

## 2.3 History of Greater Lyttonsville

### COMMUNITY HISTORY

Greater Lyttonsville experienced many of the settlement and development forces that shaped Montgomery County, resulting in a Sector Plan area with a rich history and a wide variety of land uses and neighborhoods. Planning efforts should draw from the area's multi-faceted history.



*The North Corner Boundary Stone of the District of Columbia. Other sides of the marker show a line and text indicating the division between the jurisdiction of the United States and Maryland.*

### Tobacco Plantations and the North Corner Boundary Stone:

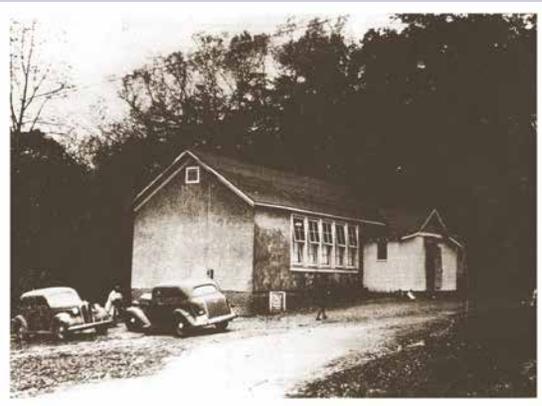
During the 18th century, large tobacco plantations, including Edgewood and the Highlands, were established within parts of the Greater Lyttonsville Sector Plan area and to the northwest. The owners, the influential Carroll and Brent families, introduced a large slave population to the area. Brookville Road and Georgia Avenue were built and became important thoroughfares. Parts of Montgomery County were ceded for the District of Columbia, and in 1792, the District's North Corner Boundary Stone was erected off today's East-West Highway within the Sector Plan area. The North Corner Boundary Stone historic site (35/34-7) is designated on the Master Plan for Historic Preservation in Montgomery County, Maryland, and in 1996, was listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

### Country Estates and Free Black Settlement:

By the 1850s, Francis Preston Blair, editor of the *Globe*, a Washington, DC newspaper, had established several country estates southeast of the Sector Plan area. Samuel Lytton, a free black laborer in Blair's household, purchased a nearby four-acre plus tract from white farmer Leonard Johnson in 1853. The tract, located on the east side of Brookville Road near its junction with current-day Garfield Avenue, became the center of a pre-Civil War free black settlement eventually known as Lyttonsville.

## 20th Century Lyttonsville

By 1930, Lyttonsville had about 60 black households and 300 people. Shops and residences lined Brookville Road and Garfield Avenue. The Pilgrim Baptist Church and its cemetery sat at the junction of the two streets facing Brookville Road. The two-room segregated Linden School for grades 1-7 was on the north side of Garfield in the middle of the block. Ike's Blue Moon, a beer hall on Brookville Road, provided refreshment. Rail lines cut through the neighborhood. There was a spring on the Samuel Lytton tract and



*The Linden School was constructed in 1917, off Garfield Avenue, on land purchased from John A.I. Cassidy, founder of the nearby National Park Seminary (date of photo unknown). The school, which had no running water or plumbing, served the African American community until Montgomery County's schools were integrated in 1955. Source: M-NCPPC files.*

another on today's Porter Road near its junction with Sundale Drive. Nearby, on the site of today's Rosemary Elementary School, was a field where the neighborhood baseball team, the Linden Black Socks, held its games. A few houses dotted the landscape along Michigan Avenue and vicinity. Serving the community outside of Lyttonsville was Mt. Zion Methodist Episcopal, on Seminary Road west of Georgia Avenue.

By the turn of the 21st century, Lyttonsville had changed greatly. Brookville Road and Garfield Avenue were lined with industrial uses, and the residential area near Michigan and Pennsylvania Avenues was fully developed. Lyttonsville resident George S. Shakelford had served on Montgomery County's 1954 Committee on Integration, and as part of that plan, Rosemary Hills Elementary School opened in 1956 offering modern facilities and a diverse student body.

In 1970, Lyttonsville activist Gwendolyn Coffield helped organize an after-hours community school so that neighbors could get to know one another. Pilgrim Baptist Church moved to a new building that was built in 1982 at the corner of Pennsylvania Avenue and Lanier Drive.

