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Mount Vernon Gazette



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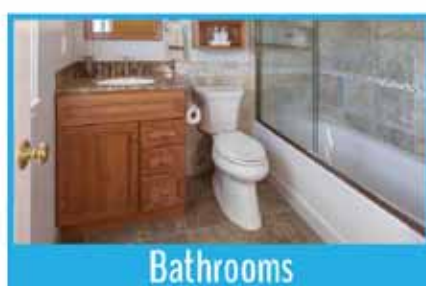
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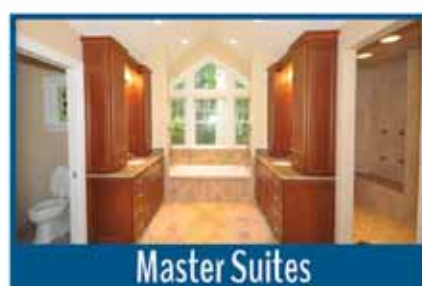
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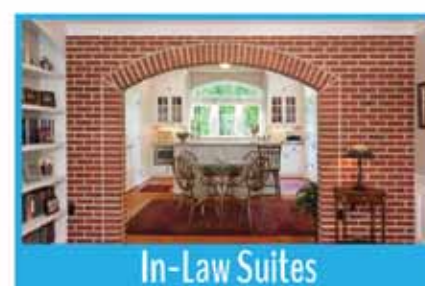
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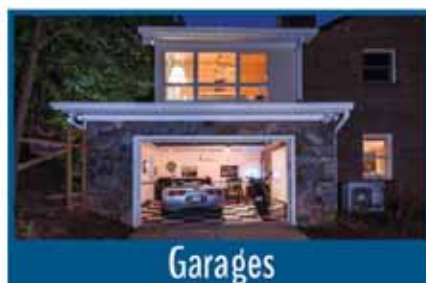
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NVAR Summit at GMU's Mason Inn

Complex shortage of homes for sale likely to persist.

BY TIM PETERSON
THE CONNECTION

Nationally syndicated columnist and moderator Kenneth R. Harney introduced the expert panel for the Northern Virginia Association of Realtors (NVAR) 17th annual Economic Summit Thursday morning, Sept. 5.

Dr. David Crowe, chief economist and senior vice president of the National Association of Home Builders, joined economic experts David E. Versel, a senior research associate at the George Mason University Center for Regional Analysis, and Dr. Lawrence Yun, senior economist for the National Association of Realtors. The panel addressed a full house — representing the nearly 10,000 realtor and “affiliate business members” that comprise the NVAR — on issues they believe best explain the current housing market and outlook, for both northern Virginia and the United States as a whole.

Though none could offer any “silver bullet” solutions to address all their concerns for housing, all agreed that growth in the market within a genuinely rebounding economy is sustainable, if only at a slower rate than the last year.

HARNEY, WHOSE COLUMN “The Nation’s Housing” appears in The Washington Post and in syndication, opened the program on a positive note, praising the “fortunate” market of the last year. And the increased sales, listings and home prices, he said, are demonstrative of a second, more generally sustainable phase of economic rebound that should give buyers and sellers alike hope.

But Harney was also quick to follow with qualifications and caveats to the optimism. “It may vary where you are,” he said, “but as far as I can tell, the entry-level buyer is still missing in action. They’re out there, but



Members of the Northern Virginia Realtors Association filled the conference hall at the Mason Inn on the campus of George Mason University for the 17th Annual NVAR Economic Summit.

they face hurdles. Student debt load is a big issue. And the job market is a huge constraint for the first-time buyer.”

VERSEL WAS THE FIRST PANELIST to speak, giving more detail regarding past, present and future economic forces in the DC metropolitan area as they relate to housing. A major concern for Northern Virginia is the decline in federal jobs and federal procurement. His data show a continuation of the trends, with one example being a \$14 billion decrease in spending from 2010 to 2017.

“There’s no question the primary economic driver of this region has always been Uncle Sam,” Versel said. “That said, we’re not Detroit. We haven’t been a one-horse town for the last 30 to 40 years. For example, Fairfax County has attracted Volkswagen North American Headquarters. We have that base of brainpower, and hopefully that’s leading into a new generation of economic growth.”

Versel sees a steady increase in building permits as a positive marker. Between 2012 and 2017, he forecasts 55,000 new jobs

being created in the housing industry, which should come as a package with increased construction and greater inventory.

