

Spring 2015 HomeLifeStyle



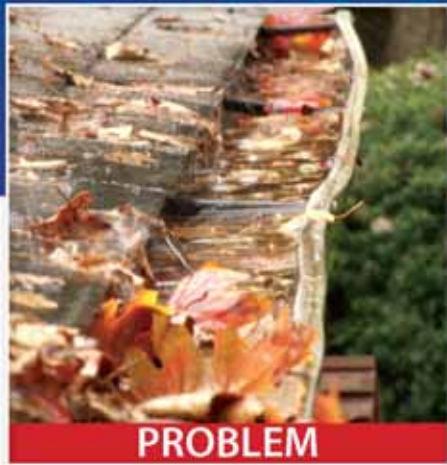
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Spring Pop for the Real Estate Market?

Agents again optimistic for a strong spring

BY TIM PETERSON
THE CONNECTION

Just like last year, real estate agent Ron Kowalski is optimistic coming out of the winter doldrums. He runs Ron Kowalski Real Estate Group with Keller Williams Capital Properties, covering Lorton, Fairfax Station and Springfield.

“Expectations are again high for the spring market,” he said. That’s due in part to mortgage interest rates being attractively low, just like last year. “The rates haven’t gone up, as we all thought.”

Interest rates for a 30-year fixed mortgage, both nationally and in Virginia, weren’t quite as low in April 2014 (4.1-4.2 percent) as the year before (3.3 percent), according to the online real estate database Zillow. But with the economy gradually recovering, agents were feeling a surge coming on.

In 2014, “the year started off strong until we got up to about July and August,” said Rex Reiley, with RE/MAX Allegiance in the Mount Vernon area, “when things started to taper off a bit.”

Agents were also anticipating a raise in rates, but that didn’t happen. And now, the national and state interest rates are currently hovering around 3.8 percent for a 30-year fixed mortgage with a credit rating of 740 to 850 according to Zillow.

Though rates have dipped somewhat from a year ago, prices and available inventory have grown.

In the past year, Fairfax County has seen the average selling price of homes rise from \$491,144 to \$526,786 (a 7.3 percent increase) versus the Mid Atlantic Region average increase of 3.2 percent. Over the same period the number of active listings in the county increased from 1,634 to 2,198 (a 34.5 percent increase over last January). (Source: RealEstate Business Intelligence)

With the spring 2015 market preparing to bloom, agents are hopeful the low rates and available inventory will motivate more buyers and sellers to get off the fence and into the arena. Particularly because it’s unclear when rates might rise again.

“People don’t want to wait,” said Pattie Mancini, whose coverage area with Avery-Hess Realtors includes Springfield. She said her office has been hitting sales goals for the first time in over a year. “With prices going up, and interest rates might be going up, this is the perfect storm.”

Mancini said she’s seeing more “millennials” coming into the market in Springfield, and finding more houses available from older individuals who had been holding out while the market was worse over the last five years.



PHOTO COURTESY OF PATTIE MANCINI

5409 Yorkshire St., in the Kings Park area of Springfield, listed at \$535,000.



PHOTO COURTESY OF RON KOWALSKI

“The builder, McShay Communities from Springfield, is building four homes on spec since he’s optimistic about the spring market in this price range (\$949,900-\$1.3M),” said Ron Kowalski, of the new McDonald Estates development in Lorton. “We even painted, decorated and staged the model home (pictured, available for \$1.25M), which is rare for a seven-home development.” One active listing is 9324 Dachshund Drive, listed at \$949,900.



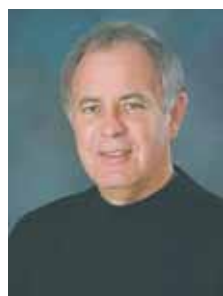
PHOTO COURTESY OF REX REILEY

8717 Falkstone Lane in Mt. Vernon Manor, Mount Vernon. “This house went on the market Feb. 25 and a contract was ratified Feb. 28th,” said Rex Reiley. “There were multiple offers because this was listed at \$370,000. The interior needed to be remodeled totally and with its low price, it attracted many investors and builders who will renovate it.”



PHOTO COURTESY OF REX REILEY

4505 Dolphin Lane, located in Yacht Haven, Mount Vernon, is listed at \$875,000. Its renovations include a two-floor addition on a half-acre lot.



