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## Long to live in the city? The quiet-vs.-accessibility trade-off is something to consider.



*Noise from bars, vehicle horns and construction are an unfortunate reality when you trade the quiet of farther-out communities for accessible and walkable neighborhoods. (Jahi Chikwendiu/The Washington Post)*

Waking up in a city that never sleeps is an exhilarating and romantic notion, thanks to Frank Sinatra. But after a few nights of screaming sirens and honking horns disturbing your sleep — and the deafening sound of pounding and drilling at a nearby construction site all day — the quiet solitude of a cave in Tibet sounds very appealing.

Despite the noise, urban and compact mixed-used communities are in high demand in the Washington region.

“We have 37 active projects, and I would say 90 percent are built around an urban environment,” said Chris Ballard, co-founder of McWilliams Ballard, a local consulting firm that works with developers to market and sell new construction projects.

“That is where the developers are. That is where the demand is,” Ballard said, explaining the reason for the high percentage of his business being in high-density sections of the region.

Why are buyers choosing close-in living over large yards and spacious single-family homes?

Walkability is the leading reason among millennials for choosing urban living, according to a recent National Association of Realtors survey.

According to Ballard, buyers at every stage of life are choosing a more walkable urban lifestyle.

“It is not just millennials,” Ballard said. “We are seeing large numbers of people downsizing, staying in [Montgomery County] to stay close to family, and moving to downtown Bethesda.”

Ballard's company is coordinating the marketing and sales of Cheval Bethesda, a luxury condominium in downtown Bethesda. Ballard says that the building is already 25 percent sold out, with seven months remaining until occupancy.

Many of these home buyers are seeking a simpler lifestyle, with less maintenance and the carefree ease of locking the door and leaving for vacation without the worries of security and upkeep.

According to local home-buying statistics, the District is at the forefront of the walkability trend.

The total sold dollar volume in the District has increased by 13.3 percent during the first half of 2017 from the same period in 2016, according to Real Estate Business Intelligence. Across the board, most urban neighborhoods in the Washington area have experienced an increase in price per square foot and a decrease in days on market. But what other characteristics do walkable high-density neighborhoods have besides convenience and low maintenance?

Noise.

As I write this article, the construction site next door to my Cleveland Park condo is buzzing with drills and saws. It has been under construction for one year. Added to this cacophony is the bathroom renovation recently initiated in the unit across the hall. I feel a migraine coming.

Word of advice: Don't think that you are going to move to the city and then win the fight against noise. The developer next door ignored my request to ask the workers to lower their music. (Although, it seems enough people complained that the music has finally stopped.)

A new resident of New York City, coming from New Mexico, recently filed a lawsuit against his building manager because his unit is too noisy. His high-rise rental happens to overlook Lincoln Tunnel. In his defense, he claims he was promised a unit on the other side of the building.

Is there any relief from all the noise? Some locals are finding moments of peace and quiet.

"As the city gets busier and noisier and more exciting, the need for quiet and space increases," said Eldad Moraru, owner of Take Five Meditation Studio in Dupont Circle. "We are giving people an escape from the craziness of the city."

Here are some tips to help you relieve the noise factor:

Purchase a unit on the highest floor possible, to avoid street noise. Cheval Bethesda is designed with the condo units starting on the fifth floor.

Better yet, purchase the penthouse unit to also avoid noise from an upstairs neighbor.

Higher-level units are typically more expensive. If your budget does not allow for a top floor, seek out buildings with concrete construction between each floor.

Check the condo rules to understand the level of noise permissible, and understand the process of complaining about loud neighbors.

Check the neighboring lots to determine whether any buildings could be knocked down and replaced with new construction.

Corner units are great, because two sides of the unit do not connect to another unit.

A client of mine recently asked me to find him a home that offers as much quiet as possible, while keeping his commute to work in Dupont Circle short. I showed him a townhouse development in Chevy Chase that borders Rock Creek Park. It is not walkable to restaurants and shops, but it is tucked away from noisy roads.

As for me, was the ability to walk to a Cleveland Park coffee shop this morning worth listening to the short-tempered drivers honking at one another as I walked down Connecticut Avenue? Well, it is really good coffee.

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