Lack of inventory, Versel explained, is a key impediment to the more rapid strengthening of the market. Families or individuals looking to trade up have fewer options to do so, and first-time or entry-level buyers have fewer options to become involved at all. Versel attributes this mainly to the vast amount of homeowners in northern Virginia between the ages of 45 and 64.

“Nearly half of all homeowners in this region are in the Baby Boomer demographic,” he said. “Let that wash over you for a second.” Versel cited data from the 2010 Census.

“That’s in no small part why inventory remains a problem,” Versel continued. “They don’t want to retire, they don’t plan to retire. Some of it is financial and some of it is lifestyle: ‘I’m not old, I’m never going to get old, and I’m living here forever.’ They’re probably going to stay in these places for another 20 to 30 years. For younger people who want to buy houses in

those areas, unless you have new construction, there just isn’t any inventory to purchase.”

CROWE ECHOED HARNEY’S call out of the missing entry-level buyers, citing national survey data from University of Michigan studies, among others. “No matter what market you’re in, the larger picture does matter. The government is going to react to what the rest of the economy’s going to do.”

Crowe said lifestyle choices — children of Baby Boomers moving in with their parents and deferring marriage, childbirth, etc. — and economic insecurity had and continue to have profound influence on household creation.

“We’re in store for enormous pent up demand,” said Crowe. “When people don’t know what their future’s going to be,” they’re less likely to move out of their parents’ basements, get divorced, have more children, etc. “That’s why we had such a surplus of houses. We didn’t build too many houses — people stopped moving out. That’s coming back again.”

During the last housing peak, Crowe said household creation at the national level was 1.4 million annually. In the slump, that figure dipped to half a million. According to Crowe, it should be at about 1.2 million.

With the slow but now steady growth of the national housing market — contributing a three percent out of a more ideal six percent to GDP — Crowe is optimistic more and more of this pent of demand will emerge as entry-level sales. But there are still potential lags: availability of credit can be limiting and discouraging, the cost of building materials is increasing.

YUN ALSO STRESSED the importance of job creation in helping prop up the missing entry-level segment. He specifically referenced students who, whether they “over-borrowed” or not, collectively feel the weight of loan debut. “What will most help them pay off debt or buy a home,” he said, “is really jobs. If they have jobs, student

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Northern Virginia Designers Awarded Rooms in Showhouse Event

Northern Virginia/metro area interior designers Kelley Proxmire of Kelley Interior Design and Wayne Breeden of E. Wayne Breeden Design are among 17 designers awarded rooms at the benefit Winchester Showhouse & Gardens, open to the public through Sept. 29.

The Showhouse features an 18th century home in the Shenandoah Valley, Long Green, known for its historic and architectural prominence and beautiful vistas.

Landscaping, shopping, artwork and designer sales complement the event, which benefits Blue Ridge Hospice, a not-for-profit hospice organization serving the Piedmont and Shenandoah Valley.

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Long Green, an 18th century home in the Shenandoah Valley, is made over to benefit Blue Ridge Hospice.

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Top-to-Bottom Makeover Embraces Longterm Horizons

The Hollis family wanted a house that would work better today — and long into the future.

By JOHN BYRD

Sometimes it's not limited square footage that makes a house feel inadequate — it's how that square footage is configured.

Take, for example, the circa 1970s Vienna split-level Andre and Katy Hollis purchased in 2005. With more than 3,200 square feet of living space that included four bedrooms, three bathrooms and a large family room, most would consider the house sufficient — even enviable — as the primary home for a family of four.

True, the previous owners had been empty-nesters, which partly explained why there was a soaking tub instead of a shower in an upstairs bathroom allocated to two pre-teen boys.

Still, the structure's two-level main block seemed to have capacity to spare. There was a guest room; a full bathroom on the first floor; a home office.

In fact, it was the lack of need for changes that had prompted the Hollis' to buy the house in the first place.

But while recuperating from an accident a few years ago, Katy Hollis began to reassess. "I decided that I really like our neighborhood and that we could stay in the house indefinitely. But I also saw that I had been ignoring a lot of things that didn't work for us. And the shortcomings were even more obvious when I looked ahead."

All of this sounded familiar to Mindy Mitchell, the Certified Aging-In-Place Specialist at Sun Design Remodeling Katy Hollis called in to talk over some ideas.

"In the last two decades, designers have learned a lot about how to customize a traditional production house floorplan for longterm use," Mitchell said. "Size is less important than how rooms are purposed and configured. The goal is to create a plan that will logically support priorities."

