

Best Places To Live

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Whether you're buying a first home, trading up, or downsizing, here are a dozen great neighborhoods—from small-town charm to city cool, waterfront living to arts hub

IF YOU HAVE A FAMILY AND . . .
ARE LOOKING FOR A SMALL-TOWN FEEL

FALLS CHURCH

The City of Falls Church in Northern Virginia has its own mayor, police department, and school system. "You have a community center, new restaurants, unique shops, and a farmers market," says real-estate agent Colin Storm. "That's what a lot of America is losing.that mom-and-pop feel."

While single-family homes abound. Largely ramblers and Cape Cods built in the mid-1900s.new developments offer condos as well. Over the past few years, prices in the 22046 Zip code have held relatively steady, hovering in the low \$500,000s. In February, traditionally a slow month for real estate, more than half of the homes that closed in Falls Church City went under contract in less than 30 days.

One of the most popular areas for families is Broadmont, where tree-lined roads wind past brick Colonials and ramblers on deep lots. In the neighborhoods surrounding Thomas Jefferson and Mount Daniel elementary schools, sidewalks are often filled with kids on bikes.

Pete Davis, 22, grew up in Falls Church City and says he dreams of raising his own children there. He and his childhood friends refer to themselves as "lifers." They went to school together from kindergarten through high school and know one another's parents. "It's like having aunts all over the place," Davis says. "There's a lot of parent involvement."

Annette Hennessey, a 49-year-old mother of two, moved to Falls Church from Arlington in 1998 to get a larger house for her family. She experienced the small-town feel almost immediately when she called city hall about a parking permit: "They transferred me to someone who knew exactly which house was mine."

DON'T WANT TO GIVE UP THE CITY LIFESTYLE

CAPITOL HILL

Real-estate agent Roby Thompson calls Capitol Hill a i°mecca;± for young families. On weekends, the neighborhood's half dozen parks fill with moms and dads pushing strollers. Parents say play groups and activities are easy to find.the newly renovated Hill Center at the Old Naval Hospital offers moms' groups, children's music classes, and summer camps.

Robin Leon, 35, a stay-at-home mother, says she and her 18-month-old spend most of their days outside: "It's so great to be able to walk everywhere. We have a teeny back yard, but we'll be outside all day long."

Leon often meets other moms for coffee and attends children's concerts at the Atlas Performing Arts Center on H Street, Northeast. The community comes together for annual events such as the neighborhood's Fourth of July parade and "Hilloween," featuring hayrides and games at Eastern Market.

Jon Penndorf, a 34-year-old architect, says his four-year-old daughter loves stopping for a cupcake at Hello Cupcake or the Sweet Lobby. One of their favorite restaurants, Lavagna, lets her grind her own Parmesan cheese.



The neighborhood's popularity has pushed prices up; the median home price in the 20003 Zip code was \$565,000 in 2011, an increase of almost 11 percent over the previous year and of 16.5 percent over the past three.

Families often gravitate to the neighborhood's Victorian and Federal-style rowhouses, many of which were built in the early 1900s. Recently renovated homes tend to be the most expensive; updated rowhouses with two or more bedrooms typically start around \$600,000. And homes tend to sell quickly: In 2011, they sat on the market an average of 50 days—28 days fewer than the Washingtonarea average.

WANT TO BE WHERE DEVELOPMENT IS HEADED

HERNDON

Over the past three years, median prices in Herndon's 20170 Zip code have risen by 39 percent—more than in any other Zip code in Washington—from \$240,000 in 2008 to \$333,500 in 2011. Prices in Herndon's other Zip code, 20171, have also spiked—from \$426,950 in 2008 to \$485,000 in 2011.

Long & Foster agent Brad Rozansky attributes the area's growth to Metro's new Silver Line, which will pass through Herndon as it runs from Falls Church to Dulles. Rozansky says the grueling commute along I-66 and the Dulles Toll Road scared off would-be homebuyers in the past, but "all that is going to change with the Silver Line going in."

Families can find large Colonials with big back yards as well as townhouses and condos. One of the most popular neighborhoods for families, Old Dranesville Hunt Club, off Dranesville Road, hosts a Fourth of July parade. Resident Hallie Giuliano, 37, was drawn to the neighborhood for the communal pool and tennis courts as well as proximity to running trails and a nearby stream. She also liked the area's affordability, which enabled her to become a stay-at-home mom while still living in a four-bedroom home on a half acre of land.

