George's County. However, by some definitions that community extends into adjacent neighborhoods in Montgomery County, which contain similar demographics and spatial characteristics.ⁱ It is one of the most densely populated areas in Maryland.

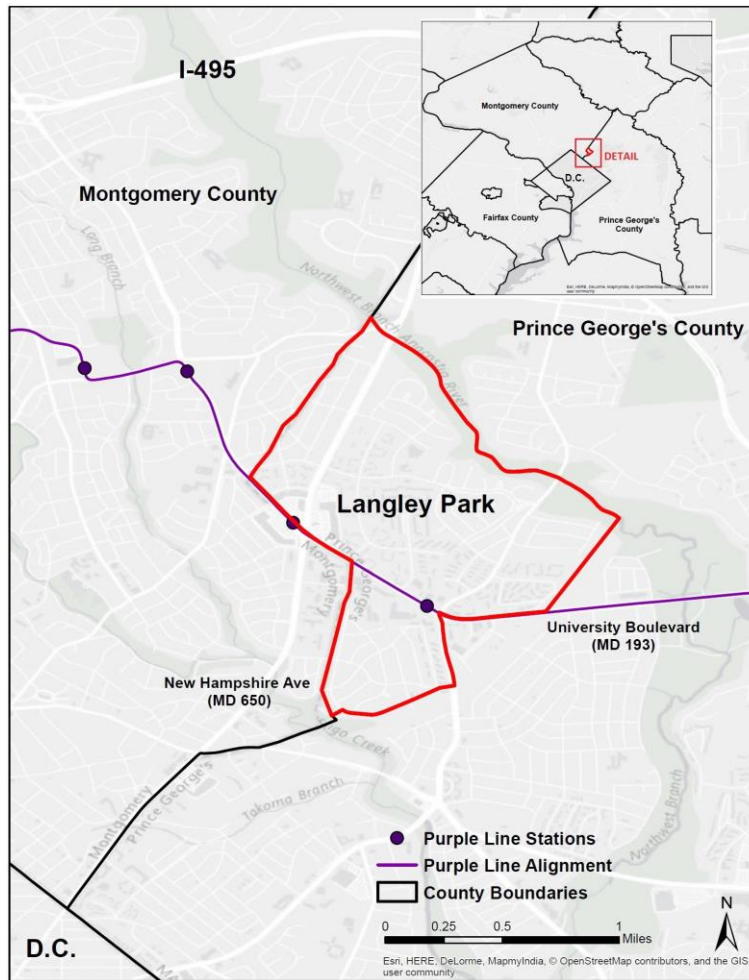


Figure 1. Map of Langley Park
Source: Nicholas Finio, NCSG

The neighborhood has been a popular destination for immigrants from Central America, South America, the Caribbean, Asia, and Africa for over thirty years. It is the heart of the Latino community in the Washington, DC metropolitan region. The majority of Langley Park's foreign-born population comes from South and Central America. Approximately 82 percent of its 19,517 residents are Hispanic (Table 1).ⁱⁱ Roughly half immigrated from Guatemala or El Salvador. Another five percent are of Mexican descent.²² Among non-Hispanics, over half are African American. Prince George's County is home to an estimated 68,000 undocumented immigrants. According to the Migration Policy Institute, Langley Park has one of the largest concentrations of undocumented

ⁱ When referring to Langley Park, this report uses Langley Park CDP boundary that only includes portions of the neighborhood in Prince George's County.

ⁱⁱ Unless otherwise noted, all references to demographics refer to the U.S. Census Bureau's 2016 American Community Survey 5-year (2012–2016) estimates for the Langley Park CDP.

Latino immigrants in Prince George’s County.²³ The U.S. Census data only captures part of the story, as undercounts in Latino communities are common.²⁴

Compared to the county and the state, Langley Park’s population is disproportionately young and male. The median age of residents is 30.7 years with 56 percent of residents being between the ages of 15 and 44. Approximately 58 percent of the population is male, 10 percent more than the average for Prince George’s County and the state.

Many Langley Park residents have low levels of education and English language proficiency. Just over one-third of adults have a high school diploma or equivalent, compared to 86 percent of Prince George’s County adults and 90 percent of adults in Maryland. Less than half of the population over five years of age do not speak English “very well.”

	Langley Park CDP	Prince George's County	Maryland
Total population	19,517	897,693	5,959,902
% Male	58.2	48.1	48.4
% Age 15-44	56.2	43.0	39.9
% Hispanic	82.1	16.7	9.2
% Foreign born	64.3	21.3	17.2
% Population 5 years and over that speak English less than "very well"	60.9	10.6	6.5
% Population high school graduate or higher (18 years and over)	38.7	85.8	89.6
Unemployment rate	4.4	8.0	6.7
% Workforce population in construction (16 years and over)	39.1	8.2	6.7
Median household income	\$59,422	\$75,925	\$76,067

Table 1. Population Demographics for Langley Park, Prince George’s County, and Maryland

Source: US Census, 2016 ACS 5-Year Estimates

Surprisingly, given low levels of education and English proficiency, the neighborhood has relatively low unemployment. In 2016, Langley Park’s unemployment rate was nearly half that of the county and the state. However, many of those who are employed work in low-wage, intermittent jobs, often as day laborers. Residents are primarily employed in construction, retail, healthcare and social assistance, accommodation and food services, and waste management.²⁵ The construction sector employs roughly 39

percent of the area's working population. Since the Recession, many of those employed in construction and related sectors have had a difficult time finding jobs, as those industries were particularly affected.²⁶ Many work multiple jobs to make a living wage.

Given the prevalence of low-wage employment, many Langley Park residents also have low incomes. The neighborhood's median household income of \$59,422 is nearly \$16,000 lower than that of the county or the state. Approximately 80 percent of families also provide financial support to relatives in their home country, which further stretches their modest budgets.²⁷ Much like with employment figures, census numbers likely inflate Langley Park's picture of economic well-being by failing to account for its large undocumented population.

Despite its many challenges, Langley Park maintains a strong sense of community. Although most residents are renters, they hold surprisingly long tenures, with more than half of residents having lived in their housing units for at least five years. Several community institutions, such as nonprofit organizations, schools, and churches, provide residents with social services and often have bilingual staff. Many local businesses provide immigrants with products from their home countries and otherwise cater to the community's needs. Social gathering spaces are important to any community, but particularly in Langley Park, where residents often rely on their neighbors for information and assistance.²⁸

Housing Characteristics

There are 5,198 housing units in Langley Park (Table 2). Compared to many other communities in Prince George's County, housing tends to be older and denser with a high proportion of multifamily rental units. Apartments make up approximately three-fourths of the neighborhood's housing stock, in a county in which single-family homes make up about 66 percent of the housing. Of the 1,433 single-family units in Langley Park, the majority are condominiums or single-family detached dwellings.²⁹ The 13 apartment complexes in Langley Park account for 71 percent of the neighborhood's housing units (Table 3). The majority of these complexes are owned by one of a few out-of-state companies or their subsidiaries.³⁰ With an average of 279 units spread across multiple low-rise garden-style buildings, these complexes are very dense. Most of the housing is more than 60 years old, with about 90 percent of housing constructed between 1940 and 1979, and a median year of construction of 1950 (Figure 2). Many apartment buildings have not been renovated in decades. From aging electrical equipment and plumbing to more insidious dangers of asbestos and lead, older homes often contain hazards that can put the health and well-being of residents at risk.

	Langley Park CDP	Prince George's County
Total Housing Units	5,198	330,708
% Vacant housing units	3.6	7.3
% Renter-occupied housing units	75.9	38.4
% Occupied housing units that are structures with 5+ apartments	65.3	29.0

Table 2. Langley Park Housing Characteristics

Source: U.S. Census, 2016 ACS 5-year Estimates

Complex	Property Address	Year Built	Total Units
Langley Garden Apartments	8106 New Hampshire Drive	1972	135
Quebec Arms	8321 14 th Avenue	1955	332
University Landing	1001 Merrimac Drive	1949	117
Campus Gardens	2214 Phelps Road	1959	446
Hampshire Village	1325 Merrimac Drive	1950	200
Langley Terrace	1400 Langley Way	1940	105
Liberty Place	1352 University Blvd East	1950	178
University Gardens	1801 Jasmine Terrace	1965	456
Victoria Crossing	8208 14 th Avenue	1950	135
Victoria Station	1401 Merrimac Drive	1950	101
Villas at Langley	8100 15 th Avenue	1964	590
Bedford Station	1400 University Blvd	1953	488
University City	2213 University Blvd	1950	400
TOTAL			3,683

Table 3. Langley Park Apartment Complexes

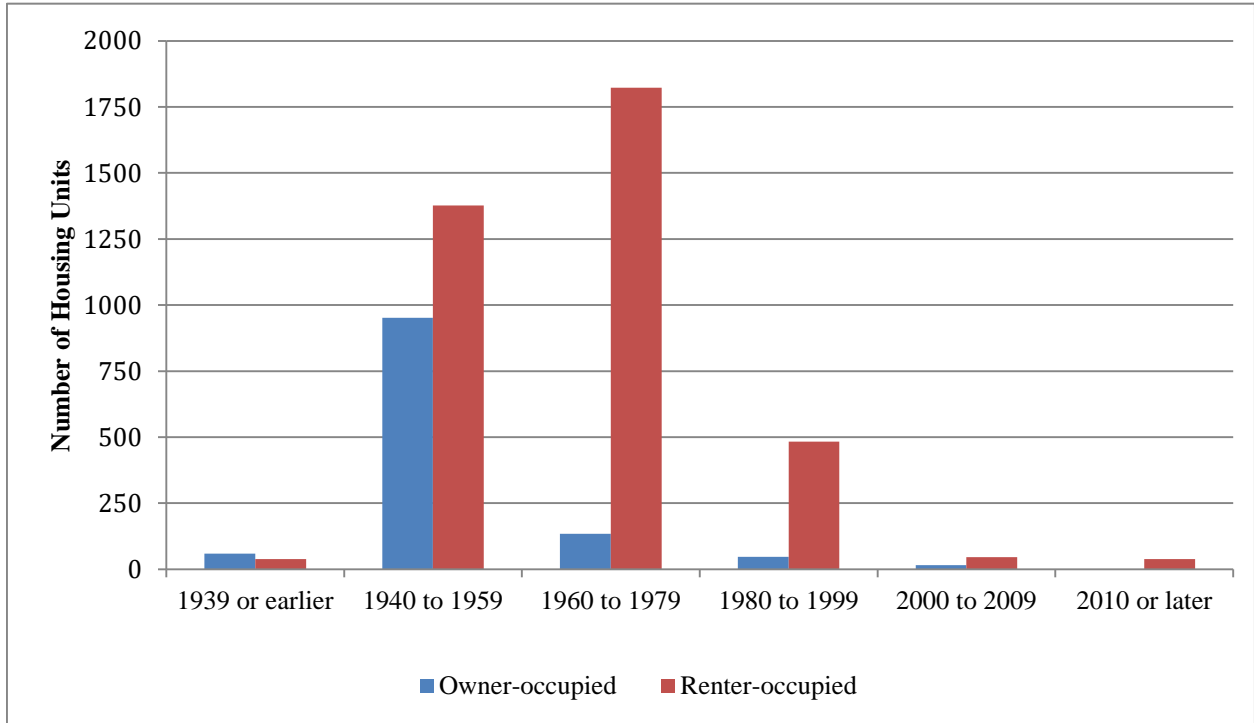


Figure 2. Year Housing Built in Langley Park
 Source: U.S. Census, 2016 ACS 5-year Estimates



Figure 3. University Gardens Apartments, one of 13 apartment complexes in Langley Park
 Source: CASA

Housing Costs and Affordability

The majority of housing in Langley Park is “market-rate affordable” housing that does not utilize government subsidies but is affordable to low-to-moderate income households in a region. These homes are often located in older neighborhoods that have few amenities and low housing demand. But while affordable to many in the region, few homes in Langley Park are affordable to its low-income residents. In March 2015, the median rents for one- and two-bedroom apartments were \$1,020 and \$1,210, respectively.³¹ Affordable housing is typically defined as households who spend less than 30% of their income on their rent or mortgage. Table 4 reveals that more than two-thirds of Langley Park households (79 percent) spend more than 30% of their income on rent and utilities. For the one in five Langley Park households whose incomes are less than 30% of the area’s median family income (AMI), there are no affordable units available in the neighborhood.ⁱⁱⁱ

	Langley Park CDP		
	Owner	Renter	Total
Total Households	1,410	3,865	5,275
Less than 30% (as % of household income on rent or mortgage)	13%	23%	20%
30% to 50%	21%	27%	25%
51% or more	66%	50%	54%

Table 4. Langley Park Housing Affordability by Housing Cost Burden

Source: HUD CHAS 2011-2015

ⁱⁱⁱ HUD measures neighborhood affordability by the number of units available in a given community to households that fall within particular thresholds of HUD’s Area Median Family Income (HAMFI). Ideally all households would spend less than 30% of their income on housing. However, all the rental housing units in Langley Park are affordable only to those households with incomes of at least 30 to 50 percent of the HAMFI. Nearly half are affordable only to households whose income is at least 50 to 80 percent of the HAMFI.