As discussions with Mitchell evolved, Katy Hollis unveiled her larger agenda. To make the house more functional for both current and foreseeable needs, the home-

owner envisioned a series of focused revisions: a spacious first floor bedroom; a gourmet kitchen; television-viewing that's not in the midst of other entertainment zones; a guest suite with dedicated bath; an indoor-outdoor segue to the beautifully wooded backyard.

The new plan had to serve a variety of concurrent scenarios. There should be beautifully articulated front-facing rooms that would support the occasional dinner party. They needed a family gathering area for daily meals and everyday interaction. The new kitchen should be equipped with a gas range, a wine refrigerator and generous food preparation surfaces.

"I found it reassuring to talk about the house as a place we might occupy 30 years from now," Katy Hollis said. "I thought that we probably had the necessary square footage to make the changes I had in mind, but there were many space planning considerations we needed to work out carefully."

Certainly, the current plan was problematic.

The entryway foyer was flanked by an L-shaped galley kitchen to the left and a family room four steps down on the right.

One could proceed to the back of the house from the galley kitchen to a rear dining room, or from the parallel foyer directly to

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a small sitting room adjacent to the dining room.

The arrangement often led to bottlenecks. At parties, guests would circulate back to the family room after dinner creating traffic jams in the foyer.

Moreover, a promising view of the pretty backyard was hampered by undersized windows — which made the back of the house too dark.

SUCH PROBLEMS were equally apparent upstairs. The front-facing master bedroom suite was large enough — but the master bathroom could only be accessed through a closet/changing area, and the plan lacked a walk-in closet and privacy. Adding to the inconvenience, the only shower available for second floor guest room was one flight down, on the

ating the TV in the newly remodeled basement allowed us to fully convert the family room into a more formal living room and eliminate the marginally useful sitting room.

Freeing-up the 17-foot-by-8-foot sitting area in the back of the house, Mitchell and team next shifted the dining room to the front (across the foyer from the new living room), allocating 170 square feet in the rear for a gourmet kitchen and family dining area.

A course of large back windows now dramatically improves natural light availability and visual continuum.

THE CENTERPIECE of the new kitchen is an L-shaped food preparation and dining counter. The custom built-in provides seating for four, easy access to the butler's



Following an accident, the Hollis family decided to reconfigure their Vienna home for both improved day-to-to functioning, and long-term use. From left: Alex, Max, Katy and Andre in the newly remodeled family room.



The former galley kitchen offered few supports for inspired food preparation.

BEFORE: Kitchen



Moving TV-viewing from the living room to an upgraded lower level has made the first floor far more functional while adding an element of privacy to the new master suite.

first floor.

"Our challenge was comprehensively re-imaging how space could be allocated while staying inside the envelope of the house," Mitchell said.

Interestingly, a decision to move TV-watching away from the front-facing family room set the reconfiguration process in motion.

"We saw the rooms in the front of the house as a suite that would better serve all formal entertainment needs," Mitchell said. "Situ-

pantry en route to the new dining room, and a critical leg in a work triangle that facilitates essential cooking and clean up tasks.

"It's much easier to both cook and tend to guests," Katy Hollis said. "The dining room, foyer and new living room are well-unified aesthetically; guests don't even need to see the kitchen."



BEFORE: Living Room

Re-purposing bedrooms and bathrooms also figured prominently in the makeover. Katy Hollis wanted both a guest room with dedicated bath and a larger, more private master bedroom suite.



PHOTOS BY BRYAN BURRIS

"We had to scrutinize the footprint closely," Mitchell said. "Fortunately, there were first level utility rooms adjacent to the family room we could either delete or re-assign in our search for space to accommodate a first level master suite." Relocating an upstairs hall bath, thus, gave Mitchell

the option to move the laundry to the second floor. The former master bedroom suite now becomes the coveted guest quarters. A second floor corner bedroom has been transformed into a bathroom for the two boys complete with a double sink vanity.

With the laundry now out of the way, Mitchell and team re-deployed 300 square feet on the rear of the first level for a spacious and very private master bedroom suite that includes a master bath and generous walk-in closets.

A home office behind glass-facing French doors opens directly into the redecorated living room. The first level bath has been refashioned as a handsomely appointed guest powder room.

"It's a terrific solution in every detail," Katy Hollis said. "And knowing we've already made some solid decisions about the future is really quite satisfying."

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Home LifeStyle Like Magic

New plan in built-out 1940s colonial gains vital square footage as young family looks ahead.