Rex Reiley with RE/MAX Allegiance.



Ron Kowalski of Keller Williams Capital.



Pat Richter of Residential Preferred.



Pattie Mancini of Avery-Hess Realtors.

“The millennials are getting older,” she said, “seeing it’s not such a bad idea, and seeing more value in a mortgage than rent.”

Pat Richter with Residential Preferred Properties in Burke could use more sellers putting up their property. With more people gaining confidence in their economic stability, she said there are more buyers looking to “move up” in her area.

“For years, we haven’t had much of a move up market,” Richter said. “Now, people are starting to say this townhouse is too small, this single family home is too small, and want a bigger one.”

With the move up market and more buyers looking to move into Burke, “It’s a good time to be a buyer,” she said. “But that doesn’t mean prices have escalated

tremendously. It’s interesting because assessments all went up. Now starting April 1, we’ll see prices go up a little,

SEE LOW INTEREST RATES, PAGE 7

Fairfax Station,
Lorton & Clifton
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Historic Virginia in Gardens

Tour includes a rare private look at special properties in Fairfax County, Old Town Alexandria and Leesburg.

The Virginia Historic Garden Tour is an 8-day event that stretches across the Commonwealth. Each spring visitors are welcomed to over 250 of Virginia's most beautiful gardens, homes and historic landmarks. This event provides the opportunity to see unforgettable gardens at the peak of Virginia's springtime color, as well as beautiful houses sparkling with more than 2,000 flower arrangements created by Garden Club of Virginia members.

The Clifton Historic District, registered as a Virginia Historic Landmark, was a Civil War railroad stop and is filled with shops, memorable restaurants and restored homes. Clara Barton, founder of the American Red Cross, tended to soldiers after the Battle of Second Manassas at St. Mary's Church and the historic Fairfax Station, now a Railroad Museum.

A self-drive tour on April 21 features stables, vineyards, a world-class garden, Georgian-revival architecture, and a 10,000 square-foot contemporary home with a vanishing edge swimming pool – four private homes with gardens and two stables in all. Tour ticket includes a tea at the Clifton Presbyterian Church.

Tour proceeds fund the restoration and preservation of Virginia's historic gardens, and provide graduate level research fellowships for building comprehensive and ongoing records of historic gardens and landscapes in the Commonwealth, and support the mission of the Garden Club of Virginia.

Clifton and Fairfax Station, Tuesday, April 21

This self-drive tour features stables, vineyards, a world-class garden, Georgian-revival architecture, and a 10,000 square-foot contemporary home with a vanishing edge swimming pool – four private homes with gardens and two stables in all. Tour ticket includes a tea at the Clifton Presbyterian Church. Advance Ticket Sales: \$30 at www.vagardenweek.org or email fairfaxtickets@vagardenweek.org. Visit www.gardencluboffairfax.blogspot.com for a list of local retailers selling tickets.

Old Town Alexandria, Saturday, April 18

Old Town Alexandria was in 1946 the third city in the country to create a historic district to preserve its downtown. Today it has 4,000 buildings with a historic designation. The April 18 walking tour in Old Town includes five row



PHOTO COURTESY OF DONNA MOULTON/GARDEN CLUB OF FAIRFAX

Nestled in an equestrian neighborhood, a 10,000 square-foot contemporary home was built in 2013 for an active family with young children. An immaculate two-stall stable is home to a beloved horse and a pony. The wife is an accomplished equestrian as evidenced by a tack room filled with trophies and ribbons.

Virginia Historic Garden Tour in Clifton and Fairfax Station

❖ Redlac Drive, Clifton Located in a pastoral setting with grazing horses nearby, this graceful 1987 Georgian Revival house draws its elegant inspiration from historic Williamsburg. Large rooms with arching Palladian windows overlook a formal boxwood knot garden and serene five-acre landscape. The hardwood tree canopy shades a hillside azalea and rhododendron garden with a bridge over a swale. Dennis

and Cyndy Patrick, owners.