Langley Park’s Housing Health and Safety Conditions and Challenges

The age of properties and lack of maintenance often contribute to poor housing conditions in Langley Park. Issues of overcrowding and non-compliance with the housing code further heighten these conditions.

HUD Housing Problems

HUD collects Comprehensive Housing Affordability Strategy (CHAS) data from the American Community Survey (ACS) to determine the extent of four “housing problems” for low-income households.^{iv} These include:

- Housing unit lacking complete kitchen facilities
- Housing unit lacking complete plumbing facilities
- Households are overcrowded
- Households are cost-burdened

An overcrowded household refers to more than one person per room, and in severe instances, more than 1.5 persons per room. Cost-burden is the ratio of housing costs to household income. For renters, housing cost is gross rent (contract rent plus utilities). For owners, housing cost is “select monthly owner costs,” which include mortgage payment, utilities, association fees, insurance, and real estate taxes. For a household that is cost-burdened, its housing cost is greater than 30 percent of its income. Severe cost-burden occurs when housing cost is greater than 50 percent of its income. Table 5 shows that more than half of Langley Park households (58 percent) had at least one of four housing problems, and 40 percent experienced at least one of four severe housing problems.

Langley Park CDP	Owner	Rental	Total
% Household has at least 1 of 4 Housing Problems	45%	62%	58%
% Household has at least 1 of 4 Severe Housing Problems	25%	46%	40%

Table 5. Langley Park HUD Housing Problems Overview

Source: HUD CHAS 2011-2015

^{iv} The primary purpose of the CHAS data is to demonstrate the number of households in need of housing assistance. The data used by local governments to plan spending of HUD funds, and is also used by HUD to distribute grant funds.

Overcrowding is a significant issue. About 26 percent of occupied housing units in Langley Park are overcrowded, which is five times more than in the county or state (Table 6). Almost half (49.2 percent) of the renter-occupied housing units contain households with 4 or more people; approximately double that of the county or state. In many cases, unrelated individuals share apartments in order to afford the rent. Nonfamily households reside in roughly 14 percent of the neighborhood’s renter-occupied housing. The average household size in Langley Park is also substantially higher than the state or county (3.9 compared to 2.8 and 2.7, respectively). Overcrowding can lead to housing maintenance issues and poor environmental conditions, such as increased wear-and-tear on appliances and hardware as well as increased risk of mold growth due to excess moisture and insufficient air circulation.

Occupants per Room	Langley Park CDP	Prince George’s County	Maryland
1.00 or less	75.5%	96.1%	97.9%
1.01 to 1.50	18.5%	2.9%	1.6%
1.51 or more	6.0 %	0.9%	0.6%

Table 6. Number of Occupants per Room for Occupied Housing Units

Source: U.S. Census, 2016 ACS 5-year Estimates



Figure 4. Abandoned couch outside an apartment complex

Source: CASA

Langley Park's Distressed Properties

Langley Park has two properties on the county's distressed properties list—Bedford Station and Victoria Station.^v Both properties are owned and managed by the same company. Built in 1953, Bedford Station is comprised of 488 one- and two-bedroom units spread out among several three-story buildings. The complex was placed on the distressed properties list in September 2012. An inspection in March 2014 found all code violations abated, however an inspection three years later found 21 new violations. The rental license for Bedford Station was renewed on January 2016, though the property remained on the distressed properties list.

Victoria Station was built in 1950 and has 101 one- and two-bedroom units. It was also placed on the distressed properties list in September 2012. An inspection in April 2014 found 58 code violations, however, an inspection in March 2017 showed that all the violations were abated. The rental license for Victoria Station was renewed on April 2015, though the property remained on the distressed properties list. The rental license for Victoria Station expired on April 10, 2017 and is presumed to have been renewed due to the property's abatement of all violations.

Housing Code Violations

As mentioned earlier, 71 percent of the housing units (3,683 out of 5,198) in Langley Park are located within 13 apartment complexes. Given that they comprise the bulk of multifamily housing in Langley Park, our analysis focused on housing code violations in these complexes. Our analysis focused on the inspection records and related housing code violations from 2014 to 2017 (see Appendix A for data and methodology).

Figure 5 shows the total number of inspections conducted at each apartment complex. During the four-year period, 907 multifamily housing inspections were conducted. More than half (54 percent) of these inspections were conducted at Bedford Station. Nearly a fifth (19 percent) were conducted at Victoria Station.

^v We were unable to obtain updated information regarding the status of these properties on the distressed list, including why they were initially placed on the list and continue to be on the list, and whether all outstanding violations were abated.

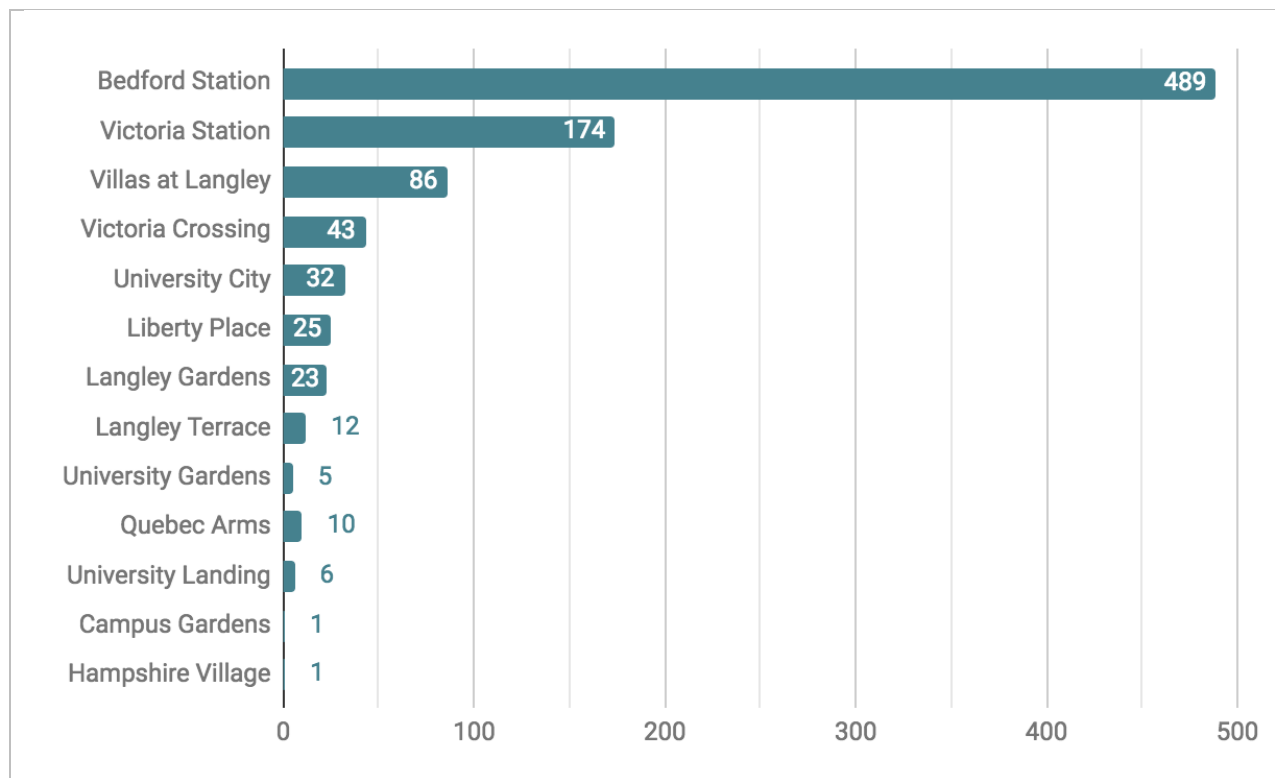


Figure 5. Total Number of Inspections by Apartment Complex in Langley Park, 2014-2017

Source: DPIE

There is also wide variation in the number of code violation across Langley Park properties (Figure 6). While there were a total of 3,023 violations during the period, more than half (52 percent) were issued at Bedford Station and roughly 20 percent were issued at Victoria Station. This indicates severe problems at the two complexes. However, disparities in the number of violations at each property are dependent on number of inspections conducted. There are likely higher numbers of violations for Bedford Station and Victoria Station because these properties are on the distressed properties list, and are therefore inspected more often. Nonetheless, the range in the number of violations across the complexes indicates highly uneven property maintenance and upkeep.

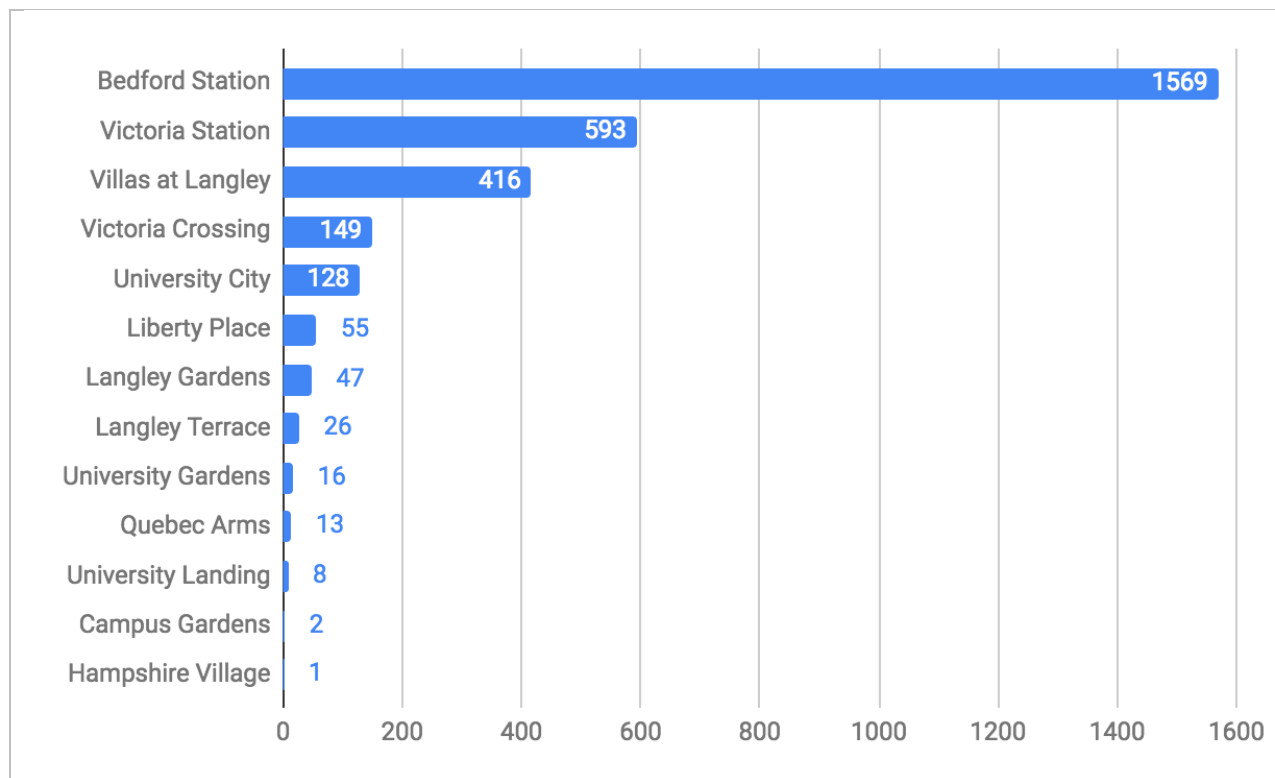


Figure 6. Number of Violations by Apartment Complex, 2014-2017

Source: DPIE

A closer examination of the number of yearly inspections shows that for certain years no inspections were conducted at some complexes (Table 7). This could be for several reasons. The most common reason may be that the complex was in between its two-year license renewal inspection; thus, a mandatory inspection was not required. Another reason may be that no complaints from residents were reported. However, for every inspection conducted at an apartment complex, there is at least one violation issued.