Family music nights on Herndon's town green in summer, a dozen local playgrounds, and the Washington & Old Dominion bike trail add to the family appeal. "As busy as we all are," says town mayor Steve DeBenedittis, "people still get to know each other."

WANT A BIG BACK YARD

POTOMAC

For families looking for a lot of space, Potomac, just outside the Beltway in Montgomery County, may be the answer. While houses are expensive—the median price for the 20854 Zip code was \$825,000 in 2011—prices have softened over the last several years, declining by 4.6 percent from \$865,000 in 2008. And with homes sitting on the market an average of 93 days in 2011, more sellers may be willing to bargain.

"Some of the best deals we're seeing now are in the farther-out suburbs like Potomac," says Jason Mandel of Washington Fine Properties. "If you want a big house and a big lot, the opportunities are out there."

Malusa Rios Powell, a 37-year-old mother of two who recently moved to Potomac from Rockville, says she was able to get more for her money there than in closer-in Bethesda. "We were able to have that back yard," she says.

Another draw for Powell was excellent schools. In 2011, U.S. News included the area's two high schools, Churchill and Wootton, among the top 100 in the country for math and science.

Powell often takes her daughters, ages two and four, to Hadley's Playground, which has a play castle and pirate ship, and to ballet classes at the community center off of Falls Road. "We wanted our kids in the best school system; we wanted a great back yard and a great community," she says. "Potomac has all of that."

IF YOU'RE SINGLE AND ... HANDY WITH TOOLS

PETWORTH

Seven years ago, Anne Stom moved into a house in DC's Petworth that had been lived in by the same couple for 40

years. “Like many of the homes here, it was well built and had good bones,” Stom says. After making “600 million trips to Home Depot” while she renovated— and seeing many of her neighbors do the same—she decided the neighborhood was ripe for a hardware store. In February, she opened Annie’s Ace Hardware, one of many new businesses that have set up shop in an area undergoing tremendous change.

Built mostly in the early 1900s, Petworth was a thriving middle-class community for the first half of the 20th century. After the riots of 1968, the neighborhood declined dramatically. The opening of the Georgia Avenue–Petworth Metro station in 1999 sparked development that has been gaining momentum ever since. And more is on the horizon, including a Walmart and a streetcar line along Georgia Avenue.

Young professionals are drawn to the affordability, close-in location, and beautiful houses, including Wardman-style rowhouses and bungalows in a rainbow of colors. Although prices have risen—the median sale price went from \$289,000 in 2010 to \$320,000 in 2011—there are still bargains.

Despite the changes, many of the neighborhood’s longtime residents have stayed. Vivian and Paul Henderson have lived in their three-bedroom Colonial just north of Petworth for more than 50 years. “We went through a period where there were no children in the area,” says Vivian. “The neighborhood is coming back alive. We’re thrilled to see services that were here when we first moved in in 1959.”

WANT TO BE IN THE CENTER OF IT ALL

CLARENDON

A short commute to downtown DC, thriving nightlife and restaurants, and a wealth of condos and apartments draw many singles to Clarendon. “If you want to be in the best neighborhood in Arlington, you move to Clarendon,” says Jeff Grieco, who bought a two-bedroom, two-bath condo in the neighborhood last year.

City planners have long praised Arlington’s Wilson Boulevard corridor, which runs through Clarendon, as one of the nation’s most walkable and densely populated suburban communities. High-rise condos and apartments are filled with singles and couples. “It’s sort of like a halfway house between college and the real world,” says Grieco.

On weekend evenings, the neighborhood is packed with bar-hopping young professionals— they might stop at the live-music venue Iota Club & Café, the sports bar Spider Kelly’s, or the hipster favorite Galaxy Hut. Seven Clarendon restaurants made The Washingtonian’s list of 100 Very Best Restaurants this year.

From 2010 to 2011, median prices jumped by about 10 percent—from \$449,000 to \$495,000—and the average number of days on the market dropped from 51 to 46. In addition to condos and rowhouses close to the Metro, nearby neighborhoods are lined with Arts and Crafts bungalows, Colonials, and split-levels.

Two popular buildings for single buyers are Clarendon 1021 and the Phoenix, both of which have open kitchens with granite countertops and rooftop pools. According to Adam Gallegos of Arbour Realty, condos in the Phoenix sat on the market an average of only 21 days last year.

LOOKING FOR THE NEXT BIG THING

BLOOMINGDALE

When real-estate broker Suzanne Des Marais first started selling in DC’s Bloomingdale in 2001, she described her properties as being in LeDroit Park because few people had heard of Bloomingdale. “Now people are calling Eckington and Truxton Circle Bloomingdale,” she says.