❖ Willowbrook Road, Fairfax Station Nestled in an equestrian neighborhood, this 10,000-square-foot contemporary home was built in 2013 for an active family with young children on the site of their previous

house. A handsome entrance of stone, leaded glass and ironwork leads to a spectacular open-plan living, dining and kitchen area designed by the fun-loving owners with year-round entertaining in mind. The im-

SEE HISTORIC GARDENS, PAGE 5

houses with courtyard gardens in this preserved area, and refreshments at St. Paul's Episcopal Church. In addition to the private properties featured, the tour ticket allows access to The Carlyle House Historic Park, Lee-Fendall House Museum and Garden, George Mason's Gunston Hall and George Washington's Mount Vernon Estate and Gardens. The tour is hosted by The Garden Club of Alexandria and Hunting Creek Garden Club. www.vagardenweek.org

Leesburg, Sunday and Monday, April 19-20

Leesburg was mapped and recognized by the Council of the Colony in 1758. Most of the 11 featured tour properties are located on two historic roads, Edwards Ferry Road and Cornwall Street. The neighborhoods offer a variety of architectural styles and well established gardens. This two-day Towne and Country tour features 11 properties and coincides with the Leesburg Flower and Garden Festival, which takes place on April 18 and 19.



PHOTO BY DONNA MOULTON

The self-drive garden tour in Fairfax Station and Clifton in Fairfax County features stables, vineyards, a world-class garden, Georgian-revival architecture, and a stunning 10,000 square-foot contemporary home with a vanishing edge swimming pool – four private homes with gardens and two stables in all.



COURTESY OF DONNA MOULTON/GARDEN CLUB OF FAIRFAX
Located in a pastoral setting with grazing horses nearby, this graceful 1987 Georgian Revival house in Clifton draws its inspiration from historic Williamsburg.

Historic Virginia

FROM PAGE 4

maculate two-stall stable on the property has attached horse trailer storage and is home to a beloved horse and a pony. Local equestrians will be in the stable to answer horse-related questions. Garth and Heather Viar, owners.

❖ Also Willowbrook Road, Fairfax Station Serenity awaits visitors at this single-story California-style property. The experience begins on the long drive that winds past a riding ring and pastures. Slate steps lead to the entrance courtyard, where a koi pond and bamboo fountain set the warm spa-like mood of this wonderful home. The house, purchased in 2003, has been completely renovated by the current owner. Clean, contemporary and connected to nature, the rooms along the back of the house each open to a series of graceful garden rooms with an entertaining deck, a yoga/meditation deck, an outdoor shower and a seating area surrounding a fire pit. Inside, visitors find delights like a glass conservatory and studio. The eco-friendly, award-winning stable complex contains a four-stall barn, equipment storage, dry lots, round pen, composting system and pastures. Randall and Joan Onders, owners.

❖ Poplar Grove, Lakewood Lane, Fairfax Station Time stands still at Poplar Grove. A curving driveway leads visitors through towering oaks and flowering cherry and plum trees to a slower, more gentle way of living. The warm cream colored Federal-style home was built in 1964 and renovated quite literally from the ground up in 2001. The owners, one a landscape architect of world-class talent and the other a graduate of DuPage School of Horticulture and a seventh-generation Virginian, carved a paradise of 18th-century grandeur out of what had been seven overgrown acres. The owners' passion and expertise brought to life a two-level Colonial parterre kitchen garden with boxwood topiary, oyster-shell walkways and a climbing-rose-covered chicken coop. Nearby is a vineyard with over 400 Petit Verdot grape vines. Visit the swimming pool garden and follow a shady path that leads to the secret white garden with a pond and splashing fountain. In fact, fountains can be heard bubbling and splashing in every direction. Another fountain brings wandering guests to an alfresco dining area reminiscent of Charleston. Inside, visitors find grand moldings, sparkling chandeliers and museum-quality artwork and antiques. Master Gardeners will be available to answer questions in the gardens. Charles Prillaman and Parker Jennings, owners.

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**THE CONNECTION
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His and Hers: Special Spaces

Addition pulls together styles and overcomes challenges.

BY JOHN BYRD

Details

Foster Remodeling Solutions periodically offers workshops on home remodeling topics. Call 703-550-1371 or visit www.fosterm.com

On the face of it, adding a two-level structure to a 30-year-old brick house is not especially difficult. Essentially, Vienna homeowners Al Dobson and his wife Joan Davanzo each have a pet project — a spacious first level garage to house sport cars, motorcycles and '60s rock for him; a lovely sunroom comprised of floor-to-ceiling window walls for her.