Among the complexes, Bedford Station had the highest number of inspections and violations every year during the 2014-2017 period. The apartment complex with the lowest number of inspections and violations varied each year. There is an average of 227 inspections and 756 violations per year. The largest number of inspections and violations occurred in 2014 (288 and 978, respectively) and the smallest number occurred in 2016, the same year a majority of the complexes did not receive an inspection. The period between 2014 and 2016 had a nearly 50 percent reduction in the number of inspection and violations, which seems to indicate that housing conditions improved.

Complex	2014		2015		2016		2017	
	Inspection s	Violations	Inspection s	Violations	Inspection s	Violations	Inspection s	Violations
Langley Gardens	0	0	15	27	0	0	8	20
Quebec Arms	6	6	3	5	0	0	1	2
University Landing	0	0	6	8	0	0	0	0
Campus Gardens	1	2	0	0	0	0	0	0
Hampshire Village	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	0
Langley Terrace	0	0	12	26	0	0	0	0
Liberty Place	10	16	1	2	14	37	0	0
University Gardens	1	3	3	12	0	0	1	1
Victoria Crossing	1	1	17	37	4	26	21	85
Victoria Station	81	282	58	219	19	54	16	38
Villas at Langley	29	179	26	114	21	61	10	62
Bedford Station	149	479	101	434	81	239	158	417
University City	10	10	6	27	13	83	3	8
TOTAL	288	978	249	912	152	500	218	633

Table 7. Number of Inspections and Violations by Year for Langley Park Apartment Complexes

Source: DPIE

Figure 7 shows the distribution of code violations by category. Code violations were placed into one of ten categories based on the type of violation.^{vi} The categories with the highest number of violations relate to maintenance issues, such as peeling paint and broken windows. The categories with lowest numbers of violations include those that pose serious health risks, such as unsanitary conditions and pests. Thus, even low levels of these violations should raise serious concern.

^{vi} See Appendix A for a detailed explanation of these categories.

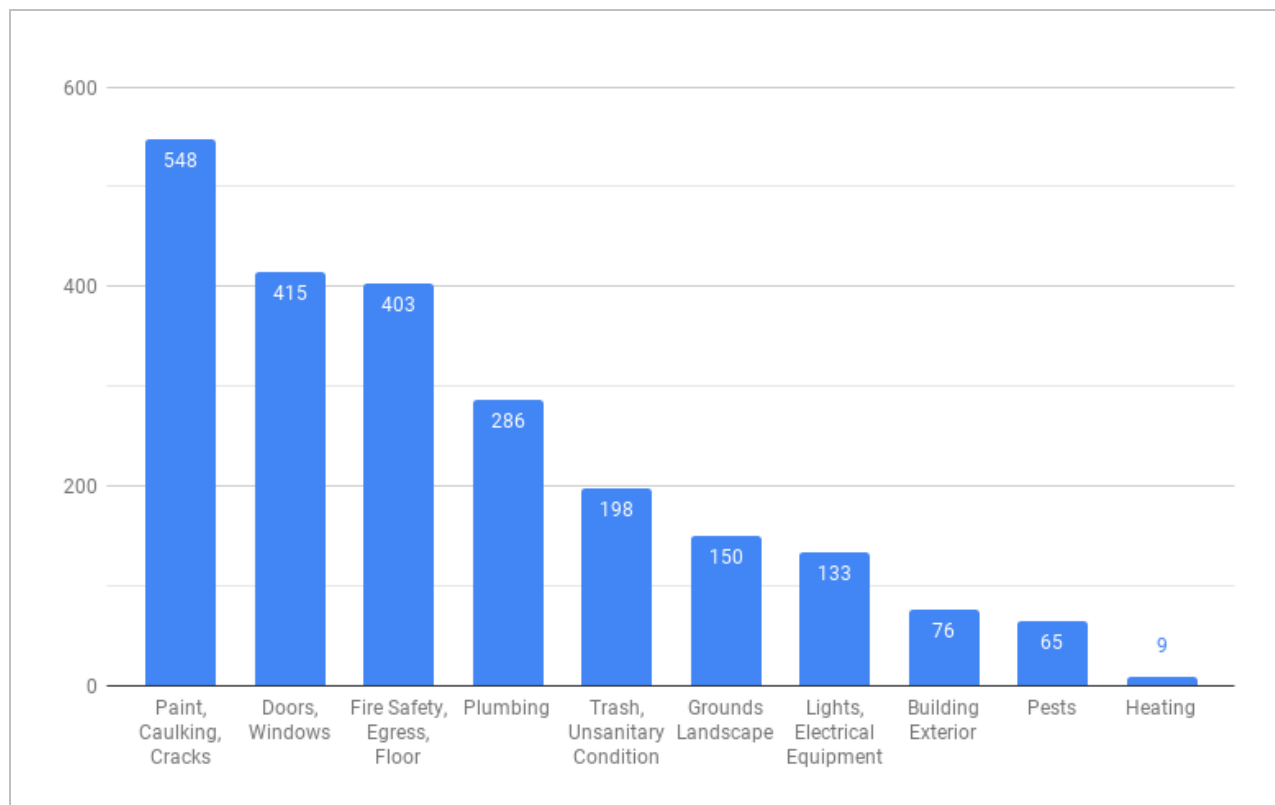


Figure 7. Number of Violations by Category for Langley Park Apartment Complexes, 2014-2017
Source: DPIE

About a quarter (26 percent) of violations are related to household environmental hazards (777 out of 3,023). The most common issues are linked to mold, lead paint, fire hazards, and pests.

Figure 8 shows the distribution of violations by type of household hazard. Roughly one third (34 percent) of violations are related to mold hazards, including leaking and/or obstructed drains and water leaks/stains on walls and ceilings. Other mold hazards involve the condition of a floor, such as a floor and/or surface covering that is in disrepair, unsanitary, or wet.

One third of violations related to lead paint hazards. Lead-based paint was used in many homes built prior to 1978. When disturbed through remodeling, daily wear and tear on doors, windows and other painted surfaces, or deteriorated by age, it creates dust that can cause serious health problems. In Langley Park, violations commonly related to lead paint hazards, include flaking and peeling paint/plaster on doors, walls, and ceilings.

One fifth of health-related violations related to fire hazards. Issues with electrical distribution, lighting equipment, or malfunctions with household appliances often cause electrical fires. In Langley Park, violations commonly related to issues with electrical outlets and fixtures that were in disrepair,

inoperative or missing emergency lighting fixtures. Other violations involved issues with fire safety, such as missing or inoperable smoke detectors, fire extinguishers, and 911 information.

Approximately 14 percent of violations related to pests. Rats, mice, cockroaches, dust mites, and bedbugs are a serious sanitation and health problem. In Langley Park, violations commonly related to pest infestations in dwelling units and/or common areas, and the accumulation of trash and litter on property exteriors and/or in a dwelling unit. Other violations involved issues with missing or damaged insect and rodent screens at doors and the building foundation.

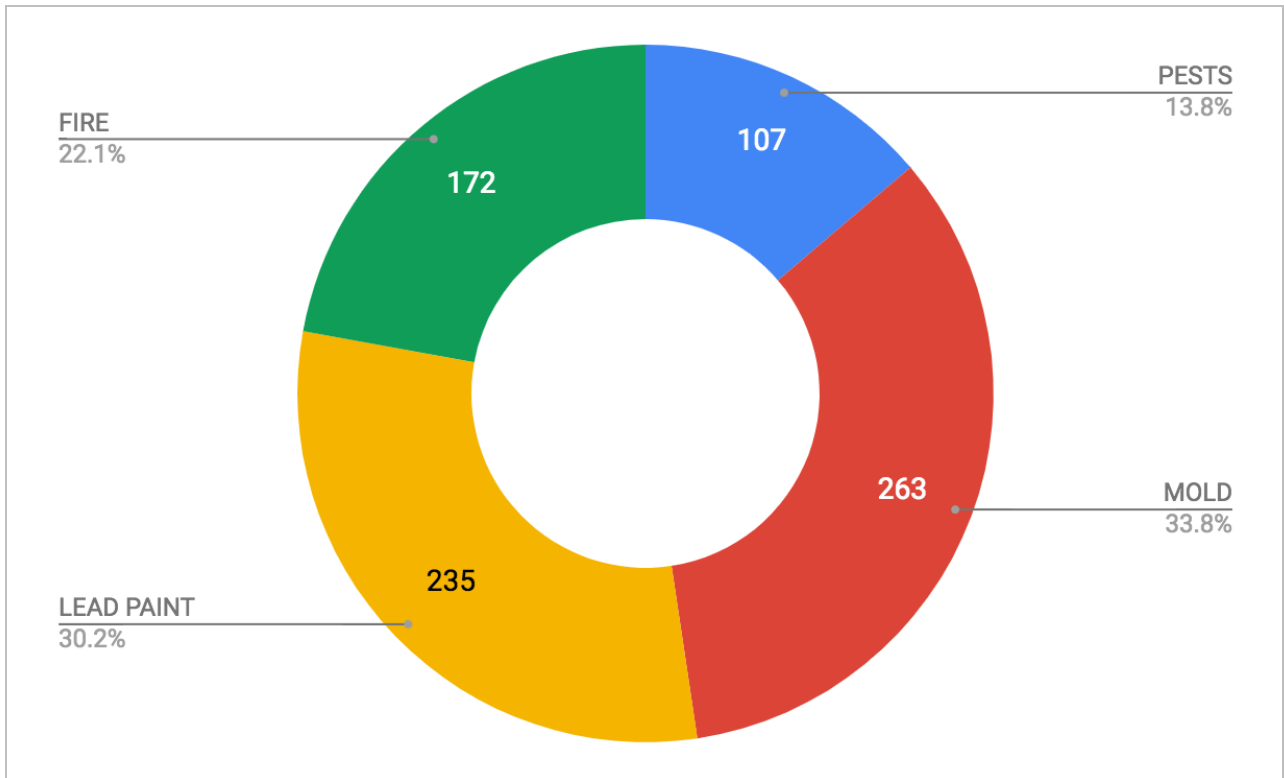


Figure 8. Violations Related to Household Health Hazards for Langley Park Apartment Complexes, 2014-2017
Source: DPIE



Figure 9. Garbage dumpsters located close to an apartment building (left); Trash on lawn outside an apartment complex (right).

Source: Brittany Wong, NCSG

In contrast to the data collected from the county on housing code violations in Langley Park, a CASA community organizer conducted a housing survey of residents at the Villas at Langley Park apartment complex in 2017. The organizer collected 107 surveys, or roughly 18 percent of the units. The survey asked residents to identify maintenance issues in their apartments across 14 categories, five of which related to household health hazards (Table A2). Overall, there were a total of 247 instances of health hazards that residents reported in their apartments (Figure 10). The majority of health-related issues were related to pest and mold hazards (43 percent and 38 percent, respectively). Lead paint and fire hazards made up 19 percent of reported instances. Rodent infestations were the most reported issue, with 74 percent of residents reporting this hazard (79 out of 107).

Comparing the CASA survey to the housing code violation data from the county is striking. In 2017, DPIE cited only 26 violations related to household hazards for the Villas at Langley Park complex, compared to the 247 instances found in the CASA survey (Figure 11). For DPIE, mold hazards had the highest number of violations (14 compared to 4). However, for CASA survey participants, pest hazards had the highest number of instances and mold hazards had the second highest number.

Importantly, CASA had a far higher rate of participation compared to DPIE inspectors. DPIE inspectors were only able to inspect 35 out of the 590 units at their April 2017 inspection of the Villas at Langley Park, meaning only 35 residents allowed DPIE to enter their apartment.³² This is 12 percent less than the number of residents who responded to CASA's survey that same year.

The results of the CASA survey underscore not only important gaps between county and resident-generated data, but also that that poor conditions that DPIE has noted may only represent a small slice of the extent of the housing health and safety issues the community faces.