A concerted lobbying effort by Lyttonsville residents led by Civic Association leaders Lawrence Tyson and Gwendolyn Coffield led to an urban renewal effort from the 1960s to the 1980s. Urban renewal brought paved roads, street lighting and modern water

and sewer facilities. Sub-standard housing was replaced by townhomes and at least 25 modular and frame houses. New buildings were interspersed with old.

The Rosemary Hills/Lyttonsville Community Center opened in 1984 and was replaced by a new facility in 2000, named for Gwendolyn Coffield. Beginning in 1982, high school students erected 10 homes in the neighborhood as part of a program run by Montgomery County Public Schools in cooperation with the Montgomery County Students Construction Trades Foundation. These homes, which bear identifying plaques, helped rejuvenate Lyttonsville and are a unique part of its heritage.

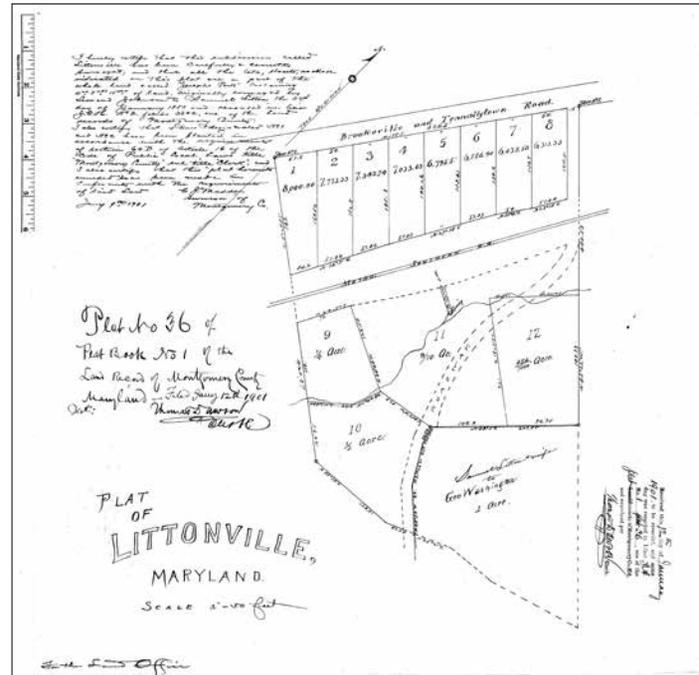
Over the years, Lyttonsville faced daunting challenges, including railroad takings, industrial rezonings, several rounds of residential displacement and negative environmental impacts from nearby industrial, military and public facilities. In addition, school desegregation battles, threatened school closures, grossly inadequate housing and infrastructure, and the loss of The Pines – a nearby black neighborhood, threatened neighborhood stability. The community persevered through strong advocacy and creative efforts to forge bonds with adjoining communities and is today one of the oldest, historically black and most diverse neighborhoods in Montgomery County.

### Railroad and Trolley Line Suburbs:

From the late 19th century, the Baltimore & Ohio railroad's Metropolitan and Georgetown Branch lines, and the nearby new Forest Glen Trolley line changed the Sector Plan area, spurring development of residential suburbs and changing its Southern agrarian character. Portions of Montgomery County's first residential subdivision, Linden (1873), are within the Sector Plan area and two locally designated historic resources, the Linden Historic District (36/2) and the Center and Annie Lawrence House (36/2-1) are within the portions of Linden adjoining the Sector Plan area. Three subdivisions--Perkins and Burrows addition to Linden, 1890; Perkins and Burrows, near Linden Station on Metropolitan Railroad, 1892; and Littonville, 1901-- were platted on land south of the Metropolitan Branch on either side of Brookville Road, and became locales for the expanding black settlement.

Two historic resources of note are affiliated with the rail lines. A resort hotel known as Ye Forest Inn opened along the Metropolitan Branch in 1887 to draw prospective home buyers to the area. The hotel failed and, in 1894, reopened as a girl's finishing school known as the National Park Seminary, which provided employment for many Lyttonsville residents. The Seminary is now a locally designated historic district (36/2) and listed on the National Register of Historic Places. A portion of the National Register District is within the Sector Plan area, namely the southern part of Parcel 939.

Talbot Avenue Bridge (M: 36-30), within the Sector Plan and slated for removal for the Purple Line, is a three-span, single-lane metal plate and girder bridge. It was built over the Metropolitan Branch rail line in 1918 as a replacement for an earlier bridge that connected Lyttonsville and Linden. The current bridge was determined to be eligible for the National Register in 2001.