BY JOHN BYRD

In the end, a skillful spatial reconfiguration is like a deft magician's trick — you've seen it with your own eyes, but you still can't figure out how they did it.

"Really, I don't know how this plan created so much more usable space," Alexandria resident Alice Goulet said, discussing a recent reconfiguration to several rooms in the family's 1,800-square-foot center-hall Colonial.

"All the changes stayed within the house itself, yet there's much more capacity and openness."

Sarah Wolf, the designer at Foster Remodeling Solutions hired by Alice and Paul Goulet to find an alternate floorplan solution, is pleased with the outcome, too, but she's seen this before. She said that owners often think the only way to gain useable square footage is to build an addition.

"The real challenge to converting less into more," Wolf said, "is knowing where existing space is being wasted."

But to start at the beginning: the Goulets purchased this brick-clad circa 1940s three-bedroom house 10 years ago when Alice Goulet was expecting the couple's first child.

As the family grew (there are now two girls and a boy — all under age 10), so, too, did the need to plan ahead. Starting in 2007, in fact, the Goulets hired Foster Remodeling on two occasions: first to finish the basement and enclose a porch; the second time to design an eat-in kitchen.

One fact emerging in the earlier remodelings, however, seemed daunting relative to the future. Under city code, the Goulets learned, the amount of new construction that could be added to the exterior had already been maxed-out.

"That meant we were looking for more usable space inside the existing structure," Wolf explains. "And this is the real frontier in older close-in homes; it's interior space planning that has really revolutionized the



The master bath is articulated in Tuscan accents: natural clay tile combined with maple cabinet facings brushed in black stain; a tile wainscoting unifies the entire room including a spacious soaking tub.

way traditional homes are now being used."

Itemized as a "wish list," the Goulet's goals seemed simple enough. Alice Goulet wanted a soaking tub, and an upstairs location for the washer/dryer. Paul Goulet envisioned a large walk-in shower. Both sought more closet space and "elbow room" in the master suite — plus, a larger bathroom for the kids, a new place for the linen closet...

AND, STILL, there was this lingering question of: what next? Where could more space be found if needed?

"Initially, I found it hard to see how we were going to gain any usable space," Alice Goulet said. "The master suite was pretty built-out."

Specifically, previous owners had constructed a rear elevation two-level wing with the master bedroom on top accessible through a small bedroom in the main house. The suite itself was configured as an L-



BEFORE: No room for a soaking tub here. While Wolf's only deletion was a small linen closet, the designer says that "inches count" in a tight-space plan solution.

shaped sleeping area wrapping a shelled-in enclosure that included a wardrobe closet, a linen closet and a master bath.

"The adjacent room in the main house had become a sort of foyer and dressing area for the master suite," Alice Goulet said. "Since the walk-in-closet was immediately inside the bedroom door, the entrance to the bedroom often got pretty cluttered."

All that changed when Wolf went to work.

Exploring several budget variations, Wolf presented two plans: one that retained the existing space configuration as-is; a second option that "wipes the slate clean" — eliminating the "L" and reapportioning the suite into two parts: a rectangular sleeping area on the wing's eastern side; a walk-in closet and master bath positioned side-by-side on the room's western wall.

"We saw immediately how well the second plan worked," Alice Goulet said. "It makes the bedroom much more functional, and private."

While relocating a small linen closet was the only functional en suite deletion, Wolf's master bathroom layout finds the vital square footage needed for both a soaking tub and a walk-in shower.

The part of the floor previously occupied by the old bath now becomes a 36-square-

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foot walk-in closet complete with tray ceilings. The plan also reassigns the former suite foyer as the footprint for a new children's bathroom — which is now twice the size of its predecessor.

The real boon to Wolf's solution, though, is how well the new space works.

"The bedroom feels much larger," Alice Goulet said. "The narrow dressing zone has been eliminated. The whole room is open and airy."

Alice Goulet credits Wolf, too, with interior design that really differentiates the master suite's featured assets.

Choosing lighter reflective colors for wall surfaces, the new scheme draws out the brighter natural ambiance of a room that



BEFORE: The old L-shaped configuration consisted of two converging legs, both too narrow for comfortable habitation, the owners say.

features east-facing French doors, a second window and a skylight.

A new teakwood custom-designed bed and headboard provides a suitably geometrical focal point to a room that is otherwise tranquilly elemental.

By contrast, the master bath is articulated in warm earthy Tuscan accents: natural clay tile combined with maple cabinet facings brushed in black stain; a tile wainscoting that unifies the entire room including a spacious soaking tub.