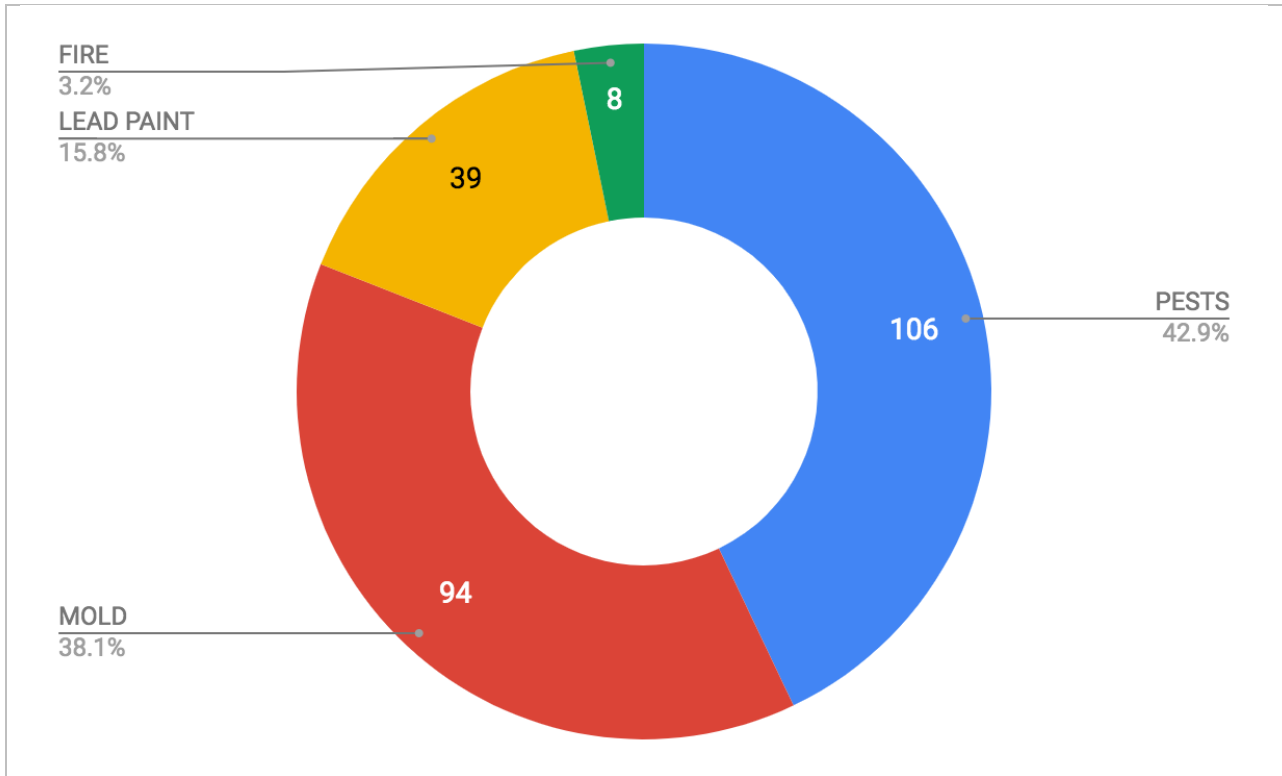


Figure 10. CASA Survey Results from Villas at Langley Park Residents Related to Household Health Hazards, 2017

Source: CASA

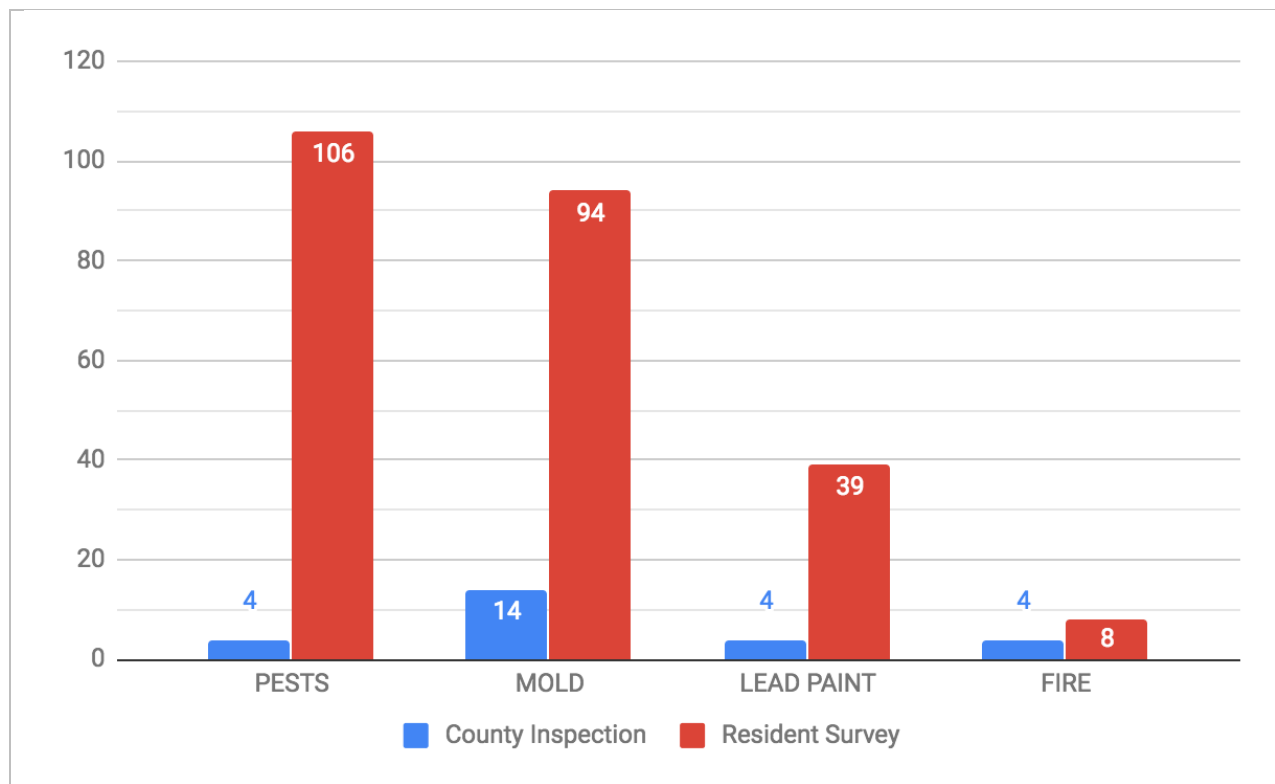


Figure 11. Household Health Hazards from County Inspections and CASA Survey from Villas at Langley Park, 2017

Source: DPIE and CASA

Challenges for Residents

There are several challenges for Langley Park residents in reporting maintenance issues and communicating with code enforcement inspectors. One is the lack of trust that many residents have reporting issues, especially if they are undocumented. During one HMC meeting, tenants stated that they are reluctant to call the county because they believe that DPIE and the property managers do not take their concerns seriously. Tenants also explained that when they call the county's 311 system to report a problem, some have had their calls dropped, making them less willing to report issues.

At one HMC meeting, Langley Park tenants also cited flaws with DPIE's system for responding to complaints of code violations. In one case, the code enforcement inspector revisited the property to determine whether the violation had been abated. The day of his visit coincided with the first day of repair work being done. The inspector reported that the issue had been abated, but the tenant complained that the repairmen never came back to finish the job after the inspector left.

Residents often face difficulty communicating with code enforcement inspectors due to language barriers, as most inspectors only speak English and for a majority of residents their primary language is Spanish. In the past, none of the five DPIE inspectors responsible for multifamily housing in the county spoke Spanish. As of January 2018, there is now one Spanish-speaking inspector working in the division.

Tenants also have issues communicating with apartment managers and sometimes confront unresponsive property managers. At a HMC town hall, one tenant complained, “There needs to be a bilingual staff at the front office.” Tenants also expressed their frustration regarding unresponsive property managers and mediocre repair service provided by their apartment complex.³³ One tenant complained, “When we call the front office to file a claim, the [property management] does not want to help.” When asked what can be done to improve their relationship with property managers, tenants underscored the need for property managers to be responsive and respectful. Although all of the Langley Park property owners and managers were invited to join the HMC, only one property manager attended meetings on a regular basis.

Another challenge that sometimes prevents tenants from reporting code violations is the fear of retaliatory property managers. At a monthly HMC meeting, a tenant reported an instance where a code enforcement inspector cited a property manager with a violation. The manager then alerted tenants that they would be responsible for bearing the costs of the necessary repairs. This type of retaliatory action is illegal. In response to negligent property managers and owners, tenants have begun to organize and create tenant associations. However, some tenants fail to do so out of fear of retaliation. At one apartment complex, tenants reported that the property manager told tenants that door knocking to organize is illegal and threatened to report them to the police.³⁴ Tenants sometimes report issues directly to DPIE rather than property managers. Although this does not follow the county’s desired protocol, it is common in Langley Park. Many property owners and managers have been unresponsive to CASA’s attempts to engage in the HMC, making dialogue and mediation between management and tenants difficult.^{vii}

Challenges for Property Owners & Managers

The age and condition of Langley Park’s apartment buildings pose a significant challenge for property owners. Most complexes are 60 to 70 years old with several hundred units. Many buildings have fallen into disrepair and have not been renovated in years. Repairs tend to be expensive, requiring extensive financial investments to keep them in compliance with housing codes, such as replacing heating and cooling systems. As noted by a property manager at an HMC meeting, managers often have over-extended maintenance budgets and struggle to make repairs, particularly given the deferred maintenance

^{vii} CASA also attempted to organize a focus group with property managers and owners, but received little response.

left by former landlords. The property manager noted that her company recently acquired a property with several existing maintenance issues that were taking a while to address, particularly on their slim budget. The property manager also expressed concerns with being issued housing code violations. She explained, “Citations hold up the process and only puts out fires,” rather than getting at the root of the problem. If citations were to include fines, she argued, it would directly impact residents, who would ultimately incur the costs. Such challenges were evident at one HMC meeting, where a tenant complained about a property manager who fined tenants for using window air conditioning units, even though the manager would not turn on the building’s central system during a particularly hot summer. A provision in the tenant’s lease prohibited window units, likely to prevent electrical circuit overloads. The property manager was in a difficult position due to an aging electrical system that likely needed upgrading, while tenants were subject to potentially dangerous heat.

Another challenge for property managers is that tenants sometimes do not report maintenance issues or bypass them by reporting issues directly to the county. Tenants also sometimes attempt to repair issues themselves, instead of notifying their property manager. These issues often arise due to communication barriers and lack of trust between tenants and property managers. In one HMC meeting, a tenant stated that his apartment had been without electricity for several months and he had contacted the county after the property manager had not resolved the issue. The tenant said that he no longer trusted that the property manager was reliable and responsive to his concerns. The property manager, in turn, explained the situation from her perspective, and received agreement to work together to resolve the issue. At another meeting, a tenant described an issue with bedbugs coming from the apartment below hers and how the issue has been reoccurring although the exterminator had visited several times. The property manager explained that they were aware of the issue and that a new exterminator had been hired and was conducting a full survey of the complex.

Clear communication with tenants is not only essential, but is often one of the main barriers to building a strong landlord-tenant relationship.

Challenges for Inspectors

Several factors limit DPIE’s ability to carry out code enforcement in Langley Park. One of the most significant barriers is enforcement inspectors’ inability to gain access to units for an inspection. At an HMC meeting, DPIE officials explained that officers in Langley Park are typically only able to gain access to units approximately 50 percent of the time. Tenants often do not open their door to inspectors—for some out of fear they will be evicted for over occupancy or their legal status, for others because they

lack an understanding or trust in the code enforcement process and the county government in general, or due to past experiences with discrimination.

Trust is further eroded when tenants make complaints about a code violation, but officers fail to follow up. When DPIE receives a complaint, an inspector visits the unit. If the tenant does not answer, the inspector leaves a door tag with instructions to schedule an inspection. If the tenant fails to do so, the inspector may revisit the unit for an inspection without notice, but often do not. Because DPIE only staffs five inspectors for the entire county, they cannot dedicate much time to re-inspecting units or persuading reluctant tenants. DPIE inspectors also encounter challenges with communicating with tenants, particularly non-English speakers. This language barrier makes the inspection process difficult.

Inspectors also lack the enforcement tools to handle unresponsive and negligent property owners. Their only leverage to encourage compliance is their ability to revoke rental licenses. However, a DPIE representative mentioned at one HMC meeting that no licenses have ever been revoked during the history of the department. They are not able to issue fines for non-compliance. DPIE also cannot cite housing health hazards, and no mechanism exists to inform other county agencies of serious health hazards found during inspections. For violations involving mold, inspectors can only cite them as being “unsanitary,” resulting in severe situations potentially going unaddressed.

DPIE is under-staffed with a large caseload with only five code enforcement officers responsible for inspecting all multifamily units in the county using outdated technological systems. The 13 apartment complexes in Langley Park represent a small fraction of the 99,000 multifamily housing units in the county. The department’s productivity is also hindered by outdated record-keeping practices that make it difficult for inspectors to easily locate inspection records and organize reports. DPIE is in the process of upgrading to a new technology system to replace the “ePermits” system currently used to track permitting, licensing, plan review and inspections. Inspection files for previous years only have paper records, which are not easily accessible to the public. This inhibits the department’s ability to monitor progress over time.