*Plat of Littonville, Maryland, recorded in the Montgomery County land records on January 12, 1901 (Plat Book 1, Plat 36). This is a plat of the land Samuel Lytton purchased in 1853 minus land he sold to George Washington in 1890 and the right-of-way for the B&O Georgetown Branch, which are also shown. Lytton died in 1893 and his daughter Alice Lytton (or Litten) sold the land in 1895 to Arthur Harris. It is unclear who owned the property when it was platted as twelve lots.*



*Lyttonsville and vicinity, 1929 (USGS, Library of Congress)*

### Industrialization:

The rail lines spurred industrial development on Brookville Road, Linden Lane and within Linden. Enos Keys, son of Charles Keys, owner of land that was once Edgewood, was the Linden postmaster at the Linden Station and a freight agent. In 1889, he also founded Enos C. Keys and Sons, which provided coal, fuel,

and building materials until 1978. He built a coal yard along Brookville Road, owned houses on the road and employed many Lyttonsville residents. His office, at the corner of Brookville Road and Stewart Lane, was demolished in August 2015.

Other industrial uses in the Sector Plan area over the years have included the Washington

Suburban Sanitary Commission incinerator, an animal pound, a vehicle maintenance yard and several radio stations and transmitters, each having adverse impacts on the small Lyttonsville community.

Industrial rezonings and proposed rezonings from the 1940s onward had a large impact on the black community along Brookville Road and Garfield Avenue. Population diminished and the neighborhood center eventually shifted eastward, toward Kansas, Maine, Pennsylvania and Michigan Avenues, an area also threatened, unsuccessfully, with industrial rezoning. In the 1960s, Lyttonsville Road and Lyttonsville Place were constructed to divert industrial traffic from the residential areas. In 1964, a comprehensively planned industrial area known as Technical Services Park, still extant, opened within the Sector Plan Area on Linden Lane, in a modernist architectural vernacular.



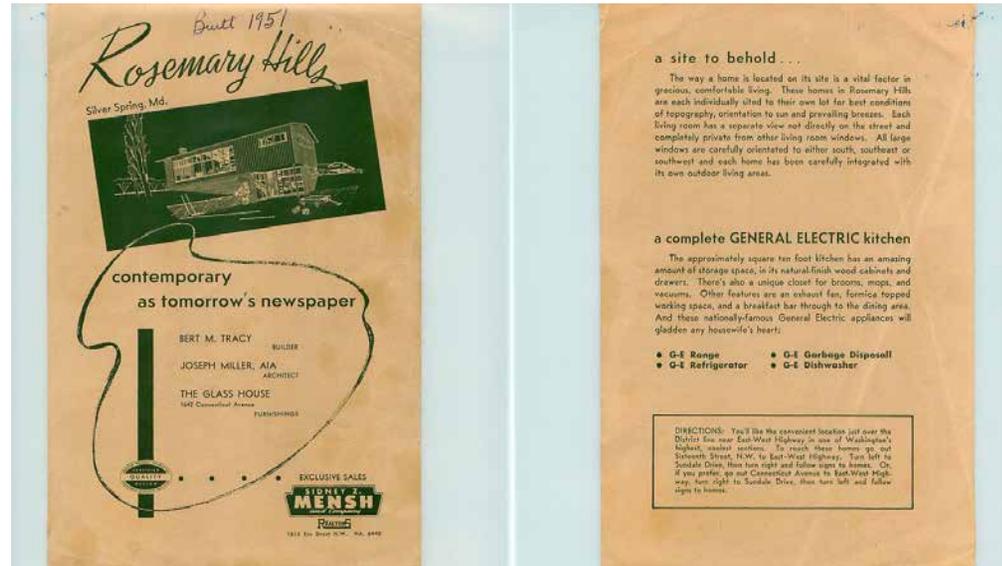
*Trains pass westbound through Lyttonsville on the Georgetown Branch. In the background is Brookville Road before its widening, the 1914 Pilgrim Baptist Church and Cemetery, and older housing on a portion of Samuel Lytton's original tract (photo taken in April 1972). Source: William Duvall Collection, Owner Ben Sullivan.*

## Auto-Oriented Subdivisions:

Twentieth-century road improvements, particularly the 1928-29 construction of Bethesda-Silver Spring Highway (now East-West Highway) and the 1960s construction of 16th Street extended, opened previously inaccessible land in and near the Sector Plan area for new auto-oriented development. A wide array of housing types was built.

