

REAL ESTATE

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Higher Prices, Tougher Choices

*Smaller Houses, Farther Out
Are Frequent Compromises*

By DANIELA DEANE
Washington Post Staff Writer

Sharon and Edward Virag had a clear vision of the house they wanted to buy when they moved here from Phoenix.

They dreamed of an older red-brick Colonial with black shutters. They didn't want to live too far out — Fairfax Station was as far from the District as they planned to go. And they wanted at least a half-acre of land.

To get that, they were willing to pay from \$650,000 to \$800,000.

As it turned out, they got none of the above. They paid \$900,000 for a newer, more modern-style house on less than a third of an acre farther out, in Chantilly. They bought the house after seeing it only once, at night.

And they're ecstatic.

The Virags aren't that unusual. With house prices soaring throughout the Washington area, finding a new place to live often involves a series of difficult choices. Many would-be homeowners venture into the market with well-considered wish lists, only to find themselves crossing off one desire after another.

Buying a home has always involved some compromises. The reality of what's for sale at any time has always forced buyers to accept, in order to get. But in today's frenzied atmosphere, the pressure to compromise may have reached new levels. Buyers must adjust their expectations quickly — on price, location, condition, style, size and a host of other seeming must-haves — or forget it.

"It got pretty comical at the end," Sharon Virag said. "You compromise and compromise and compro-



Arlington County

By ROB PEGORARO
Washington Post Staff Writer

Arlington County January through December

For yet another year, housing costs continued to inflate in Arlington. Across the county, 2,824 single-family houses and townhouses sold at a median price of \$465,000 — \$70,000, or 17.7 percent, more than in 2003.

The steepest increase came in the 22206 Zip code, which covers Shirlington and adjacent neighborhoods.

Median value there jumped from \$276,000 to \$340,000, a 23.2 percent spike, according to a Washington Post analysis of county sales records. However, that was still the lowest median price in the county.

The 22202 Zip code, stretching from Interstate 395 to the Potomac, had the next-highest jump; median prices rose 22.5 percent, to \$574,750.

In all but one other Zip code, increases ranged from 14.7 to 20 percent.

In that exception, the 22209 Zip code that folds in Rosslyn and Fort Myer Heights, the median value skidded 12.7 percent, to \$579,900. (That was the second-highest median, after the \$605,145 figure for North Arlington's 22207.)

Zip code	2003		2004		Change in median price
	Total homes sold	Median purchase price	Total homes sold	Median purchase price	
21305	—	—	4	\$281,800	—
22101	2	4,000,000	1	1,650,000	-2,350,000
22201	346	467,500	345	536,000	68,500
22202	97	469,000	120	574,750	105,750
22203	191	420,000	219	495,000	75,000
22204	565	298,900	625	355,000	56,100
22205	274	450,000	333	542,000	92,000
22206	368	276,000	452	340,000	64,000
22207	543	519,000	572	605,145	86,145
22209	98	664,562	109	579,900	-84,662
22213	53	439,500	44	507,500	68,000
TOTAL	2,537	\$395,000	2,824	\$465,000	\$70,000

Weichert agent Ron Cathell explained the reduced median in the 22209 Zip code as the result of a glut of new, slightly less expensive housing. He said, "I can tell you that nobody's housing prices have come down around here."

Condominiums, a big chunk of Arlington's housing stock, saw an even steeper climb, with 1,529 selling for a median price of \$315,000 — 26.5 percent above last year.

Thomas Rice, the county's director of real estate assessments, called this trend "the

longest protracted increase in values that we've seen."

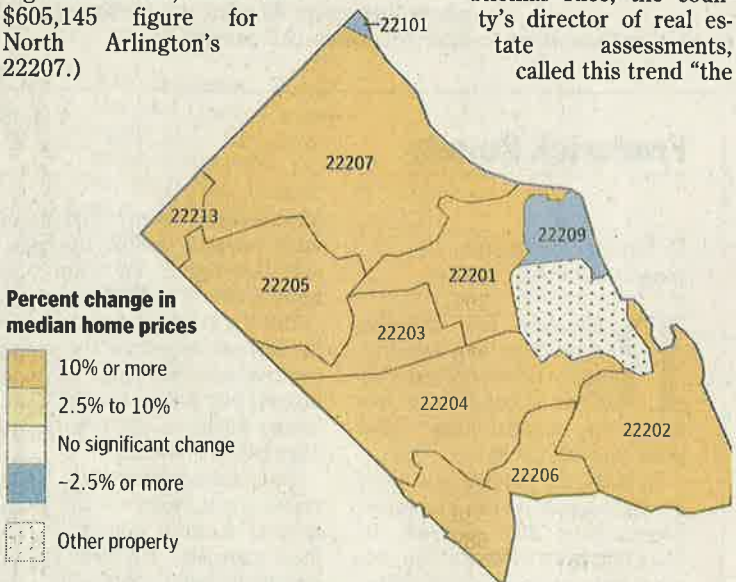
Billy Buck, associate broker with Buck Realty, said he has seen no slowdown in the most competitive segment of the market: \$625,000 to about \$850,000.

The most sought-after neighborhoods, Buck and Cathell said, remain those along Metro's Orange Line. "It has all the attractions of the kind of city life you'd find in Dupont Circle or Adams Morgan or Georgetown," Cathell said.

What's a little more affordable? Bob Clark, a 15-year-veteran of Long & Foster's Arlington office, suggested the Alcova Heights and New Arlington/Douglas Park neighborhoods, on opposite sides of Columbia Pike.

Kathryn Scruggs, chair of the Arlington County Civic Federation's housing committee and a county public-school teacher, decried the way most of her colleagues are priced out of Arlington if they don't already own homes. She said: "It's not a healthy community unless it has all income levels."

Clark noted that things aren't much better elsewhere, citing a house near McLean that a client lost when it went for almost \$100,000 more than its asking price of \$695,000. "It's not just limited to Arlington," he said.



SOURCE: Full-value transactions as reported by the county