Efforts by the Housing Matters Campaign helped to engage residents, property owners and managers, and code enforcement inspectors in addressing these challenges.

Outcomes of the Housing Matters Campaign

Between 2016-2018, the Housing Matters Campaign (HMC) engaged and educated residents about household environmental health hazards, and built trust among residents, property managers, and code enforcement officers that is essential to addressing housing quality issues. They have brought greater awareness of Langley Park's housing quality issues to county administrators and elected officials, and helped to resolve a number of resident complaints. Perhaps most importantly, HMC has helped to push key legislation that will improve the quality of housing throughout the county over the long-term.

Resident Engagement and Education

Langley Park residents played a critical role in HMC both through their participation in the coalition as well as through the various venues for resident education and information-sharing that HMC created.

HMC conducted a door-to-door campaign to inform residents about household environmental hazards and prevention. CASA staff distributed HMC's "Healthy Homes Handbook" in English and Spanish to approximately 1,500 Langley Park residents. The handbook included information on identifying residential health hazards, practices to maintain safe and healthy homes, tenants' rights, submitting a housing complaint, and related county and state resources.

CASA also held community events to inform residents about identifying unsafe conditions and environmental health hazards in their homes and effectively engaging with property managers and DPIE to resolve complaints. Roughly 250 residents attended these workshops held in both English and Spanish.

HMC's monthly meetings also served as an important source of resident engagement and education. Residents heard first-hand about the challenges they shared with other residents as well as those encountered by property managers and DPIE in attempting to address their concerns. Most HMC meetings were held in both English and Spanish with a CASA staff providing translation services. Often in attendance were several residents of the Villas at Langley apartments who are also members of their tenant association. Residents of Bedford Station, Victoria Station, and Hampshire Village were also present at some of the meetings.

HMC also organized a town hall meeting in March 2018 for residents to hear about the coalition's efforts and for HMC members to hear about community concerns. Roughly 20-30 residents were present. The meeting was conducted in both English and Spanish. It included presentations from HMC members, including Councilmember Deni Taveras on recent legislation initiatives, NCSG on housing code violation data, and DPIE on their role in multifamily housing code enforcement. Other community organizations,

including the Community Health and Empowerment through Education and Research, presented about their resources and services. Attendees also broke into small groups to discuss challenges and potential solutions in four key areas: tenant empowerment and advocacy; property maintenance and upkeep; code compliance and enforcement; and landlord-tenant relations and interventions.

During these discussions, residents highlighted the role of HMC in giving voice to and helping to resolve housing complaints. Villas at Langley residents noted a distinct difference in the responsiveness of their property manager. One member of the tenant association noted, “I haven’t called 311 right now because the Villas manager is a bit more attentive.” Residents also noted an increased understanding among tenants that they need to take responsibility in reporting issues. Several residents acknowledged the importance of community organizing and shared stories about coming together to present their concerns to managers. One resident said, “There are power in numbers. We can create a small association to bring up issues.” Another added, “If we raise issues as a group, they will listen to us.” Residents also discussed their struggles to generate broader resident participation around housing issues. As one resident noted, “There is power in tenants coming together, but other tenants need to participate.”³⁵ At an HMC monthly meeting, residents also talked about the impact of HMC. While several noted their initial hesitation to participate, they spoke about the meetings as a unique opportunity to voice their concerns to people that could help to resolve them.³⁶

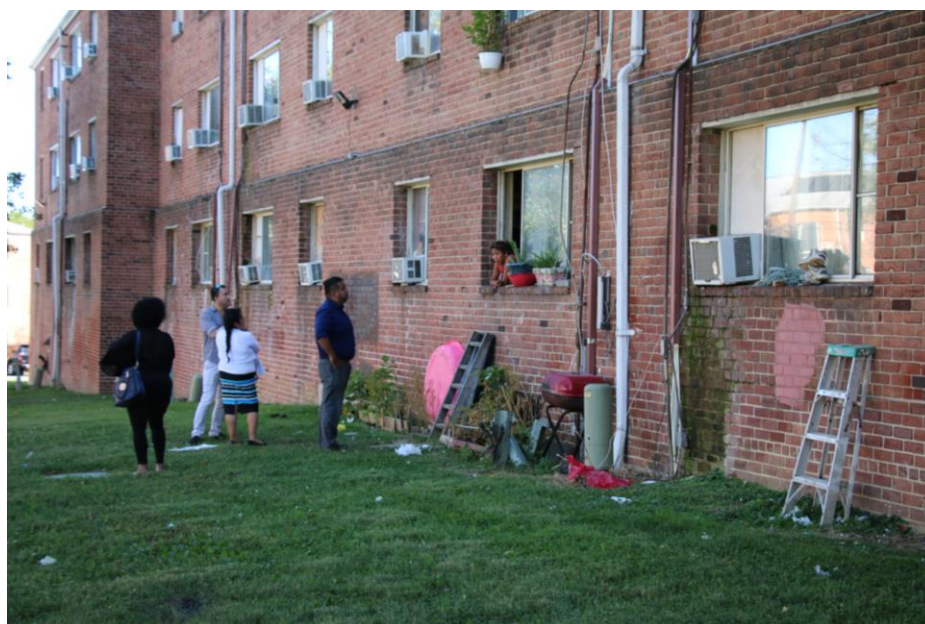


Figure 12. HMC members talking to a resident during a walking tour of the neighborhood

Source: CASA

Improved Relations among Coalition Members

HMC built more trusting relationships between residents, code enforcement inspectors, and property managers. HMC's monthly meetings served as a unique cross-sector forum for residents, property managers, community-based organizations, DPIE, and elected officials.

Inspectors and property managers had the opportunity to discuss issues directly with tenants, and hear about the challenges they faced. There was only one property manager who regularly attended HMC meetings. The participation of the property manager improved relationships with tenants, and allowed a space to address common tenant problems. At one meeting, a tenant asked the property manager why parking was not more regulated, noting that some tenants had to park at nearby lots because there were not enough spaces. The property manager responded that new parking regulations would be explained in the next newsletter and that part of the issue was tenants illegally selling parking stickers to non-residents.³⁷ The property manager noted how HMC meetings helped her to not only understand the needs of residents, but also allowed her to see and understand problems from a tenant perspective.³⁸ Through her participation in the HMC, she became aware of the language barrier that exists between the office staff and residents, and has revised the office's operations to accommodate all residents by providing all outgoing communications in both English and Spanish.

For residents, HMC meetings put a human face on property managers, and showed their willingness to work with tenants to resolve disputes. Tenants were also encouraged to speak about issues without fear of retaliation and heard about the challenges property managers and county inspectors face. One resident noted that when tenants' association members began attending HMC meetings, they were at odds with their property managers. However, HMC meetings provided opportunities to share their problems with management and DPIE. This translated to residents knowing what to do, who to talk, and how the process works when they report housing issues. Another resident noted that the meetings showed her that she had rights that both the county and property management must respect.³⁹

County Awareness of and Attention to Housing Issues

The meetings provided a venue for DPIE to address residents' concerns. DPIE representatives often commented about how helpful it was to hear directly from tenants and provide direct feedback to them. During one HMC meeting, a tenant stated that they had received no response after submitting a complaint via the county's 311 reporting system regarding a maintenance issue. A DPIE representative asked for the tenant's address, stating that the department would look into the complaint. This was a common occurrence at HMC meetings, and in some instances, the complaints would be resolved by the next

meeting. DPIE also responded to the tenants' concerns regarding there not being any Spanish-speaking code enforcement officers by hiring a new bilingual staff member.

DPIE's participation in HMC meetings also provided an opportunity to educate property managers and tenants about the limited resources and capacity of the department. Their participation highlighted the need for organizations like CASA to help them advocate for more resources.

HMC meetings also provided elected officials a productive space to better understand nuanced issues surrounding affordable housing, and housing in general in low-income areas. The meetings offered insight in how state and county laws need to be drafted to ensure that there is equity in housing. In the situation mentioned earlier regarding residents being fined for having window air conditioning units, an elected official heard the residents' concerns at the meeting and proceeded to speak to the property managers on their behalf. The elected official was able to come to an agreement with the property managers, getting them to turn on the central air conditioning system and waive the fines for people with window units. By drawing attention to these issues, and bringing county and state agencies and officials to see and interact with properties, it forced the property managers to respond to issues quicker.

New County Bills

Prince George's County Councilmember Deni Taveras represents District 2, which includes Langley Park and is a member of HMC. After attending several meetings and otherwise hearing from constituents, she introduced legislation aimed at addressing poor property standards, residential overcrowding, parking congestion, illegal dumping, chronic public nuisances, and tenant-landlord retaliation. The "Thriving Communities" legislation included four bills that were unanimously passed by the county council and enacted in 2017. CASA and HMC members and advocated for the passage of these bills DPIE served as a source of information about department procedures and operations.

CB-037-2017 amends the Prince George's County Housing and Property Standards ordinance to address overcrowding. The bill adopts the provision of the 2015 International Property Maintenance Code pertaining to minimum area requirements for dwelling standards. It is aimed at preventing unsafe living arrangements, fraudulent leasing practices, and relieving overstressed public infrastructure. Although unpopular with some Langley Park residents, Councilmember Taveras used HMC meetings and the town hall to discuss the importance of overcrowding regulations to promote housing health and safety.

CB-049-2017 works to eliminate blight, provide accountability for property owners, and improve community notification processes for non-conforming uses. Under the new law, a nonconforming use may only continue if a use and occupancy permit is issued after the planning board or the district council

certifies that the use is nonconforming is not illegal.⁴⁰ All Langley Park apartment complexes in Langley Park are non-conforming under the county's new zoning, and thus subject to the regulations. Property owners found violating the conditions of nonconforming use certification may have their use and occupancy permits revoked. It also requires compliance with certain County Landscape Manual requirements for screening or enclosure of trash collection and recycling facilities and compliance with any off-street parking and loading requirements. This bill is especially pertinent to Langley Park, where garbage dumpsters are sometimes not enclosed properly and located close to living spaces, contributing to pest infestations (Figure 9).

CB-085-2017 adopts a landlord-tenant anti-retaliatory statute that enhances existing county laws regarding landlord retaliatory action. The bill addresses: eviction or threatened eviction, increased rent and/or decreased services, and termination of a periodic tenancy. It states that a landlord may not take a retaliatory action on the basis of three conditions: (1) if a complaint is made in good faith, such as relating to specific housing deficiencies; (2) if tenants consult an attorney; or (3) a tenant assists another tenant in exercising their legal rights.⁴¹ This bill helps to protect tenants from fear of reporting substandard living conditions. The bill reflects similar language to anti-retaliatory legislation in Montgomery County and Washington, DC.

CB-091-2017 pertains to multifamily rental facilities and provides for the imposition of civil fines and penalties for violations of the Rental Housing Code. This bill gives DPIE the ability to charge those deemed responsible with violations with a civil fine. The fine for each violation of the housing code is \$100. For repeated violations at the same location within a 36-month period, the second violation is \$500 and each subsequent violation is \$1,000.⁴² This bill is intended to hold property owners accountable for maintaining properties by incentivizing them to avoid civil fines and related court fees.

HMC's efforts successfully established a broad multi-stakeholder coalition dedicated to advancing healthy housing, educating and engaging residents to avoid environmental health hazards, and working with apartment complex management and the county to resolve complaints. However, there is still more work that needs to be done in Langley Park to improve housing quality. But the community is not alone. Many similar areas across the nation have been wrestling with similar pressures of declining housing and neighborhood conditions, and found innovative ways to combat them.

Best Practices in Housing Quality and Safety

The connection between health and housing is a growing concern in neighborhoods across the country, and housing is increasingly recognized as an important contributor to individual and neighborhood health. In this section, we examine the efforts of jurisdictions across the nation and the Washington, DC metropolitan region to promote healthy and safe housing conditions. These include ensuring that tenants are aware of and able to exercise their rights; educating property managers and tenants on property maintenance and upkeep; promoting effective housing code compliance and enforcement; and creating alternative methods of dispute resolution that allow property owners and tenants to resolve issues outside of the courts.

Tenant Empowerment & Advocacy

One of the forces undermining effective code enforcement is a tenant's failure to exercise their rights. When tenants do not know the rights they have and resources available to ensure quality housing conditions, even the strongest housing code will be ineffective. Some tenants, particularly undocumented immigrants, fear retaliation by property owners for requesting repairs or making complaints about substandard conditions. Some also lack support for forming tenant's associations that can help to ensure that property owners are kept accountable for making timely, quality repairs.⁴³ Landlords also tend to have greater financial and other resources to leverage in disagreements with tenants.