Knock out the existing screen porch; slightly expand the footprint for the garage; sun room goes on top embracing the rear deck and pool; and, Bingo, it's done.

Yet as anyone who has lived in the Fairfax County for a while knows, no project is without complications, and add to this the problems of an unlevel grade, set-back restrictions, strict rules on structures with lots of glass and the owner's desire to preserve all the surrounding trees, and suddenly there are the makings of an intricate engineering challenge — the sort of brain-buster most contractors wouldn't attempt to unravel.

That's how it all started with this deceptively understated Vienna addition: several contractors told Dobson and Davanzo they couldn't have the amount of glass in the sunroom they were looking for; county rules regarding glass and where it can be positioned are rigorously enforced; and then, too, the glass must be "braced" to resist winds that otherwise might cause it to implode — a requirement which inevitably reduces sightlines.

"County rules on glass in new construction have been in place for over a decade," said David Foster, president of Foster Remodeling Solutions, the contractor the couple hired to execute the project. "Because of some tricky complications, a lot of contractors stay out of the sunroom arena — so it's become somewhat specialized."

What several contractors plainly told Joan Davanzo, nevertheless, was that her dream project — as she envisioned it — simply couldn't be built.

"We were told the windows couldn't be as low to the floor, nor as close to the corner as we wanted," Davanzo said. "Since I had particularly liked the openness of the old screen porch the sunroom was to replace, this was discouraging."

By contrast, Davanzo said, Foster began addressing the project's technical hurdles from the first meeting.

"His experience was palpable," said Al Dobson, 70, who has had several previous encounters with remodelers. "The first consideration — which he pointed out im-

mediately — was how to develop a site plan that would satisfy the county, but also give us a sustainable result that allows the aesthetic effects we were seeking."

Part of the assignment would also entail a plan for preserving mature trees on the property's eastern side.

THE GARAGE, which would house Dobson's collectible motorized vehicles, needed a footprint of some 400 square feet, the contractor determined; the sunroom, one level up, would be plenty spacious at slightly over 200 square feet. Hence, Foster's "stacked" pyramidal design not only satisfies family "use" requirements, but also allows the "growing room" needed for an entire grove of mature trees bordering the property's perimeter.

The plan was, of course, partly predicated on lowering the lot's existing grade some five feet, enough to carve out a foundation for the garage and create driveway access.

The foundation also figures prominently in an innovative engineering solution that gives the couple the amount of glass they had been seeking in the sunroom.

To meet the county's wind-bracing requirements, Foster and team designed a narrow-gauge, all-steel framework for the sunroom's many large glass panels which is anchored all the way down to the concrete foundation itself.

Though not visible to the naked eye, the infrastructure allowed designers to extend windows to within a few feet of the floor and mere inches from the corner of the room.

"Our dogs can even look out the windows," Joan Davanzo said. "The design gives us a really a stunning view in all directions."

But, surely, a nearly all-glass room must be quite cold in the winter?

"All the windows are Low-E Argon-filled double pane — state of the art thermal resistance," Foster said.

To reinforce the comforting insularity, however, the contractor applied thermally-resistant spray foam behind the wall sur-



Al Dobson and his new spacious garage to house his sport car, motorcycles and '60s rock memorabilia.



PHOTO CONTRIBUTED

The sun porch solution emphasizes views. Windows are insulated and wind-resistant.

faces — and drilled holes in the steel columns to accommodate an added infusion.

"It's all about creating a tight structure," Foster said. "That's what keeps outside temperatures out."

On the other hand, the sunroom feature Davanzo most appreciates this time of year is how fluidly it opens to spring's balmy breezes. All the windows are casement-style which can be independently adjusted to let in cross breezes. Overhead, two skylights open electronically — and individually. The skylights are also equipped with electric blinds and rain sensors.

The room's interior design scheme, which Davanzo developed in conjunction with Foster, reflects a number of favored owner lifestyle preferences. The golden duotone teakwood floor — comprised of a framed rectangular perimeter traversed with diagonal slats — is a pattern the couple came upon in their travels in Italy. The tongue-and-groove ceiling and warm sea-foam green wall color, likewise, were chosen to

highlight a verdant visual continuum that recalls childhood adventures in the country.

