

In N.Va., getting a new leash on life

Older neighborhood has many amenities and a popular dog park

BY KATHY ORTON

For all the amenities Shirlington has — and it has many — the most overlooked might be its dog park along Four Mile Run. It is a green space, economic engine and housing driver all wrapped up in one.

“It’s a fluke,” says Edith R. Wilson, president of the Shirlington Civic Association. “These days they’d never approve putting a dog park next to a stream. But it’s there to stay.”

Arlington County estimates the dog park receives close to 200,000 visits a year.

“What it represents is we may not have Metro but people buy [homes] here all the time because of the dog park,” said Wilson, who drops by Best Buns Bread Company for pastry, Peet’s for coffee and Dogma Dog Bakery for dog treats before taking her Cavachon to the park. “It is a major asset to the area and to our merchants.

“When they planned the economy of the Shirlington area, they got boutiques and theater and WETA and restaurants, but no one in the county ever thought that one of our economic engines would be a dog park.”

This pet-friendly community five miles southwest of the District and adjacent to Highway 395 started off as a 27-acre former shopping center. Shirlington was one of the first strip malls in the country when it opened in 1944. For a while, it had the largest shopping center in the area and originally was named Chernerville, after automobile dealer Joseph Cherner, but the name didn’t stick. Instead, it was renamed Shirlington, a blending of Shirley Highway (395) and Arlington.

The transformation of Shirlington from a sleepy suburb to a walkable, urban community was the result of cooperation between Arlington County and Rockville-based Federal Realty, an owner, manager and developer of shopping centers and street retail properties. Federal Realty, which bought the Village at Shirlington in 1995, is the fourth owner of the land since 1982 but the first to



PHOTOS BY JOHN MCDONNELL/THE WASHINGTON POST

FROM TOP: It’s all about the dogs, with Marnie Russ, left, and Skeeter chatting with Heidi Kiesling and Harry at Dogma Gourmet Dog Bakery & Boutique; the dog park on Four Mile Run; and, from left, Elizabeth Hoover, Josh Singer, Samantha Glass and Evan Hicks with his dog Oshie at Samuel Beckett’s Irish Gastro Pub.

capitalize on its potential.

Although the pandemic curtailed activity, the Village at Shirlington looks to once again become a popular dining and entertainment destination with the Signature Theatre, an AMC movie theater and popular restaurants Carlyle and Busboys and Poets. The Arlington Public Library branch, which opened in 2007, is a neighborhood favorite.

Campbell Avenue, the main drag in Shirlington, is named for

Elizabeth and Edmund D. Campbell. She was a founder of WETA, the public television and radio station located in Shirlington. He led the effort to make Arlington one of the first integrated school systems in Virginia.

Kellen MacBeth had lived in Arlington for 16 years, most recently renting an apartment in the Court House neighborhood. When he decided last year it was time to buy, he knew he wanted to remain in Arlington, where he

had strong roots in the community and was active in civic life. The government consultant originally wanted to stay in the Court House area and live near a Metro station.

“For many years now, I assumed that I wouldn’t be able to purchase a home in Arlington at least without having a partner or a second stream of income,” he said.

When he couldn’t find anything in his price range, MacBeth expanded his search to Shirlington.

“It was affordable for the type of home and the type of neighborhood I was looking for,” he said.

After looking at a number of condos and being outbid on several, MacBeth ended up buying a condo at the Arlington Condominium on Walter Reed Drive in September. His new home had things he wanted — a fireplace and a dishwasher — and something he didn’t know he wanted — green space. The building backs up to woods, and Barcroft Park is a five-minute walk away.

“It just didn’t seem worth it to pay what I’m paying now but get substantially less for the money in a more urban environment where I don’t have the trees and the beauty around me that I really have come to appreciate in Shirlington,” he said, comparing his new neighborhood to his former one.

The lack of a Metro stop may be a drawback for some, but Wilson says she doesn’t mind not having a station close by.

“It’s a good thing we don’t have Metro,” she said. “It protects us from a sort of super growth. That’s not who we are. We are a village along a stream.”

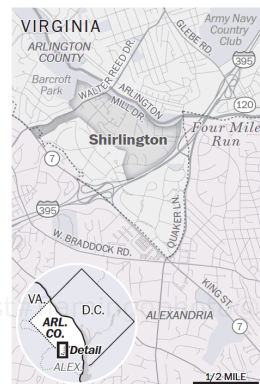
She points out that Shirlington is a 20-minute bike ride from the planned new Amazon headquarters.

“I’m talking beautiful bicycle paths along the stream,” she said.

Shirlington isn’t completely devoid of public transportation. It has the county’s only indoor bus station, located near South Randolph Street and 31st Street.

Not only does Shirlington not have a Metro stop, it also doesn’t have any single-family houses. The housing stock is entirely multifamily, with three rental buildings and eight condominium complexes — one high-rise and seven garden townhouse communities. The neighborhood contains about 2,300 households, according to Wilson.

“There’s a good mix of style of condos,” said Sallie Seiy, a real estate agent with McEneaney Associates. “Some are that condo where you walk up flights of stairs. Some are townhome-looking homes where you walk right into your front door. You’ve got garden style. Right in the Village at Shirlington you’ve got the high-rise elevator style. They’re all community-oriented condo living. It



Source: Maps4News/HERE THE WASHINGTON POST

just depends on what type of condo style you want. You’ve got plenty to pick from in this area.”

Shirlington attracts first-time home buyers who come here for its affordability.

“You do see a lot of renters who live here who convert to owners,” Seiy said.

Living there: Shirlington is bounded by South Walter Reed Drive to the north and west, with part of the community stretching above the road, South Arlington Mill Drive to the north and east, Interstate 395/Shirley Highway to the south and the Fairlington neighborhood to the west, according to the Shirlington Civic Association.

Home prices jumped significantly from 2019 to 2020 in Shirlington. The median sales price rose to \$499,000 last year from \$446,000, a 12 percent increase. Homes sold ranged from a one-bedroom, one-bathroom, 700-square foot condo for \$245,000 to a three-bedroom, four-bathroom, 2,200-square-foot end-unit townhouse for \$745,100. There are 18 homes on the market, ranging from a one-bedroom, one-bathroom condo for \$285,000 to a two-bedroom, two-bathroom condo for \$615,000.

Schools: Abingdon and Claremont Immersion elementary, Gunston Middle, Wakefield High.

Transportation: Shirlington Bus Station is the principal transfer point for Metro and ART bus service in South Arlington. It is a six-minute bus ride to the Pentagon City Metro Station. Capital Bikeshare has six stations close by, including one outside of the bus station and one at the eastern entrance to the W&OD Trail. The Four Mile Run Trail connects Shirlington to the Mount Vernon Trail.

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