In response to a growing number of renter complaints, Washington, DC established the Office of the Tenant Advocate (OTA) in 2005.⁴⁴ OTA functions as an advocate for renters within city government and fills resource gaps for renters. Their services include affordable legal advice and counsel, such as mediation services and legal representation in judicial proceedings. They offer seminars and workshops to inform tenants of their rights and help them develop tenant associations, and judicial intervention services to inform courts on how to interpret renter laws. They also lobby city agencies and departments for better tenant protection policies.

Montgomery County, Maryland has also responded to renters' needs for better representation and support. The Montgomery County Renters Alliance, a non-profit organization that advocates for tenants' rights and protections, is funded by the county to educate renters on the resources available to them, and support in organizing activities and handling disputes. They also support renters where county policy and protections fall short, and work with the county to ensure enforcement of the housing code.

The Renters Alliance was instrumental in garnering support for Montgomery County Bill 19-15, which passed in November 2016. Several provisions of the bill aim to better protect renters' rights. It requires

the Department of Housing and Community Affairs (DHCA) to provide tenants and landlords with a standard lease and a landlord-tenant handbook, upon request. Leases are required to include a plain language summary of tenants' rights and responsibilities. The landlord is required to give tenants at least three months written notice before imposing a rent increase greater than the recommended rate published by the county as well as a 60-day notice of their intent to terminate a lease.⁴⁵ These stipulations give tenants greater efficacy in disputes with their landlords and information about their rights, and discourage landlord retaliation.

Raising tenants' awareness of their rights and providing them with resources to activate them not only promotes quality housing, but also affordable housing. In 2000, the District of Columbia condemned several apartment buildings in the Columbia Heights neighborhood that were home to large numbers of Latino and Vietnamese residents and had multiple housing code violations.⁴⁶ Many residents complained that this was an overt attempt to displace them. In response, tenants' groups protested the condemnations. They alerted the press, met with city officials, filed a lawsuit with the city alleging discrimination, withheld rent, and sought to prosecute landlords for failing to maintain the properties. Eventually the city stepped in to allow the buildings to remain affordable and tenants to stay in place. Landlords avoided criminal prosecution by transferring building ownership to tenants and providing rehabilitation funds.

Property Maintenance & Upkeep

Another key way to ensure safe and healthy housing is to educate property owners, managers, and tenants. Prevention is the first step to eliminating environmental housing-related hazards and reducing housing code violations.

In North Carolina, the Greensboro Housing Coalition (GHC) provides tenants education on how to maintain a healthy home and other resources, including housing counseling to families at risk of foreclosure or homelessness, and policy advocacy and mediation for landlord-tenant disputes.⁴⁷

The City of Portland educates property owners on strategies for keeping their properties up to code through their Landlord Training Program. Core to their approach is the idea that preventing code violations is less expensive than abating them and can foster better relationships between landlords and the city, as well as between landlords and tenants. The program conducts annual workshops for landlords on how to comply with the housing code and prevent illegal activity in their properties. Their day-long, free workshops cover topics, such as rental applicant screening, crime prevention through environmental design, fire prevention and safety practices, resolving disputes, evictions, and cooperation with police and housing code inspectors.⁴⁸ Since the program was established in 1989, over 19,600 landlords have

attended. Over 90 percent of those reported making changes to their property management based on what they learned.⁴⁹ The program has since been used as a national model.

Code Compliance & Enforcement

While code enforcement is important to ensure proper housing maintenance and quality standards, policies and practices are sometimes inadequate to ensure compliance with municipal housing code. Code enforcement departments may have limited capacity to respond to complaints because of understaffing or other resources. They may also lack proactive inspection programs or have weak mechanisms for penalizing non-compliant property owners.

Several cities have taken on the issue of inspections and landlord penalties. After a 2013 law gutted a former inspection ordinance, GHC worked with the City of Greensboro to rewrite the ordinance to ensure proactive inspections and penalties for non-compliant landlords. The new ordinance instituted a \$75-per-day landlord fine for noncompliance with the housing code.⁵⁰ In Santa Ana, California, the city increased its customer service capacity and outreach to the community after tenant activism, particularly by Latino immigrant groups. It ensured that all new hires were bilingual, reduced response times for complaints, and renamed the “Code Enforcement” department to “Community Preservation” to emphasize their priority of working with residents and landlords to improve properties. The city also instituted the Proactive Rental Enforcement Program (PREP), which promotes systematic, proactive code enforcement.⁵¹ It includes the Gold Seal Incentive Program whereby properties can be certified as having met standards of excellence in property maintenance and housing code compliance. Once certified, properties are exempt from paying the city’s residential surcharge fee for three years.⁵²

The City of Los Angeles, California has also taken steps to improve their code enforcement. When the Housing and Community Investment Department (HCID) has cited health, safety, or housing code violations on a rental property, and the violations have not been corrected in the time allowed, HCID can refer the property their innovative Rent Escrow Program (REAP). After a hearing to determine whether to uphold the department’s decision to place a property into the program, tenants of accepted properties receive a 10 to 50 percent rent reduction, and can choose to pay the reduced rent to into an escrow account managed by the HCID. Landlords, tenants, or other parties request funds from the escrow account to make necessary repairs.⁵³ HCID provides an outreach coordinator to educate and assist affected tenants, and works with community-based organizations to ensure that tenants take advantage of the program. They also offer monthly workshops to property owners to help them comply with housing codes. While in the program, property owners are charged fees that helps to pay for program administration.

Los Angeles has also taken steps to ensure greater compliance of tenants with inspections. HCID partners with the Healthy Homes Collaborative, an association of community-based organizations, who visit homes scheduled to be inspected ahead of time to inform tenants of their rights, prepare homes for inspection, and encourage tenants to cooperate with inspectors. The partnership has resulted in increased collaboration between renters and HCID. Inspectors have gained entry to homes visited by collaborative staff 80 percent of the time, compared to just 20 percent for homes not visited by staff.⁵⁴

Montgomery County, Maryland has also made strides to improve their housing code enforcement policy. While one of the wealthiest counties in the country, the county also has areas of poorly maintained housing. This was highlighted in the 2016 fatal natural gas explosion in Flower Branch Apartments, a garden-style rental complex in the predominantly low-income, immigrant community of Long Branch, just down the road from Langley Park. The complex was notorious for frequent housing code violations. Seven people were killed in the blast that sparked a massive fire and explosion. The incident shone a spotlight on the poor housing conditions in the county and helped to bring years of advocacy by renters' rights groups to improve code enforcement in the county to fruition.⁵⁵ Just three months after the incident, the Montgomery County Council unanimously passed Bill 19-15.⁵⁶ The bill instituted a series of reforms recommended by a tenants work group brought together by the Montgomery County Department of Planning in 2010.⁵⁷ The bill requires annual inspections of all rental housing complexes with two or more units. Landlords found in violation of the code more than twice in two consecutive years are required to pay the next inspection fee. Tenants are permitted to make certain repairs themselves and have their rent abated to cover the cost.^{viii} DHCA is required to publish annual reports about past and upcoming housing inspections.⁵⁸ The bill represents a significant improvement in the county's ability to address housing code violations, and was supported by a broad coalition of housing advocates and community organizations.

Landlord & Tenant Intervention

Another factor limiting the effectiveness of housing code enforcement is an inability or unwillingness of landlords or tenants to endure lengthy and expensive court processes to resolve disputes. When faced with a noncompliant landlord, tenants sometimes choose to withhold rent until repairs are made.⁵⁹ This results in a lengthy court process, wherein the tenant will either face eviction for nonpayment or establish a rent escrow account through their local district court. Withheld rent and compounding fines from code enforcement can make it difficult for landlords to afford the necessary repairs.⁶⁰

^{viii} This pertains to violations that are a threat to health and safety. Bill 19-15 allows tenants to make certain repairs when authorized by DHCA, if DHCA orders a repair and the landlord fails to correct the issue in the allotted time.

GHC confronted this issue by providing an alternative means of landlord-tenant intervention. In disputes regarding inadequate property maintenance, landlords or tenants can now reach out to the coalition to mediate. GHC staff inspects the property to verify the issue, and attempts to resolve issues through dialogue that gives parties an opportunity to resolve the issue without involving code enforcement. The program allows landlords to avoid fines from the city, and renters to resolve maintenance issues more efficiently.

Fairfax County, Virginia also provides landlord-tenant mediation services. The Tenant-Landlord Commission is a governmental body formed in 1971 as an impartial resource for renters and landlords that provides voluntary mediation and arbitration services. The commission is appointed by the Fairfax County Board of Supervisors and is comprised of 10 members--three representing tenants, three representing landlords, and four representing the community at large.⁶¹ A tenant or landlord can request mediation services, which begin with dialogue between the two parties and, if unresolved, go to arbitration in a legally binding commission hearing. This quasi-judicial body has not only the legal authority to make decisions, but also to enforce the required remedy. The results are posted on the commission's website to keep tenants informed on issues with certain properties and avenues for resolving their complaints.⁶²

In 2010, OTA helped to establish a new DC Superior Courts branch that allows tenants to sue their landlords. Previously there had only been the landlord-tenant branch, which provided landlords an expedited process to bring action against tenants, but did not allow tenants to do the same. The new branch allows tenants to bring actions against their landlords in an expedited court process. Its services are limited to those seeking to enforce compliance with DC Housing Code Regulations. OTA provides renters with legal assistance and the court assigns a housing code inspector to verify the violation.

Many lessons for improving housing quality and safety in Langley Park can be drawn from these case studies. They show what is possible with the commitment of time, resources, and collaboration between multiple community and government stakeholders. But while they are useful for thinking about potential routes to improving and ensuring housing quality in Langley Park, an effective strategy must build upon the resources available within individual communities.

Resources to Advance Housing Quality in Langley Park

There are a number of programs and policies that can help to advance the housing health and safety in Langley Park. These include programs focused on neighborhood revitalization, housing rehabilitation and preservation, landlord/tenant mediation, and other housing and environmental issues at the federal, state, and county level.

Federal & State Programs

HUD Healthy Homes Program

The Healthy Homes Program is administered by the Office of Lead Hazard Control and Healthy Homes (OLHCHH) within the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD).⁶³ It provides grants to nonprofits, for-profit firms, state and local governments, and colleges and universities to address housing-related problems affecting the health of children and other vulnerable populations in low-income households.

Awards are given to applicants who undertake studies and develop methods to mitigate housing-related health and safety hazards, including mold, lead, allergens, asthma, carbon monoxide, home safety, pesticides, and radon. Qualifying activities include education campaigns, building local capacity for mitigation, developing low-cost mitigation methods, and evaluating the effectiveness of mitigation programs.

The Healthy Homes Demonstration Program and the Healthy Homes Technical Studies Program are also administered by OLHCHH. The demonstration program develops, demonstrates and promotes cost-effective, preventive measures for identifying and correcting residential health and safety hazards.⁶⁴ It awards between \$2 and \$7 million in grant funds annually. Individual awards range from \$200,000 to \$1 million. The technical studies program funds activities to develop or improve methods for identifying and controlling housing-related health hazards.⁶⁵ Since its inception in 1999, the program has awarded approximately \$1.5 to \$3 million in grant funds annually. Individual awards range from \$200,000 to \$1.2 million.

Sustainable Communities Program

Langley Park is one of 23 designated Sustainable Communities in Prince George's County. Maryland DHCD's Sustainable Communities Program is a place-based designation that supports community development, revitalization and sustainability in established neighborhoods or Priority Funding Areas, where the state has prioritized future growth. Designed to encourage interagency and cross-governmental

collaboration, the program provides designated neighborhoods access to interagency revitalization assistance through financing programs and tax credit incentives, such as the Community Legacy Program.

Community Legacy Program

Administered by Maryland DHCD, the Community Legacy Program promotes neighborhood revitalization by supporting initiatives aimed at attracting new residents and businesses and encouraging existing residents and businesses to remain and reinvest in a community. Local governments, groups of local governments, and community development organizations can apply for funding for projects that aim to catalyze new investment in older neighborhoods, including housing rehabilitation.

The Neighborhood Intervention component of the program provides loans or grants to projects that involve the purchase and rehabilitation of properties or the demolition and redevelopment of properties beyond the point of rehabilitation. To be eligible, projects must be located in one of Maryland's designated Sustainable Communities. The Community Legacy Program and its Neighborhood Intervention Program have an anticipated \$6 million in funding for the 2019 fiscal year. The maximum award is \$500,000 per project.