The new sunroom is accessible through an adjacent family room separated by three French doors which Davanzo mostly leaves open.

"This is where I spend most of my time when I'm at home," she said.

For Al Dobson, the favored hang-out now is his "man cave" garage which houses a Corvette, his Italian motorcycle and a sound system that plays choice sounds of the '50s and '60s.

A racing enthusiast who participates in time trials at Summit Point, Dobson wanted a room that speaks to his passion for motor sports. Underfoot, PVC tiles in an iconic checkerboard pattern set the tone for a private retreat decorated with '60s movie posters and other period memorabilia.

"It's a really peaceful spot to just relax," Dobson said. "That's what this process was always for, so I'm glad we pursued it."

Low Interest Rates Give Agents Optimism for Spring

FROM PAGE 3

pricing for the spring and summer market.”

Fairfax County mailed its 2015 real estate assessment notices Feb. 17: 74 percent of residential properties saw an increase.

“Assessments matter because the tax burden is increasing on homeowners in many jurisdictions, particularly Fairfax,” said David Versel, senior researcher with the George Mason University Center for Regional Analysis.

Another burden on homeowners who may be waiting to enter the market is lingering insecurity over the effects of government Sequestration.

“I gear it to federal government spending,” said George Mason professor of finance Gerald Hanweck. “When is that going to bottom out? When it does and they begin to spend again, then we’ll see a pickup.”

Rex Reiley is looking for that to happen soon, hoping that Congress signs off on a new budget and that it eliminates or reduces Sequester cut-backs. “If that happens, think we’ll see a big boom, with everyone confident in their employment again.”

Longer term, Hanweck is encouraged by an “upsurge in technology entrepreneurship” in Northern Virginia, as well as the development of the Inova research campus in Merrifield for attracting pharmaceuticals and biotech. But that impact on the real estate market could take years to notice, he said.

In the short term, he expects house prices in Fairfax County to fall slightly, forecasting a 2

percent drop in the median over the next few months in existing and new homes, a great opportunity for first-time buyers who qualify for low-interest loans.

“Agents have a right to be optimistic,” said Hanweck. “At same time, they’ll have to work real hard to make the optimism pay off, selling about 97-98 percent of the listing price. That’s going to certainly drop, it’s just a matter of pricing.”

In Lorton, Ron Kowalski has observed steady sales overall in the last month, about one per day for the 22079 zip code as a whole. The “move up” segment of houses priced \$500,000 to \$800,000 has lagged behind the “low end” (under \$500,000) and upper tier (\$1 million and above).

He’s confident that increasing inventory coupled with the interest rates and “lenders loosening standards a little” will continue to help with affordability and drive sales into the spring, especially with first-time buyers.

But, he said more of his clients are researching properties on the internet before they meet with him. And that’s having a mixed effect on whether they decide to make a move or not.

“They’re getting a lot of information,” he said, “but so much is filtered through what they want to look at. There are both sides to the story. People focus on the one that sold super high or low. My issue is a lot of the information is self-directed.”

Kowalski doesn’t mind buyers or sellers coming into the market loaded with their own data; he’s just happy they’re there.

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lost (adj): 1. unable to find the way. 2. not appreciated or understood. 3. no longer owned or known

