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DC Real Estate Sales Said to be Bleak Yet Insiders Contradict Popular View

By Michael K. Wilkinson

Part One: Background

Recent reports in the press have painted a picture of a real estate market in turmoil. Steeply adjusting mortgage payments leading homeowners to panic and bail, or foreclose. Whole neighborhoods dropping precipitously in value as more homes hit the market than can be absorbed by the demand. Mortgage companies folding under the pressure of their non-performing loans and a lack of new business. Developers dropping out of condominium projects or converting from condo to rental.



What's confusing is that, in the District, it just doesn't seem to be that bad. Is it true, and if so, why?

After extensive discussions with a wide range of real estate professionals, and after trying to make a bigger story out of this question, it boils down to something quite simple: supply and demand.

That Was Then: Unprecedented Demand

There is no doubt that the market has shifted quite dramatically in the recent past.

Up until about two years ago, developers routinely sold out projects before ground was even broken, and individual homeowners were showered with heartfelt letters, gift

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photo—courtesy, LCCA House Tour Committee.

Nos. 1 & 2 Logan Circle. When built after the Civil War each side was its own huge mansion house. However, after a period of long decline it was converted into eight large and luxurious condominium residences thanks to the vision of then new-on-the-scene developer Monte Hoffman.

Logan Circle House Tour to Reveal Vintage Houses and Contemporary Lofts

By Parker Stanzione*

The Logan Circle Community Association (LCCA) invites District residents to attend its 29th annual Logan Circle House Tour on Sunday, December 2, starting at 1 pm and continuing through 5 pm. The self-guided tour concludes with a Wassail reception at the Studio Theatre at 14th and P Streets from 3 until 5:30 pm.

This year the tour will include eight homes in the neighborhood that represent the theme, "Expanding the Logan Circle Experience."



photo—courtesy, LCCA House Tour Committee.

Living room of one of the residences in the The Icon Lofts condominium.

"This year the tour brings you a new view of Logan Circle and the growth that is continuing to make our neighborhood more diverse and vibrant," says Tim Christensen, 2007 House Tour Chairperson. "Commitment to community, tradition, and the future are our watchwords as we strive to keep Logan strong to our longtime residents and welcoming to our new ones."

For a more modern view of what's happening on the 14th Street corridor, guests can visit the Cooper Lewis, which has become a modernist landmark in the neighborhood

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Gentrification Accompanies Historic Preservation in Adams Morgan; New Projects Featuring Excellent Design Applauded But Tenants' Rights at Risk

By Anthony L. Harvey

Two newly announced high-end apartment developments in Adams Morgan are providing novelists on the workings of such concepts as "historic preservation," "inclusionary zoning," the retention of affordable or workforce housing, and the continuance of statutory tenant rights — this when century-old, modest apartment buildings are

new, high-end apartment units in the east and west sides of Adams Morgan, with both being legally established as "condominium regimes," although initial plans call for renting the units.

Like a giant pincer, these and similar projects either underway on Champlain and 17th Streets or recently completed on Euclid and 17th Streets will continue



architect's rendering—courtesy Eric Colbert & Associates.

Partial view of the façade design for the planned new Dorchester extension as the architect envisions it will appear when seen from the west side of 17th Street. Shown on the far right is the rear portion of the former Citadel Center which will house the new, upscale Harris-Teeter supermarket.

emptied of their working class residents and subsequently proposed for historic rehabilitation, and become legally designated new "condominium regimes." Such is the case with two, small abutting structures on Vernon Street; so, also, is the case of the soon-to-be-deemed historic Dorchester House apartments on 16th Street.

For the Dorchester, developers are proposing the attachment of a new extension, or addition to the existing rental apartment building; it will also create a new condominium regime, thereby eliminating tenant rights yet, at the same time, may be eligible for significant historic preservation tax credits.

And in the 1800 block of Vernon Street, after a telescoped time frame of neighborhood and ANC community meetings, Kalorama West LLC and Novo Development Corporation won conceptual and design approval from the city's Historic Preservation Review Board (HPRB) at its October 25, 2007 monthly meeting for additions and adaptations to the Aurora and Coronado apartments in what is now the Washington Heights Historic District. Also approved by the HPRB was the Dorchester House addition.