Maryland Judiciary, Mediation and Conflict Resolution Office

The Mediation and Conflict Resolution Office (MACRO) of the Maryland Judiciary promotes the availability, use, and quality of alternative dispute resolution (ADR) through collaboration with stakeholders, training, research, and public awareness. Grants are awarded to courts, local government agencies, nonprofits, and institutions of higher education to increase efficiency in the courts, expand access to justice and prevent conflicts from escalating into violence or litigation as well as for programs, such as conflict resolution education and services.⁶⁶

District Court of Maryland, Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) Office

The District Court of Maryland's ADR Office provides mediation and settlement conferences for civil cases pending in many district courts. Services are offered at no charge, either on the day of trial or pre-trial.⁶⁷ In Prince George's County, mediation is available both pre-trial and on the day of trial.

District Court of Maryland, Self-Help Resource Center

Residents of Prince George's County can also access legal assistance and resources on civil cases from Maryland's District Court Self-Help Resource Center.⁶⁸ There are four centers throughout Maryland; the Upper Marlboro center is located in Prince George's County District Court House. Tenant services

include free counsel and advice on issues, such as landlord-tenant disputes, domestic violence, and debt collection. Lawyers do not provide legal representation in court, but prepare and assist tenants with representing themselves.

Court of Special Appeals, Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) Division

The ADR Division of the Maryland Court of Special Appeals offers two alternative dispute resolution services to parties with pending litigation in the court—mediation and prehearing conference. During mediation, parties work with an attorney and a judge, who assist participants in reaching voluntary agreements for issues on appeal, in addition to any other relevant issues.⁶⁹

Baltimore Neighborhoods Inc. (BNI)

Baltimore Neighborhood Inc. (BNI) was a nonprofit fair housing organization that educated and empowered tenants in Prince George’s County and across the state of Maryland.⁷⁰ As part of their tenant-landlord program, housing counselors responded to tenants and landlords about disputes or housing issues, informed them of their rights and responsibilities, and made referrals to code enforcement, legal aid, or other resources. Counselors received approximately 20,000 inquiries a year. BNI also provided education and outreach programs. As of August 31, 2018, Baltimore Neighborhoods Inc. (BNI) ceased operations. There is not another state-wide fair housing organization of its size and scope.

Prince George’s County Programs

Transforming Neighborhoods Initiative

As previously noted, the Prince George’s County Transforming Neighborhoods Initiative (TNI) targets struggling neighborhoods for revitalization by providing additional county resources. The TNI uses data to improve service delivery in targeted neighborhoods around issues of economic development, education, public safety, health, and blight. Housing quality has been the subject of Langley Park’s TNI efforts, including code violations and litter.⁷¹

Three of the original six county TNI areas that experienced the most positive impacts from the program, including Langley Park, were transitioned to community control in 2017. As a community-led TNI, Langley Park no longer receives the same level of services from the county as it once did.

Community Development Block Grant

The Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) is used to improve housing, stabilize neighborhoods, and expand economic opportunities, principally for low and moderate-income persons.⁷² In Prince George's County, DHCD's Community Planning and Development Division administers CDBG grants. Prince George's County receives approximately \$4.5 million annually from HUD in CDBG funds.

Municipalities, local government agencies and nonprofit organizations can apply for funds for residential and non-residential projects involving the acquisition or disposition of real property, housing rehabilitation and preservation, and public services. Priority is given to activities being carried out in one or more TNI areas. Additional points to applicants that have a presence in a TNI community. Eligible activities, include those related to improving housing quality, such as lead-based paint testing and abatement, fair housing, and tenant/landlord counseling.

HOME Investment Partnerships Program

Administered by Prince George's County DHCD, the HOME Investment Partnerships Program helps to expand the supply of quality, affordable housing for low and very low-income families. The county is eligible to receive approximately \$3.5 million annually from a HUD.⁷³ The program provides interest bearing loans to nonprofit and for-profit developers to encourage the construction, acquisition, and rehabilitation of rental, owner-occupied, and special needs housing. HOME-funded projects must be in compliance with federal lead-based paint regulations. TNIs are given priority to receive HOME funding.

Prince George's County Office of Community Relations

The Office of Community Relations (OCR) provides landlord-tenant mediation services for cases that do not involve discrimination of protected classes through their Community Mediation Prince George's program.⁷⁴ OCR's Human Relations Commission (HRC) investigates allegations of civil rights and housing discrimination,⁷⁵ such as the denial of a rental application or landlord retaliation due to discrimination based on race, age, nationality, religion, or disability. Investigators conduct intake interviews to determine if there are grounds to open an investigation. If discrimination based on one of the protected classes is found, an attempt to resolve the issue without a public hearing is made. If unsuccessful, the case will be brought before a public hearing in which HRC is authorized to rule on the case and take action, such as ordering damages or imposing employee training. HRC is currently seeking certification from HUD to become a Fair Housing Assistance Program Agency, which would allow it to administer higher damage awards and have greater authority as an enforcement agency.⁷⁶

CASA

CASA is one the largest immigrant rights organizations in the Mid-Atlantic region, with their headquarters in Langley Park. CASA works with immigrants groups and communities inside and outside the neighborhood to promote human rights and fight discrimination. They partner with local governments, private foundations, individuals, congregations, civic associations, and other organizations to provide a voice for tenants in Prince George's County, and provide resources to tenants, such as low- or no-cost legal services related to issues of housing and immigration matters. They also assist with tenant organizing and offer educational resources and services regarding tenant rights.

These resources show that one of the biggest challenges is locating funding for preservation and rehabilitation costs, which are particularly high in Langley Park given the state of disrepair of many of the multifamily housing complexes. Further, many of the resources described above are under-utilized in Langley Park. Because Langley Park is not a municipality and most are not property owners, they rely heavily on the initiative of the county, local nonprofits, and individual property owners to apply for funding. The will and ability to maintain safe and healthy housing conditions in Langley Park is lacking at many of these levels. Using the lessons from the case studies and the existing resources available, however, progress can be made to further HMC's work to improve housing quality and safety in the neighborhood.

Recommendations for Moving the HMC’s Work Forward

Implementation of a sustainable healthy homes strategy for Langley Park requires coordination among partners working on issues of health and housing, including tenants, property owners and managers, and county code enforcement inspectors. Having access to information about county housing codes, the code enforcement process, and an understanding of the connection between health and housing are key. County agencies and community-based organizations need to develop and provide multiple ways for tenants and property owners to learn about housing quality standards, code violation remediation and prevention, and their respective rights and responsibilities. Successful strategies rely on trusting relationships and a shared recognition that tenants, property owners and managers, and the county are all responsible for the problems as well as the solutions. The following actions can help Langley Park and Prince George’s County move towards more healthy and safe housing.

Tenant Empowerment & Advocacy

Tenant rights laws and policies provide protections for tenants who face substandard housing conditions and safety issues. In Langley Park, however, tenants are often unaware of their rights and lack support in exercising those rights. In addition, the county currently relies largely on the state’s tenant rights laws, but offers few protections or resources of their own. Greater support is needed for tenant rights at the county-level and for nonprofit organizations that help tenants’ exercise their rights.

Establish Office of the Tenant Advocate. Establish an office to provide comprehensive services to tenants and act as the main government authority on tenant rights and policy issues in the county. The office should advocate for the rights and interests of county renters in legislative, regulatory, and judicial contexts. Other services that can be offered include legal aid to advise and assist tenants regarding disputes with landlords, and education to inform tenants about their rights and responsibilities. This can be modeled after similar offices, such as the Office of the Tenant Advocate in Washington, DC.

Promote and Fund Organizations that Support Tenant Rights. Using the accomplishments of the Montgomery County Renters Alliance as framework, Prince George’s County should promote and fund non-profit organizations and services that advance tenant rights and protections, educate renters on the resources available to them, and support renters in organizing and dispute resolution. This would also include funds for general capacity-building and staffing to ensure that they are able to effectively provide services.

Establish a Prince George’s County Tenant Right to Organize Act. Establish a tenant right to organize act for Prince George’s County to support and encourage tenants to form tenant associations that can

improve their ability to negotiate with the landlord and discourage retaliatory landlord actions, as well as assert other rights as defined by the county and state. The act can require landlords and their agents to acknowledge tenant groups, and mandate that the landlord consider an association's requests. Further, it can help landlords and tenants maintain positive landlord-tenant relations. This can be modeled after similar acts, such as the Right of Tenants to Organize Act (§ 42–3505.06) in Washington, DC.

Promote and Fund Programs that Support Tenants Associations. Tenants are critical to informing other residents about community issues. Tenants who are reluctant to organize are more likely to participate, however, when they see others in their communities doing so. We recommend that the county fund programs and services that provide training and capacity-building support to tenant leaders and associations. Tenants with strong leadership and organizing skills can help build a more engaged community and facilitate communication with property managers and county agencies to resolve housing-related issues.

Property Maintenance & Upkeep

Preventing code violations is the first step to creating and maintaining safe and healthy rental housing. This requires an informed partnership between property managers and tenants, and knowledge about how housing can impact health. In Langley Park, the Purple Line represents a unique opportunity to improve the quality of existing and new multifamily housing.

Develop Landlord Training Program. A county-wide landlord training program should be established to educate property owners and managers on their rights and responsibilities, including how to maintain compliance with the housing code, prevent illegal activity in their properties, and best practices in management and communicating with tenants. Mandatory attendance should be a required for negligent landlords identified by DPIE, particularly those with properties on its distressed properties list. This can be modeled after Portland or other cities with similar program, such as Cincinnati, Ohio and St. Paul, Minnesota.

Require Property Managers to Obtain Certification. Property managers of multifamily housing in Prince George's County should be required to certify their ability to properly manage and maintain properties. The Certified Apartment Manager (CAM) credential provided by the National Apartment Association ensures that property managers have the knowledge and skills to manage properties. In addition to learning about industry essentials, managers also take courses on property maintenance.

Provide Regular Education and Outreach to Tenants. Beyond property managers, tenants must also be educated on their rights and responsibilities, how to maintain a healthy home, and the process of reporting

issues. The county should be required to publish and provide upon request to tenants a landlord-tenant handbook that acts as a practical guide for both landlords and tenants concerning their respective rights and responsibilities. This can be modeled off similar handbooks produced by Multnomah County, OR and legislation by Montgomery County, MD (MC 19-15). The county should also partner with nonprofits to provide monthly educational workshops to tenants across the county. It can also benefit from strengthening educational resources and outreach to culturally specific communities, including Latino and African immigrants. This program can be modeled off that of the Greensboro Housing Coalition.

Leverage the Purple Line to Increase Housing Quality. The development of the Purple Line should be accompanied by an emphasis on preserving and enhancing the stock of quality, affordable housing options to stabilize and revitalize Langley Park. The county and local nonprofits should support the Purple Line Community Development Agreement, and the Housing Plan currently being finalized by the Purple Line Corridor Coalition, which outlines these goals and strategies to achieve them. The county should also encourage private and nonprofit developers to invest in Langley's Parks existing market-rate affordable housing, such as through the use of county tax credits, CDBG and HOME funds, and other resources currently prioritized for the neighborhood through its Sustainable Communities and TNI designation. The county can exercise its right of first refusal to allow nonprofits to purchase multifamily rental facilities in Langley Park, particularly those located close to proposed Purple Line stations, to revitalize and preserve housing opportunities for low- to moderate-income households. To be effective, DHCD must pursue an active strategy of acquisition, as Purple Line construction has already begun.

Focus TNI Programming on Housing Quality Issues. The Prince George's County TNI program should develop and track more indicators of housing quality to better understand and improve Langley Park's housing conditions. Indicators should include housing health and safety hazards and indicators, such as children with asthma and homes the potential for lead-based paint exposure. Though Langley Park is no longer receiving as many services from the county's TNI offices, housing quality data and services should continue to be a priority of the county's cross-sector efforts.

Expand Utilization of Existing Federal, State, and County Resources to Address Housing-Related Health and Safety Hazards. Prince George's County, in collaboration with property owners and community-based organizations should apply for the HUD Healthy Homes Demonstration grant to assess and conduct interventions for various housing-related hazards as well as tenant and landlord education in Langley Park. A county or a local Community Development Financial Institution (CDFI) should apply for the Community Legacy Program to fund a loan or grant program to assist property owners who might otherwise not be able to afford extensive repairs to undertake renovation projects. The county can

encourage the utilization of this state funding opportunity by having county departments, such as DHCD and DPIE, recommend it to community-based organizations who wish to purchase existing property or unimproved land, and to property owners who struggle with abating code violations and need additional funding to make necessary repairs and renovations.

