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PHOTOS COURTESY BOB MARSDEN/CITYVISTA



Mount Vernon Triangle's CityVistaSM condos have attracted first-time buyers who want to live in the heart of D.C. Residents have access to the Vista Green, top left, and enjoy airy and open kitchen and living spaces.

Neighborhoods to Watch

Four regions offer bargains for rookie buyers tempted by a federal tax credit

There's nothing quite like the jingle of extra pocket change to revive shoppers' capitalist urges. For many first-time home buyers, a tempting trifecta — low interest rates, accessible price points and the \$8,000 first-time buyer federal tax credit — is pushing newbies from the sidelines and into the bullring.

"There has certainly been a surge in the under-\$500,000 market, especially with condos," says Realtor Andrea Evers of Evers & Co. (Eversco.com) in Dupont Circle. "We expect a condo frenzy in the next couple of months as people try for that [tax] credit."

Whether the tax credit will rescue the flagging housing market remains to be seen, but some

agents can't help but feel cheery watching the flood of first-time buyers jockey to outbid each other for prime real estate in the Washington area.

The tax credit expires Dec. 1. Translation? The time to hesitate is over. "Every buyer that is considering [purchasing] a home should make a move very fast," says Martina Burns, Realtor with RE/MAX Allegiance (Burke-realestate.com). "There's lots of competition out there."

Four Washington-area neighborhoods — Logan Circle/Shaw and Mt. Vernon Triangle in the District; and Fairlington/Shirlington and Centreville in Virginia — have much to offer cash-strapped first-time buyers, whether they're condo-cravers or pining for a townhouse on the range. (Maryland buyers with similar needs might consider Hyattsville, where residents enjoy close proximity to the District but a small-town vibe, historic homes

and an arts district.)

Of course, the most fab homes will be gone in a flash — but then again, so too will that \$8,000.

FAIRLINGTON/SHIRLINGTON

Nuzzled up to I-395 in Arlington County, the garden-style condos and townhouses of Fairlington-Shirlington remain popular among first-time NoVa buyers, with one-bedroom condos selling for around \$250,000.

Affordable prices there have lured first-timers such as Joy Beck, 30, who in late February closed on a two-bedroom/two-bathroom condo in the West Village of Shirlington (Condosatshirlington.com). Even after renting in the D.C. area for nearly 10 years, she hadn't given much thought to buying a place until a short sale opportunity arose that she couldn't pass up.

"The facilities are amazing — we have a huge pool, brand-new gym, a nice community center

“We expect a condo frenzy in the next couple of months as people try for that [tax] credit.”

—ANDREA EVERS
EVERS & CO. REALTOR

and it's very dog-friendly," gushes Beck, an assistant vice president/portfolio manager at M&T Bank, who happily coexists with her golden retriever/collie mix pooch Lucy.

Beck enjoys the area's close sense of community, whether mingling with her 20- and 30-something neighbors at cookouts planned by the condo association or across the street at Shirlington Village. (The shopping center has outposts of Harris Teeter, Cake Love, Capital City Brewing Company, Guapo's and more, plus three

movie theaters.)

The Fairlington Villages' World War II-era condos and townhouses are another longtime young buyer favorite. "There's almost a college campus-type atmosphere" among Fairlington Villages homeowners, says Billy Buck, president of Buck & Associates in Arlington (Buckrealtors.com). "Not only are [the condos] affordable, but they're also very attractive."

For prospective Fairlington-Shirlington buyers seeking more bang for their bucks, Long & Foster real estate agent Christine Rich (Bestarlingtonhomes.com) suggests checking out The Arlington (spread among an area bordered by S. Walter Reed Drive, S. Wakefield Street and 28th Road) where two-bedroom condos often sell for less than \$300,000.

LOGAN CIRCLE/SHAW

City-craving District buyers — who possess neither the bank accounts for Georgetown nor the patience to wait around for development to strike areas less trodden — often gravitate toward Logan Circle and adjacent blocks of Shaw. "Logan is fashionably urban, and proba-

by the most diverse crossroads of the city," says Ken Johnson, CEO of DCRealEstate.com.

After a few years of renting in the Logan Circle neighborhood, Michael Topp, 29, director of membership of the Society of Industrial and Office Realtors, and Rob Linnander, 26, a health-care consultant, came to a simple conclusion: They loved the neighborhood about as much as they hated the high cost of rent. Last summer, the couple became the proud owners of a 1,000-square-foot one-bedroom-plus-den Logan Park condo at the 16-unit building at 1616 11th St. NW.

"Logan Circle is so dynamic and still changing," Topp says. "A dog park just opened across the street, and there's always something going on along 14th Street."

Prime addresses like those in Logan Circle don't come cheap. Condos in Shaw and Logan typically range from \$250,000 to \$499,000 for cozy one-bedrooms, often in new buildings that feature high-end finishes (granite counters, stainless steel appliances), elevators and on-site gyms, says D.C. Realtor Kevin J. Wood (Kevinjosephwood.com).

Evers suggests buyers interest-

ed in Logan and Shaw check out The Chastleton (Chastletondupont.com) between Dupont and Logan Circles. Because it's a co-op, prices there are a bit lower than similar condos in the area.

MT. VERNON TRIANGLE

When native Washingtonian Dana Mattison recently decided to buy her first place, she looked to the new CityVista (Cityvistade.com) development in D.C.'s up-and-coming Mt. Vernon Triangle.

"I grew up in the suburbs of Northwest," she says. "It's exciting for me to come downtown." Mattison, 22, also works as settlement coordinator for CityVista, so she can attest that many fellow first-timers have been flocking to the project. To her, taking advantage of the tax credit to buy a City Vista pad was a "no-brainer." "It's an investment in the area," she says. "That's the benefit of the tax credit — more people can make it work who might not have been able to come to the city otherwise."

The project has breathed new life into the former void through the opening of a shiny new Safeway grocery, Busboys and Poets (1025 5th St. NW) and Fifth Street Hardware (1055 5th St. NW), plus

coming-soon retail such as a second branch of H Street NE's Taylor Gourmet Deli.

Buyers wary of downtown's concrete jungle can find refuge

There's 'almost a college campus-type atmosphere' among residents of Fairlington Villages' homes.

at Vista Green, a private one-acre park in the middle of the CityVista complex. One bedrooms at CityVista start in the \$300,000s.

CENTREVILLE

Radiating from I-66, Fairfax County exurbs award residents relatively easy access to Northern Virginia and downtown D.C., which appeals to rookies who don't mind living beyond the Beltway and want more space than a condo.

"The first-time home buyers I work with are looking in Centreville, Chantilly and Fairfax and looking in the \$200,000 to \$350,000 range. There is a lot of activity," says Jane Quill, a

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JAY FAULKNER

Shirlington residents relax at the local outpost of Busboys and Poets, which hosts open-mic poetry events, author talks and book signings, and more. The condos and townhomes of Shirlington and Fairlington have attracted many first-time buyers.

broker and past president of the Northern Virginia Association of Realtors.

Centreville's lower price tags — and larger floor plans — attracted Chris and Suzanna Bell, 24 and 23. This past May, the couple snagged a townhouse on short sale at Woodgate Village (Woodgatevillage.org), a 123-unit community at Stone Road and Route 29. The Bell's new digs have three bedrooms, one on each of three levels, plus an open kitchen and living room, basement-level family room and fireplace.

"It puts us right in the middle of a lot of stuff," Chris says. "It's a short hop down 29 to the Manassas business district. We're probably five minutes from a mall. We can take 66 to the Metro to get to downtown D.C." **KATIE KNOROVSKY**

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