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Arlington County

By Rob Pegoraro
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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.)

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

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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 Alcovia 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.

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