

The Examiner

# REAL ESTATE

YOUR WEEKLY GUIDE TO WASHINGTON-AREA HOMES

Current mortgage rates  
30-year fixed, conforming  
- bankrate.com

D.C. **5.14%**  
Md. **4.95%**  
Va. **4.98%**

THURSDAY  
MAY 21, 2009

## GREAT NEIGHBORHOODS



# River East: An area on the rise

PHOTOS BY ANDREW HARNIK/EXAMINER

By Dean Bartoli Smith  
Special to The Examiner

The neighborhoods east of the Anacostia River — Congress Heights, Hillcrest and Anacostia, to name a few — are beginning to provide affordable and accessible housing options only minutes from downtown. Historic row homes, condominiums and town houses set on the rolling hills and bluffs of Southeast feature incredible views of the city, access to Metro and major roadways, and competitive pricing levels.

Homesteaders who have settled into these neighborhoods resent them being broadly labeled as in “Anacostia” when things go wrong, and feel slighted by the tag “east of the River,” which sounds to them like “the other side of the tracks.” They refer to the area as “River East,” and the name change has become a rallying cry in their efforts to transform long-held perceptions.

“It’s a secret area,” RE/MAX agent Joel Martin said. “There are lovely neighborhoods. Hillcrest looks exactly like Bethesda.”

After decades of failed or delayed initiatives, the city’s track record for delivering on its promises has been less than stellar.

“It’s been underrated and underserved for years,” Martin said. “After 25 years, where is the development?”

The movement to revitalize

River East is being driven by a spirited group of young professionals — many of whom author blogs — who will stop at nothing to get the abandoned buildings torn down, the street corner memorials decorated with liquor bottles removed and more than one decent place to have dinner.

“There are only a few places to patronize in the neighborhood,” said LaShaun Smith, of Congress Heights. “THEARC offers various exercise classes — yoga and Pilates; IHOP, which is the only place we can sit down and order a meal; and MLK Delhi, which has very good food.”

There is one Giant grocery store, a Popeye’s and not much else.

“We need a Chipotle, Starbucks and a few cafés to sit, eat and have a drink,” Smith said.

Many of the 19 projects slated for the area at a cost of \$400 million are under way. The Department of Homeland Security will relocate in 2010 to St. Elizabeths — the mental hospital that once housed Ezra Pound and on whose premises several hundred Civil War soldiers rest in an integrated graveyard. This relocation will intensify efforts to develop the area.

Formerly off-base housing for the Air Force, the Savoy Court condominium development combines an Art Deco feel with quartz countertops, views of D.C. and stainless steel appliances.

“The majority of people in the complex are single professionals with college degrees,” said The Advocate, who preferred being identified by her blog handle. “It’s hip. It’s high-end. It’s a great place to live.”

Nonetheless, the area still struggles with an image problem.

“There are challenges,” she said of Congress Heights. “We’re like a diamond in a paper bag — and sometimes all you see is the bag. You wouldn’t know we have deer, foxes and bald eagles.”

The historic Anacostia neighborhood features beautiful old town homes in the Wardman and Italianate styles. Its rich history dates back to the Nacotchtank tribe, which had settled along the river in the 16th century, and includes a visit by Captain John Smith in 1608. It was once home to Frederick Douglass and, ironically enough, was D.C.’s first suburb.

“Since the ballpark was built, people are looking across the river for what’s next,” said resident David



MAP BY ANGELA HAUGHNEV FOR THE EXAMINER

### At a glance

#### March 2009

- Average sold price in the 20032 and 20020 ZIP codes: **\$195,500**
- Average list price in the 20032 and 20020 ZIP codes: **\$198,000**
- Average days on market for homes sold: **101**

#### March 2008

- Average sold price in the 20032 and 20020 ZIP codes: **\$249,000**
- Average list price in the 20032 and 20020 ZIP codes: **\$254,500**
- Average days on market for homes sold: **69**

Garber, who writes the And Now, Anacostia blog. “There is an exciting charge in the air.”

Recently, high-profile arts events have been held in new Anacostia galleries. Construction has begun on the Big Chair — believed to be the first coffee shop across the river.

“The future is bright for River East,” Smith said. “There are young professionals of all backgrounds and ethnicities moving into the neighborhood. With fresh ideas and new leadership, the community will see its full potential.”

Progress is finally being made.

# Top reasons to live in River East



### Affordable housing

There are a number of mixed-use housing developments planned or in process. “More people will begin moving east of the river with the lowest housing on Capitol Hill at \$500,000,” said Realtor Joel Martin. Asheford, Wheeler Terrace and Savoy Court are new developments. Bungalows, Colonials, ramblers, town houses and condominiums can be purchased for between \$150,000 and \$400,000. There are also new rental options such as The Grays on Pennsylvania Avenue. “Historic Anacostia is breathtaking,” local blogger The Advocate said.

### The Town Hall Education, Arts & Recreation Campus

A world-class education, arts and recreation campus is located east of the Anacostia River in Washington, D.C.’s Ward 8. A beautiful and modern state-of-the-art structure, THEARC provides an outlet for children in the neighborhood to be exposed to dance, theater and the arts. In addition to a 365-seat community theater — the only theater of any kind east of the Anacostia River — THEARC includes a regulation-size gymnasium, a computer lab, an art gallery, state-of-the-art music and dance studios, and other first-rate facilities.

### Frederick Douglass National Historic Site

The site preserves the beautiful home of Frederick Douglass, one of the most prominent African-Americans of the 19th century. Douglass lived in the house, which he named Cedar Hill, from 1877 until his death in 1895. Perched high on a hilltop, the first African-American National Historic Site also offers a sweeping view of the U.S. Capitol and the Washington skyline.