Alice Goulet said that most of the space planning and finishwork decisions were made at Foster Remodeling's showroom in Lorton.

"The showroom helped to made the process orderly," she said. "So many options inspire creativity."

Thinking ahead, the Goulets had the design team create stair access to a third floor attic, which they plan to eventually build-out as either their son's bedroom or a children's playroom.

"What we really appreciate about the incremental approach we've pursued with Foster is that it allows us to think everything through carefully," Alice Goulet said. "That really matters when you have a growing family."



Designer Sarah Wolf reconfigured an Alexandria couple's master bedroom suite to create a more functional floorplan that gains a 36-square-foot closet and a spa bath with soaking tub and a walk-in shower.

Big Ideas for Small Spaces

Local designers offer ideas for decorating small rooms.

BY MARILYN CAMPBELL
THE CONNECTION

Whether one is sprucing up a small powder room or decorating a studio apartment, space limitations often pose a design challenge. However, local designers say that no matter how a small space's square footage or how awkward the layout, there are plenty of decorative cures for small spaces.

Jean Freeman, a professor of interior design at Marymount University in Arlington, recommends multiuse furniture. "[On] one project I put in a Murphy bed that folded up and there was a desk that could then be put down from the underside of the bed. It was fantastic," she said. "Work and eat on it during the day, clear the table and sleep on it at night."

Designer Debbie Wiener, of Designing Solutions in Silver Spring, Md., also suggests maximizing the use of wall space. "There's only one floor, but there are four walls, so don't just decorate the walls, furnish them," she said. "Tall book cases, floating wall shelves, wall-mounted cabinets, desks and tables that fold up against the wall are all functional pieces that give great storage and work space without taking up any valuable floor space."

LARGE FURNITURE can overwhelm a small space, says Courtney Thomas of The Picket Fence in Burke. "Using small-scale furnishings helps keep things in proportion," she said. "A narrow bookcase is great for small spaces."

Small tables and chairs with folding legs are another good option.

Thomas also said mirrors are a great way to make a small space seem larger. "They help reflect light and bring depth to a space," she said. "Even a small mirror in a narrow hallway or tiny room can make a big difference."

Storage ottomans can serve a dual purpose in small spaces. "They can be used as a coffee table but can also serve as extra



PHOTO COURTESY OF ANN O'SHIELDS

An oversized storage coffee table such as this one can also be ideal in a very small space, says Ann O'Shields. "It will allow enough surface space to use for food and drinks for entertaining."

storage," said Ann O'Shields, of The Nest Egg in Fairfax.

"They are large enough and sturdy enough to be sat on for extra seating and they are also great for ottomans. Choosing a fun fabric is a great way to add some color to your space and they can always be tucked under a console table or into a corner when not in use."

WHEN DESIGNING a small kitchen, Arlington, resident Allie Mann, project designer at Case Design/Remodeling said, "Keep floor coverings such as hardwood the same from the kitchen into the adjacent rooms. If you use floor tiles, use larger format tiles to minimize the amount of grout needed."

When it comes to appliances, Mann suggests mini-models. "Use space saver appliances such as microwaves and built-in organizers for knives and spices," she said. "Additionally, a microwave can be installed in the island or below a cabinet to free counter space."

When it comes to color in small spaces, Sharon Kleinman of Transitions by Sharon Kleinman suggests using bold and dramatic hues, but not patterns. "Use lush fabrics with lots of texture to create interest," she said. "For example, in a small powder room, I might use an antique mirror on one wall and then wallpaper in a rich color on the other walls." She added that it's best to pick wallpaper with a small to medium pattern.

skilled workers.

Yun applauded the multi-skilled workforce in and around DC as "a clustering effect beginning to grow." He believes more businesses will be drawn to the workforce, independent of government, which could in turn help create more jobs in the region.

Finally, noting the rising population of renters, Yun implored the audience (to pass along to their clients) to be wary of inflation over the next year. "We may actually get a 6 percent mortgage next rate next year, if inflation rate pops out. It's something to watch carefully."

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NVAR Summit

FROM PAGE 3

loans are not a problem. It's about job creation. We are creating jobs, but at a slow pace. This is hindering young people in the country."

But like all the panelists, Yun's presentation was peppered with plusses and minuses. A positive for employment seekers, as well as their potential employers, is the concept of "clustering," according to Yun. Clustering takes place when a sizable number of skilled workers congregate in a certain area and that attracts employers, which attracts more

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