In the easternmost part of the District’s Northwest quadrant, Bloomingdale was long a settled, predominantly African-American community in the shadow of Howard University. But as development pushed east in the early 2000s—from Dupont Circle to Logan Circle to U Street and Shaw—Bloomingdale began to attract young buyers looking for affordable homes within walking distance of DC’s hottest neighborhoods.

“Everywhere you turn, there’s renovations,” says Gary Mendel, who moved to the neighborhood in 2009 and spent two years renovating his house on Rhode Island Avenue. Many of the homes are Victorians with bay windows, built in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Thanks to primarily residential zoning, developers and builders have taken to fixing them up rather than tearing them down and building anew. “It’s a very attractive, cohesive neighborhood without a lot of infill lots,” says Des Marais.

Median prices in the 20001 Zip code have already seen a bump—from \$410,000 in 2010 to \$417,000 in 2011. Rowhouses range from about \$350,000 for one in need of a major renovation to \$800,000 for a home already redone. Condos—many of which are in converted rowhouses—start around \$200,000 for a one-bedroom and top out around \$500,000 for a three-bedroom.

WANT THE WALKABLE LIFESTYLE WITHOUT THE CRAZY PRICE TAG

SILVER SPRING

Families have long flocked to this Maryland suburb for its affordable prices, good schools, and easy commute to DC. But as downtown Silver Spring has developed, the neighborhood has attracted single buyers as well. “I was looking for something affordable, convenient, and close to the Metro,” says Susan Pologruto, whose three-bedroom townhouse is on the edge of Sligo Creek Park and within walking distance of the Silver Spring Metro.

“It’d be very difficult to find a one-bedroom in Logan Circle for what you would pay for a two-bedroom, two-bath in Silver Spring,” says real-estate agent Melinda Estridge.

Downtown Silver Spring began its transformation in the late 1990s when the American Film Institute committed to refurbishing the Silver Theatre and Discovery decided to move its headquarters nearby. Recently, the Fillmore, a concert venue that opened last fall, has brought acts such as Mary J. Blige, Blondie, and Wale to town. Ethnic restaurants including Mandalay and Addis Ababa have flourished along with chains such as Lebanese Taverna and Copper Canyon Grill.

In the early and mid-2000s, a crop of luxury condos popped up in the 20910 Zip code, where most of the area’s attractions are located. Estridge recently sold a two-bedroom penthouse apartment in the Crescent, a 14-story condominium that opened in 2006 near the Metro, for \$390,000.

Restaurateur Jackie Greenbaum capitalized on the influx of twenty- and thirtysomethings by opening a hip lounge called Sidebar two years ago. With vintage furniture, chandeliers, and a backlit bar, the speakeasy-style place would fit well on DC’s H Street, Northeast. Says Greenbaum of the bar: “It draws heavily from the younger population that’s moved into the nearby buildings.”

IF YOU’RE DOWNSIZING AND . . .

ALWAYS DREAMED OF LIVING BY THE WATER

ANNAPOLIS

Real-estate agent Mike Hamby says he gets contacted every week by about a dozen potential buyers who want to move to Annapolis after their children have left home.

For empty-nesters who fantasize about living near the water, now may be a good time to buy in the Annapolis area. Three of the city’s Zip codes—21401, 21403, and 21409—have seen prices fall in recent years. In 21401, median prices have dropped by 5½ percent over the past three years, to \$375,000; in 21409, median prices fell by just over 3 percent, to \$347,000. The biggest decline was in Zip code 21403, just south of downtown Annapolis, where prices are down by almost 20 percent, to a median 2011 price of \$318,500. In all three Zip codes, homes sat on the market more than 100 days.

Real-estate agent Kimberly Barton says foreclosures played a big role in dragging prices down. While foreclosures are finally leveling off, there are still good deals to be had, especially for buyers willing to do some work, such as renovating a kitchen.

In addition to water views and a strong boating culture, Annapolis offers continuing education at Anne Arundel

Community College, performances by the Annapolis Symphony Orchestra, and art classes and exhibits at Maryland Hall. Murray Hill resident and magazine publisher Donna Jefferson, whose youngest son is in college, sees many of the same faces at her favorite coffee shop, Hard Bean Coffee & Booksellers, every morning. She loves to walk along the water. "You get so you know when high tide is," Jefferson says, "when the jellyfish and crabs are coming in—you get into that whole rhythm."

