



BROOKINGS GREATER WASHINGTON RESEARCH PROGRAM

WASHINGTON AREA TRENDS

Households Increase Faster Than Housing Units

From 1990 to 2000 the Washington area added 218,000 households, but housing increased by only 205,000 units. The result was a vacancy rate that went down from 6.3 percent in 1990 to 4.7 percent in 2000 and left people scrambling for housing, especially in the Virginia suburbs. This drop in vacant units contributed to the hot real estate market that caused real estate values to increase sharply in the late 1990s.

While the area as a whole had fewer vacant units as a result of households increasing faster than housing units, there were substantial differences across the region.

Northern Virginia

The Northern Virginia suburbs experienced a huge 24 percent increase in households over the decade and a similarly large 20 percent increase in residential units.

Changes in Households Compared to Changes in Housing Units 1990-2000				
	Change in Households 1990-2000	Percent Change	Change in Housing Units 1990-2000	Percent Change
District	(1,296)	-1%	(3,644)	-1%
Alexandria	8,640	16%	5,999	10%
Arlington	7,607	10%	5,579	7%
Fairfax	58,734	19%	52,029	16%
Loudoun	29,277	96%	29,228	89%
Prince William	27,607	34%	26,288	30%
Total No. VA	131,865	24%	119,123	20%
Montgomery	41,662	15%	38,909	13%
Prince George's	28,921	11%	32,288	12%
Charles	8,734	27%	9,416	27%
Calvert	8,500	50%	8,602	45%
Total Sub. MD	87,817	15%	89,215	14%
Washington Area	218,386	16%	204,694	14%

Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1990, 2000.



Changes in Vacant Housing Units 1990-2000				
	Vacant Housing Units Percent 1990 Vacant		Vacant Housing Units Percent 2000 Vacant	
District	28,855	10.4%	26,507	9.6%
Alexandria	4,972	8.5%	2,362	3.7%
Arlington	6,327	7.4%	4,074	4.5%
Fairfax	16,409	5.1%	9,120	2.4%
Loudoun	2,442	7.4%	2,260	3.6%
Prince William	5,871	6.7%	3,950	3.5%
Total No. VA	36,021	6.2%	21,766	3.1%
Montgomery	13,495	4.6%	10,067	3.0%
Prince George's	12,079	4.5%	15,768	5.2%
Charles	1,537	4.5%	2,235	5.1%
Calvert	1,988	10.5%	2,129	7.7%
Total Sub. MD	29,099	4.7%	30,199	4.3%
Washington Area	93,975	6.3%	78,472	4.7%

Source: U. S. Bureau of the Census, 1990, 2000

The additional 119,000 units, nevertheless, fell short of the 132,000 household increase. This imbalance halved the vacancy rate in Northern Virginia from 6.3 percent in 1990 to 3.1 percent in 2000. The percentage of vacant units in Fairfax County was only 2.4 percent in 2000, the lowest vacancy rate of any major jurisdiction in the area. Nonetheless, Fairfax County led Virginia's growth in housing units with over 58,000 new units. The largest decrease in vacant units, however, occurred in the City of Alexandria that went from 8.5 percent vacancy rate in 1990 to 3.7 percent in 2000.

Suburban Maryland

In contrast to Virginia, Suburban Maryland had a much smaller 15 percent increase in households but added almost exactly the same number of housing units as households. As a result, the vacancy rate in Maryland decreased only slightly from 4.7 percent in 1990 to 4.3 percent in 2000. Vacant units even increased slightly in both Prince George's and Charles counties as a result of the addition of more new

units than households. Charles County had the highest 2000 suburban vacancy rate at 7.7 percent, but that was still a decrease from the 10.5 percent in 1990.

District of Columbia

In the District of Columbia, both the number of households and housing units declined. While households declined by 1,296, housing units declined by 3,644 between 1990-2000. The vacancy rate in the District only declined slightly from 10.4 percent to 9.6 percent, still leaving the District with the highest vacancy rate in the area.

The relatively small decrease in households was surprising in view of the 35,000 person loss in population, but most of the District population decrease resulted from an average household size that went from 2.26 persons in 1990 to 2.16 in 2000. This change in household size accounted for about 25,000 of the population loss with much of the remainder resulting from a 6,000 reduction in the population living in institutions, such as St. Elizabeth's Hospital.

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