Code Compliance & Enforcement

To better enforce existing housing codes, the county's code enforcement department needs the capacity to respond to complaints and ensure compliance, including resources to effectively penalize and reward property owners. County housing code enforcement practices also require better data sources and collection practices to understand home health issues and to improve accountability, transparency, and efficiency. Trust between county code enforcement inspectors, tenants, and property managers must also be strengthened to encourage cooperation during inspections.

Increase DPIE Staff & Resources. Increased efficiency in the intake process and response times would benefit DPIE, but there is also a limit to the amount of work five inspectors can handle. Department staff should be increased substantially to reduce the workload on current inspectors and increase department efficiency. The county can increase the amount property owners pay for rental licenses and use the additional funds to hire more code inspectors. Record-keeping practices should be updated to utilize newer technology and database systems that are easily accessible to the public to ensure accountability and evaluation. This should include a record of all properties on the county's distressed property list. New staff members should include those with proficiency in languages common to residents throughout the county, including Spanish and French. Cultural competency and legal training should be required of all code inspectors to ensure that they are sensitive to the issues faced by the county's diverse residents, including undocumented immigrants.

Mandate Annual Inspections of all Rental Housing Complexes. DPIE should be required to conduct annual inspections of all rental housing complexes with two or more units in the county. Additional inspections should be required for older multifamily properties that have not been substantially renovated, and those on the county's distressed property list. DPIE should be required to identify critical data points, gaps and evaluation tools that support their planning and report results annually to associated county departments (planning, environment, health, housing & community development, etc.). DPIE should also publish annual reports on department performance, inspection and violation statistics to provide accountability and monitoring of trends, common issues, and distressed properties. Montgomery County Bill 19-15 can serve as model legislation.

Increase Penalties for Negligent Landlords. Prince George’s County should increase the consequences for negligent and non-compliant property owners and managers. Using the Rent Escrow Account Program in Los Angeles, CA as a guide, if a property owner fails to make repairs to address a code violation, tenants of the affected units should also be allowed to make certain repairs themselves and have their rent reduced to cover the costs, and pay the reduced rent into an escrow account managed by the Prince George’s County DHCD. This program would enhance the new county legislation, CB-091-2017, which imposes civil fines and penalties for violations of the county housing code in multifamily rental facilities. DPIE should require property owners to pay a fee for re-inspections of properties due to reoccurring and unresolved violations.

Promote Incentives for Code-Compliant Landlords. The county should also reward landlords who excel in property maintenance. DPIE can give an award or reduced fee on license renewal for properties that exhibit excellent management practices. Other incentives that would help to encourage code compliance, include fast-tracking approval of permits for property improvements; or providing free or low-cost equipment, such as smoke or carbon monoxide detectors or security locks. This program can be modeled off of the Proactive Rental Inspection Program in Santa Ana, CA.

Provide Intermediary Support for Tenants. The county should provide intermediary support for tenants before, during, and after inspections to increase participation in county inspections. DPIE should partner with CASA or other community-based organizations to assist residents with housing inspections. Organizations can visit homes scheduled to be inspected ahead of time to inform tenants of their rights, how to prepare their home for inspection, and encourage them to cooperate with inspectors. This service can be especially helpful for non-English speaking tenants. In addition, the program can integrate education on code compliance and tenants’ rights into the inspection process. As previously discussed, CASA’s high rate of participation in their housing survey compared to DPIE highlight the need for such an intermediary role. This program can be modeled off of the Healthy Homes Collaborative in Los Angeles.

Promote Coordination Between DPIE and Office of Community Relations. DPIE and OCR can work together to determine whether a case is best resolved through code enforcement or mediation. In some cases, the severity of a complaint is unknown until a code inspector conducts a physical inspection. When severe landlord-tenant issues arise that are outside of their purview, DPIE should refer residents to OCR for further assistance. OCR should coordinate with DPIE to conduct public education campaigns for tenants and landlords to educate them on their rights and resources available as well as how to determine which office to contact for certain issues.

Landlord & Tenant Intervention

Renters have the responsibility to notify property managers about repair issues in a timely manner, while property owners have the responsibility of maintaining safe, healthy, and habitable homes. However, if issues with repairs occur, the county should provide opportunities for property owners and tenants to resolve disputes outside of the court system.

Establish Strategic Partnerships with Fair Housing Organizations. The county can benefit from a partnership with fair housing organizations similar to BNI to outreach to and educate renters about their rights and county resources available to them, and provide tenant counselors and mediation services.

Promote and Provide Resources for Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR). Prince George's County should consider creating a quasi-judicial commission or other body to mediate between landlords and tenants, and provide legally-binding arbitration outside of the courts. This program can be modeled after the Tenant-Landlord Commission in Fairfax County, Virginia. The county should also put in place protections to ensure access to organizations and offices providing legal counsel and/or advice for undocumented immigrants.

Enhance Utilization of Existing State and County Mediation Resources. The Maryland Judiciary offers grants to counties and nonprofits to promote ADR to resolve civil disputes. Prince George's County or local nonprofit organizations can apply for the grant to fund ADR programs that provide bilingual conflict resolution education and services for Langley Park residents. OCR should also encourage and educate residents about other ADR resources, such as those provided through the District Court and Court of Appeals.

Conclusion: Improving Housing Quality & Safety in Langley Park

Unhealthy housing conditions negatively impact neighborhoods, cities, and families. Issues such as mold, lead-based paint, insufficient plumbing, lack of heat and ventilation, and pest infestation can cause serious health challenges and life-threatening conditions in both the short- and long- run.

Such conditions disproportionately impact low-income communities of color, and immigrants who are not only most likely to be exposed to unhealthy and unsafe living conditions, but also least likely to have the resources to address them. This is especially true in inner-ring suburbs that have seen significant housing decline and a lack of reinvestment for several decades.

Langley Park offers a lens into the vulnerabilities faced by low-income immigrant communities, particularly those in inner-ring suburbs, such as disparities in housing conditions and resources, as well as a way to improve their outcomes. Over the past two years, HMC has made significant strides in educating and empowering tenants, property owners and managers, county agencies and elected officials with the information and tools to more effectively address housing health and safety issues in Langley Park. But HMC's efforts are only a starting point for a broader set of plans, policy, and practices that need to take place to improve the health and welfare of the neighborhood.

This report has laid out a strategy for moving forward that takes into account Langley Park's existing housing conditions, resources at the federal, state, and county levels, and best practices throughout the region and nation. Local jurisdictions must capitalize on existing programs aimed at improving community health and housing, encourage stronger linkages between new and existing programs, and build on the lessons of other jurisdictions. These recommendations stress the need for cross-sector collaboration and efforts that strengthen relationships between communities, government agencies and property owners. No single program or agency can solve this complex problem, and no strategy that is not built on a foundation of trust and respect among stakeholders will succeed.

The recommendations are many, and existing resources are few. HMC, however, began with the idea of proposing bold visions that take into account constraints, but are not dictated by them. Over the past two years, this core principle has helped the coalition develop innovative and evidence-based proposals for long-lasting policy change—community and political will, and communication across sectors that often sit on different sides of the table. We hope that community, county, and state leaders will use this report to build on that good will and collaborative spirit to improve not only homes but also the health and well-being of residents in Langley Park now and into the future.

Appendices

Appendix A: Data and Methodology

This report draws on several primary and secondary data sources. Our analysis of housing and demographic conditions relied primarily on U.S. Census Bureau 2012-2016 American Community Survey 5-year estimates for the Langley Park Census Designated Place (CDP).

For data on housing code violations, NCSG researchers worked with DPIE staff to consolidate their inspection records for the 13 multifamily apartment complexes in Langley Park. Researchers obtained records for some complexes dating as far back as 1999. However, the number of records for each complex varied substantially and was often dependent on whether complaints were reported for individual units and the frequency of subsequent inspections. Some complexes had no inspections outside of those conducted biannually for license renewal. Due to the variation, we analyzed data for only a three-year period between 2014-2017, where DPIE had at least one inspection report for each complex. The various code violations were placed into one of ten categories based on the type of violation (Table A1). CASA also created a housing maintenance survey written in Spanish and distributed it to Villas at Langley Park residents. Residents were asked to place a check mark next to the issue if it was present in their apartment. The housing issues indicated on the surveys were tabulated to indicate total number of instances per sub-category. Further analysis tabulated the number of household health hazards and compared survey results to the housing code violation data obtained from DPIE.

This report also relies on primary data from HMC meetings and related events. This includes notes taken during all HMC meetings over the two-year period and an HMC walking tour of housing conditions in the community. Residents' comments at the HMC Town Hall were also recorded and transcribed, including their responses to questions regarding housing maintenance, code enforcement, landlord-tenant relations, and housing improvement resources discussed during breakout sessions. A CASA staff member translated the responses from Spanish to English.

Category	Description
Pests	This refers to any code violation related to insect/rodent infestation (i.e. roaches, bed bugs, and rats)
Trash / Unsanitary Condition	This refers to any code violation related to: 1) open storage; 2) an unsanitary accumulation of trash, litter, debris; or 3) unsanitary walls or ceilings.
Plumbing	This refers to any code violation related to: 1) walls and ceilings that have water leaks/stains; 2) leaking faucet or drain; or 3) commode and plumbing system are in disrepair and/or inoperable.
Heating	This refers to any code violation related to: 1) insufficient heating; 2) heating unit in disrepair; and 3) defective/inadequate water heating.
Paint / Caulking / Plaster	This refers to any code violation related to: 1) doors, walls and ceilings that have flaking, peeling paint and/or loose plaster; 2) loose/missing caulking; or 3) walls and ceilings that have cracks and holes.
Doors / Windows	This refers to any code violation related to: 1) doors and windows in a state of disrepair; 2) doors and windows that have broken/missing glass, damaged and/or missing hardware; or 3) doors and windows that are inoperable.
Lights / Electrical / Equipment	This refers to any code violation related to: 1) cooking equipment, electric fixtures, and electric outlets/covers that are in disrepair; 2) light fixture(s) and emergency lighting fixtures that are inoperative and/or missing; or 3) refrigerators and exhaust fans that are in disrepair.
Fire Safety / Egress / Floor	This refers to any code violation related to: 1) smoke detectors that are in disrepair, inoperative and/or missing; 2) stair treads and stair nose edges in disrepair; 3) floors and/or surface coverings in disrepair, buckled and deteriorated, and not structurally sound; 4) fire extinguishers that are discharged, missing and/or has expired service tag.
Building Exterior	This refers to any code violation related to: 1) exterior walls that have cracks, breaks, holes and/or rotted or rusted surfaces, including retaining walls; 2) roof shingles on building that are loose, buckled, missing and/or otherwise deteriorated; 3) gutter(s) and/or downspout(s) that is/are in disrepair and/or have obstructions; or 4) building foundations that have missing/deteriorated rodent screens.
Grounds / Landscape	This refers to any code violation related to: 1) exterior walkways, sidewalks, steps or porches/landings that are cracked, broken, deteriorated, and/or have sunken areas that creates a trip hazard; 2) exterior property areas that have holes and/or eroded/unprotected soil, dead trees; or 3) parking areas that have holes, cracks, is deteriorated and/or has a sunken surface, including broken and/or deteriorated concrete curbing.

Table A1. Descriptions of Code Violation Categories

Category	Sub-Categories
Appliance/Cabinets	Range (stove & oven); Fridge; Kitchen Cabinets
Lack of Utilities	Heat; Light; Water; Hot Water
Plumbing	Sewage Disposal; Kitchen; Tub; Toilet; Faucet
Electricity	Outlets
Walls	Water Damage (leak); Flaky, loose, or peeling paint; Ceilings
Windows	Not Functioning; Broken; Missing Screens; Blinds
Doors	Damage; Knobs
Floors	Flooring; Carpet
Structural	Foundation; Balcony
Infestation	Bed Bugs; Rodents; Roaches; Other
Mold/Mildew	Kitchen; Bathroom; Bedroom(s); Living Room
Common Areas	Parking; Laundry Room
Gas	Gas Smell
Other	Administrative Abuse; Parking; Rent Increases

Table A2. Survey Categories and Sub-Categories of Maintenance Issues

Appendix B: Additional Resources on Housing Code Violation Data

Langley Park Multifamily Rental Housing Properties

The complete database of housing code violations compiled by NCSG can be accessed online at the following link:

<https://tinyurl.com/LP-CodeViolations>

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