

# Real Estate

BUYING?

SELLING?

JUST  
CURIOUS?

Here are the Washington-area housing market numbers you need to know.

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THE WASHINGTON POST MAPS

## WHERE WE LIVE

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**3.76%**  
Mortgage rates rise. **27**

# Where Pentagon City bustle meets small-town calm

BY HARRIET EDLESON

Pentagon City has become a neighborhood in its own right, with its Metro station followed by the shopping mall and a still-growing number of apartment towers, but it was historically the north end of a quiet enclave of single-family homes.

That section of Arlington County is called Aurora Highlands, and Jim Oliver bought his house there in 1994. Initially, he was attracted by the convenient location. Now it has become a place where he can step outside to talk with other dads while children ride by on their scooters.

In the past 20 years, "the biggest demographic shift is kids," said Oliver, the immediate past president of the Aurora Highlands Civic Association.

To Cheryl Mendonsa, who has lived in Aurora Highlands since 1990, "it's a little town very close to a big city. It's the best of both worlds."

Mendonsa lives in a "little brick house that looks like a little carriage house, compared with the newer houses," she said. "Almost no two houses are alike."

**Walkable wannabe:** As more shopping and dining and housing come to Pentagon City, Aurora Highlands' neighbor to the north is growing into a walkable urban place. But some say it has a long way to go.

"Pentagon City is evolving and, in spite of huge assets, still does not have a sense of place, a heart, yet," said Christopher Leinberger, a research professor at George Washington University's business school. "It will come."

Yet some longtime residents say the area was vital and appealing long before the recent additions.

"The spirit of the neighborhood tends to predate things like the mall and the Metro," Oliver said.

Aurora Highlands and Arlington Ridge, the neighborhood just to the west, were once where city dwellers headed to escape the intense Washington heat. They came for the breezes that the higher elevations offered.

At least 14 Sears catalogue houses dot the streets of Aurora Highlands, part of which has been designated as a historic district by the National Register of Historic Places.

The Pentagon City Metro station opened in 1977. The shopping centers eventually followed, with the Fashion Centre at Pentagon City opening in 1989, then Pentagon Centre, a smaller enclosed mall, in the early 1990s and the open-air Pentagon Row in 1999.

"I much prefer that to a mall," Mendonsa said of Pentagon Row, which includes a Harris Teeter supermarket. "I like the feel of a mom-and-pop Main Street."

Nordstrom and Macy's anchor the Fashion Centre mall, where a Ritz-Carlton hotel sits just next to the Metro station. Pentagon Centre, featuring a Costco warehouse store, is about to undergo redevelopment.

**Lots to do:** Mendonsa came from Riverside, Calif., to Washington in 1982 to work for her congressman. She lived in an apartment at first and bought a house four years later.



PHOTOS BY EVY MAGES FOR THE WASHINGTON POST

**Aurora Highlands from both sides: a bungalow on 24th Street South, above, and the ice rink at Pentagon Row in the neighboring Pentagon City area, below. Part of Aurora Highlands, bottom, stretches nearly to Four Mile Run and Alexandria.**



She said the D.C. area was culture shock at first, but over time, Mendonsa, now 65, has grown so attached to her neighborhood that she can never imagine leaving it. During the week, she works as part-time director of public affairs for a small technology policy company. On the first Saturday of the month, she's likely to attend the pancake breakfast at the Methodist church.

The area has lots of features that residents enjoy: the seasonal outdoor ice-skating rink at Pentagon Row; Virginia Highlands Park and the Aurora Hills Branch Library, in the green space buffering the older residential streets from Pentagon City; and a Halloween festival complete with face painting. Neighbors gather at Prospect Hill Park in Arlington Ridge to take in the national fireworks each July 4.

The 18-acre Virginia Highlands Park has lighted baseball/softball fields, basketball courts and a spray ground for cooling off in the summer. "It's coming along," Oliver said.

**Living there:** Aurora Highlands is tucked south of Pentagon City and west of Crystal City in South Arlington, bordered roughly by Virginia Highlands Park and Hayes Street to the north; Joyce Street, 26th Street South and Grant Street to the west; Fern and Eads streets to the east; and South Glebe Road to the south.

Over the past 12 months, 134 properties, including condos, townhouses, duplexes and single-family houses, sold in Pentagon City, Aurora Highlands and Arlington Ridge, according to Billy Buck, an associate broker at Buck & Associates. They ranged from a 516-square-foot studio for \$140,000 to a newly constructed single-family house for \$2.13 million.

Currently, Buck said, 23 houses are for sale in the area, ranging from a studio condominium priced at \$169,999 to a new Tudor house listed for \$2.398 million.

**Schools:** Oakridge Elementary, Gunston Middle and Wakefield High.

**Transit:** Access to the area is easy via Metrorail's Pentagon City stop on the Blue and Yellow lines. Metrobuses and Arlington Transit buses also serve the area.

The 10-to-15-minute Metro ride to downtown Washington is an asset, residents say. "It's two stops to L'Enfant Plaza on the Yellow Line," said Dominic Hawkins, 24, who has rented in the area for more than three years. He had lived in the District for a year and knew he wanted to find an area that was quieter.

**Crime:** In the past 12 months, according to Arlington County police, the area had three aggravated assaults, nine robberies and seven burglaries.

Harriet Edleson is a freelance writer.

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To see more photos of Aurora Highlands, go to [www.washingtonpost.com/realestate](http://www.washingtonpost.com/realestate)