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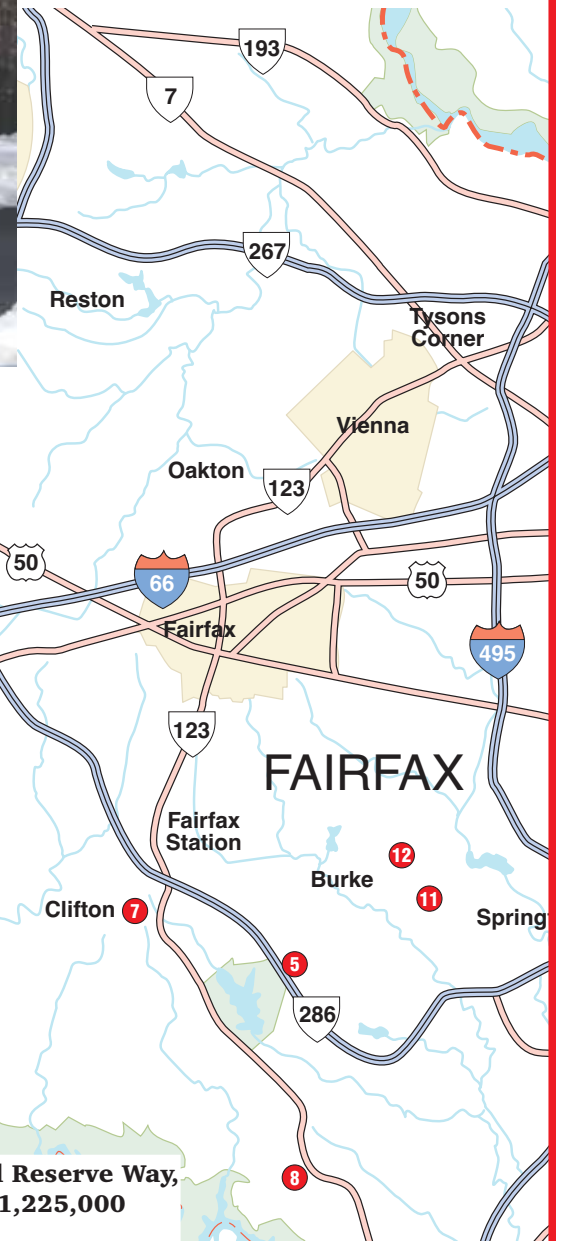
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Local REAL ESTATE

PHOTOS BY CRAIG STERBUTZEL/
THE CONNECTION

January, 2015 Top Sales

2 7063 Balmoral Forest Road,
Clifton — \$1,415,700



3 12510
Yates Ford
Road, Clifton
— \$1,300,000



8 8740 Mountain Valley Road,
Fairfax Station — \$1,047,500



4 9407 Old Reserve Way,
Fairfax — \$1,225,000

Address BR FB HB .. Postal City Sold Price .. Type Lot AC PostalCode Subdivision Date Sold

1	12995 WYCKLAND DR	6	8	2	CLIFTON	\$2,100,000	Detached	5.00	20124	WYCKLAND	01/16/15
2	7063 BALMORAL FOREST RD	5	5	3	CLIFTON	\$1,415,700	Detached	3.00	20124	BALMORAL GREENS	01/23/15
3	12510 YATES FORD RD	3	2	0	CLIFTON	\$1,300,000	Detached	15.62	20124	PEPPER MILL FARM	01/08/15
4	9407 OLD RESERVE WAY	5	4	1	FAIRFAX	\$1,225,000	Detached	0.27	22031	PICKETT'S RESERVE	01/09/15
5	6511 BURKE WOODS DR	6	5	2	BURKE	\$1,150,000	Detached	0.83	22015	BURKE LAKE MEADOW	01/26/15
6	13102 BELLE COTE LN	5	4	1	FAIRFAX	\$1,100,000	Detached	0.83	22033	OAK HILL RESERVE	01/15/15
7	11311 CHAPEL RD	4	4	1	FAIRFAX STATION	\$1,060,000	Detached	5.00	22039	WOLF RUN HUNT	01/05/15
8	8740 MOUNTAIN VALLEY RD	5	4	1	FAIRFAX STATION	\$1,047,500	Detached	5.91	22039	HAMPTON HILLS	01/13/15
9	10687 YORKTOWN CT	3	4	1	FAIRFAX	\$1,005,000	Townhouse	0.05	22030	JAGUAR/YORKTOWN	01/06/15
10	5105 BEBE CT	5	3	1	CENTREVILLE	\$802,000	Detached	0.17	20120	FAIRLAKES CROSSNG	01/26/15
11	6114 GARDEN RD	4	3	1	SPRINGFIELD	\$729,000	Detached	0.19	22152	LEE-BROOKE	01/16/15
12	5413 MOUNT GREENWICH CT	4	2	1	BURKE	\$715,000	Detached	0.23	22015	SIGNAL HILL	01/15/15



10 5105 Bebe Court, Centreville — \$802,000

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