Single-unit subdivisions include the Colonial-Revival-style Rosemary Hills and Rosemary Knolls (1930s to 1950s) and the modernist Richland Place (1951). These neighborhoods attracted young professionals who welcomed racial integration and the diversity of adjacent neighborhoods. Garden apartments provided moderately priced, family-oriented housing in a natural setting and include Rosemary (now Burlington) Apartments (1954), Rosemary Village Apartments (1954), Round Hill Apartments (1960), Rock Creek Forest Apartments), Paddington Square (built in the 1960s and now operated by the Housing Opportunities Commission) and Friendly Gardens (from the 1970s and operated by Friends Non-Profit).

A mid-rise complex, Summit Hill (built from 1960 to 1964 and now called Summit Hills), had two- and three-bedroom apartments, and a circular modernist commercial center with a meeting room first used for Jewish services. Three high-rise apartment buildings were erected: Suburban Towers (1962), Park Sutton Towers (1964) and the luxurious Claridge House (1965), an example of that era's apartment hotels.



Rosemary Hills modernist homes brochure (circa 1951).



Rosemary Hills modernist houses designed by architect Joseph Miller (built 1951) on Richland Place

### Federal Installations:

During and after World War II, the federal government began dispersing sensitive operations to places outside but near Washington D.C. In 1942, the United States Army took over the National Park College, which by that time included Edgewood. The Army operated the facility as the Walter Reed Forest Glen Annex, using the Seminary buildings north of Linden Lane as a convalescent center for veterans until the end of the Vietnam War and the rest of the property for various research operations. In 2008, the facility became the Fort Detrick Forest Glen Annex, and now houses research facilities and a medical museum.

Throughout the 1950s, the United States Army also operated an anti-aircraft artillery installation, with battery and radar station (Battery B, 70th AAA Battalion) on land now used as Rosemary Hills Park.

### Purple Line:

New Purple Line stations should include displays that tell the story of the Sector Plan area. One of the stations will be located on land originally purchased by Samuel Lytton, a free black laborer whose property became the center of Lyttonville.

#### A. Goals

- Gain countywide recognition of the complex history of Greater Lyttonville.
- Document the rich social history provided by local residents of Greater Lyttonville.

- Capitalize on opportunities presented by the Purple Line stations to make Greater Lyttonville's past more evident.

#### B. Recommendations

- Recognize and preserve the African American heritage of the neighborhood.
- Recognize and capitalize on the agricultural, industrial, transportation and suburban history of the area.
- Incorporate historically oriented interpretive signage, markers and commemorative art throughout the planning area, including in Purple Line stations.
  - Seek funding for such signage, markers and art.
  - Make such signage, markers and art a priority in new development.
  - Use the historical background described in the Sector Plan as a preliminary basis for the content of such signage, markers and art.
  - Consult the Sector Plan's companion urban design guidelines for examples of historically oriented interpretive signage, markers and commemorative art.
  - Consult Historic Preservation staff at the Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission (M-NCPPC) to review content and location of signage, markers and art. Staff may seek input from the History and Art Committee (see description below).
  - Comply with the County's Public Art Guidelines (April 2013) for public artworks installed in the community.
- Establish a history and art advisory committee comprising Sector Plan area and vicinity representatives, M-NCPPC staff and other representatives of other relevant organizations, such as the Silver Spring Historical Society. This committee could help seek ways to enhance and make more permanent the Lyttonville history display at the Coffield Community Center; meet with the Purple Line Art selection committee to ensure that selected artworks reflect agreed-upon aspects of local history; and seek other ways to promote area history, such as on websites hosted by other organizations and through implementation of a potential Heritage Walking Trail.
- Establish a museum/interpretive space within the Plan area where photos and artifacts from Lyttonville's rich history can be preserved and made available to the public. The preferred location is within the historic Lyttonville community.
- Evaluate 20th-century resources in the Sector Plan area for addition to the Locational Atlas and designation on the County Master Plan for Historic Preservation. This study would occur subsequent to the adoption of the Greater Lyttonville Sector Plan, after the context of the County's 20th-century architecture and development has been further examined.
- Include Richland Place, a neighborhood of mid-century modern homes, among resources to be evaluated.