LOVE ART AND CULTURE

DC'S WEST END/FOGGY BOTTOM

Recent development has breathed new life into the West End and Foggy Bottom. A mixed-use project on George Washington University's campus called Square 54 has added a 36,000-square-foot Whole Foods as well as office space, a luxury apartment building, and a handful of new restaurants. "There are a lot of students, a lot of young professionals, more and more young families, and a large retired community," says Asher Corson, president of the Foggy Bottom Association.

While much of the neighborhood consists of rowhouses built in the early 20th century, a good many high-end, modern condo buildings have opened recently. With amenities such as concierges, valet parking, and fitness centers, they've become popular with emptynesters who no longer want the headache of maintaining a single-family home.

The revitalization may help explain why prices in the 20037 Zip code are up by close to 15 percent over the last three years—and up by 6 percent from 2010 to 2011, when the median home price reached \$505,000. Prices in the new, high-end condo buildings can be much higher—a two-bedroom, two-bath in 22 West, in the West End, sold in September for \$1.6 million.

The neighborhood offers easy access to the Foggy Bottom Metro station, several bus lines, and the Capital Crescent Trail. The restaurants and shops of Dupont Circle and Georgetown are 15-minute walks away. Nearby museums include the Corcoran Gallery of Art and the Phillips Collection. George Washington University, which lets neighborhood seniors audit college courses at a reduced rate, is another draw.

Barbara Howey, 65, and her husband moved to the Watergate after raising their family near San Francisco. They attend the Kennedy Center's free Millennium Stage performances almost every evening. "We just walk down there," Howey says. "It's ideal."

WANT YOUR MONEY TO GO A LONG WAY

CHANTILLY

Chantilly offers easy access to the Appalachian Trail, the Shenandoah Valley, Virginia wineries, and the Blue Ridge Mountains. But perhaps the biggest draw for empty-nesters is its affordability. "You can get quite a bit of house," says real-estate agent Colin Storm, "or downsize and really cut costs." Storm adds that many emptynesters make the move before they retire, especially if they work in Northern Virginia.

About 25 miles west of Washington, Chantilly comprises two Zip codes: 20152, which had a 2011 median house price of \$416,850, and 20151, where the median was \$339,950. Although both Zip codes have held their value pretty well in recent years, the more rural 20152 has seen prices soften as new developments created an oversupply of housing. In 20151, the neighborhoods consist mostly of large Colonials built in the 1980s and '90s. Because of the limited housing supply, the market there has been stronger.

Grace Han Wolf, owner of the paint-your-own-pottery studio Clay Cafe Chantilly, says grandmothers often bring their grandchildren into the store. The local community center, the Cub Run RECenter, has a pool, a fitness center, and a nature program for adults. The Dulles Expo Center regularly hosts events, from flea markets to craft festivals, and residents recently came together to raise money to renovate Chantilly Regional Library, which originally opened in 1995. Quick access to Dulles Airport makes visiting and hosting grandchildren relatively easy.

Says Wolf: "There's everything an empty-nester might want within 30 minutes."

VALUE CONVENIENCE

GAITHERSBURG

In the past two decades, several large planned developments have been built around Gaithersburg, creating communities where residents can eat, shop, and play within walking distance of home. Lakelands, for example, has more than 1,000 condos, apartments, townhouses, and single-family homes. Residents can dine at Tandoori Nights or Buca di Beppo and do their grocery shopping at the nearby Whole Foods or Giant. The community has its own pool, tennis courts, and clubhouse.

“We had a spike in prices back in 2005, 2006, and 2007,” says Gaithersburg broker Roy Kelley. “Now prices are back down.” In the 20882 Zip code, prices have fallen by almost 11 percent over the past three years, bringing the median home price to \$580,000 in 2011. Homes sat on the market an average of 112 days in 2011, much longer than the 78-day average in the Washington area.

But in certain hot spots, houses sell briskly. Susie Danick, 51, recently traded townhouses in Kentlands. Both sold close to their asking price within two weeks of being listed. “If things are priced appropriately, they sell very quickly,” she says. Danick moved to Kentlands right before her eldest child left for college. “We didn’t want the maintenance of a big house anymore, and I can walk everywhere. It’s easier living.”

Built in the 1990s, Kentlands has singlefamily homes, townhouses, and apartments as well as restaurants, an arts center, a theater, clothing boutiques, and a grocery store. Danick walks her dogs every morning around the community’s two lakes.

In 2000, Danick launched a business, Transitional Assistance & Design, to help people who are moving to smaller homes. Demand has grown so much that she now has 25 employees.