Thus, the Vernon Street project along with the Dorchester House on Kalorama Road between 16th and 17th Streets in the soon-to-be established Meridian Hill Historic District represent the old becoming new and the new taking advantage of being both old and new.

Subject to final design review by HPRB staff, these two projects will provide 127

the redefinition of various community components comprising this long-established mixed income and multi-cultural section of northwest Washington.

Adaptations to the now vacant Aurora and Coronado apartment buildings on Vernon Street will serve to restore these two relatively small historic structures and add a handsome glass and steel bridge, designed by Dupont Circle-based Bonstra/Haresign Architects, connecting the two buildings which abut in the rear. By so doing, the architects succeed in eliminating the existing, unsightly exte-



photo—courtesy Bonstra/Haresign Architects.

An example of the quality design work for which the architects of the Vernon Street project are known can be seen in the Q14 Condominiums at 14th and Q Streets, shown here.

rior fire escapes, none of which meets code. Three apartments will be added to the present 25 and a basement wall on the rear of the two buildings will be partially removed to create eight new parking spaces — six more than required by zoning regulations; no parking spaces presently exist.

As a new condominium regime, no rental conversion to condominium tenant rights will exist nor will rent control

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NEW PROJECTS

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be applicable as to this historic, 1910 rental building's planned rehabilitation. This caps a recent process by which a previous owner had been accused of harassing tenants and had demonstrably refused to properly maintain the two buildings.

The Dorchester House addition will be constructed on its present 120-space surface parking lot in the rear of the building, which occupies the last remaining open area on 17th Street between Euclid Street and Kalorama Road. While being designed and planned for construction as an addition to the existing, 394-rental unit Dorchester, this new 99-unit four story building with underground levels for parking 170 cars will also be legally established as a condominium regime even though these new units initially will be rentals.

As a "by right" construction proposal — one needing no zoning relief — and with inclusionary zoning being delayed, no "affordable units" need be provided, and statutory rent control and condominium conversion protections for tenants will not be provided since the addition's status will be a "new" addition to an historic old building. Tenant rights for residents in the old Dorchester will continue, though those of "rent control" are becoming academic as the cost of the ambitious buildings systems and apartment upgrades being presently conducted are passed on to renters.

Prior to the HPRB's October 25th approval of these two projects, the Adams Morgan ANC's Planning, Transportation, and Zoning (PZT) Committee heard presentations from both applicants at its October 10th monthly meeting — too late to provide input to the full ANC before the already scheduled HPRB consideration. Washington architect Eric Colbert present-

ed a new, and Art Deco-sympathetic, design for the Dorchester House addition; it was well received by both ANC commissioners and neighbors in attendance — as had been the Bonstra/Haresign Architects' design for their Vernon Street project. Although grave concerns were expressed over such matters as the lack of timely HPRB notice to the ANC, and the consequences for tenant rights in the new Aurora, Coronado, and Dorchester additions and historic restorations and adaptations, no action was undertaken that sought to delay the October 25th HPRB consideration of these two proposals.

Also presented at this PZT Committee meeting was an HPRB staff-prepared Power Point presentation for the proposed new Meridian Hill Historic District, one that celebrates the vision of Mary Foote Henderson, the wealthy U.S. Senator's widow who prospered as the developer of mansions on 16th Street intended for foreign embassies and Ambassadors' residences and who agitated — unsuccessfully — for permanently renaming 16th Street as "Avenue of the Presidents." Mrs. Henderson was also successful in leading the movement to clear the row houses — shacks, as she reportedly referred to them — from the land that became Meridian Hill Park, also known by District of Columbia Council resolution as Malcolm X Park. The period of significance being proposed for this new historic district would end in 1949, the year in which Mrs. Henderson's castle-like mansion was demolished. During informal discussion with people in attendance, HPRB staff expressed a willingness to consider other "end dates," suggesting for alternative consideration 1931, the year of Mrs. Henderson's death. □

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