

Enchanted trails, swim team highlight Springfield's Newington Forest

Where We Live | Forested neighborhood is near shopping and restaurants.

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By Hope Hodge Seck

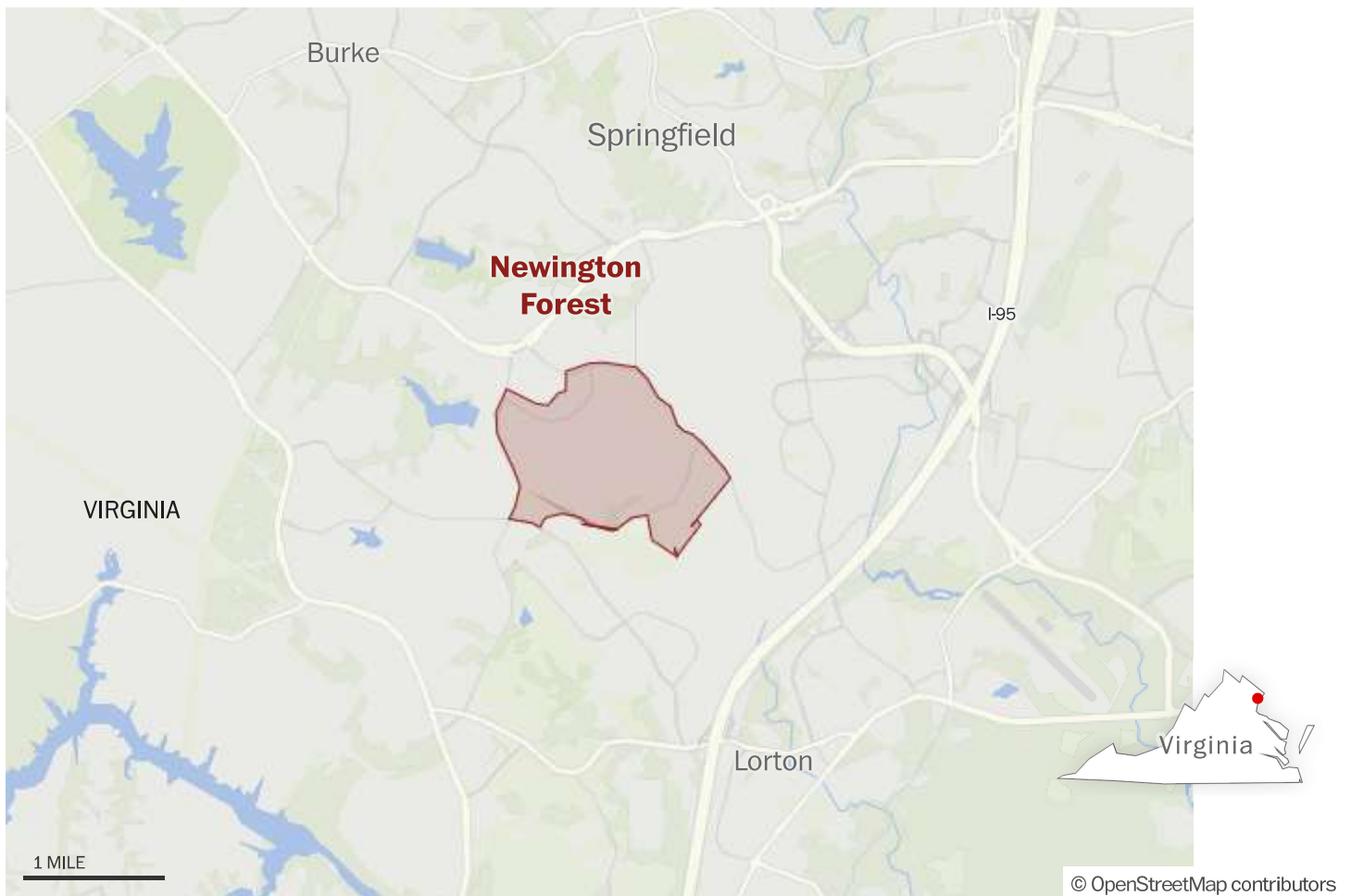
It took Ellie Stout and her husband more than a year and 10 offers to find a house in the D.C. area's scarce real estate market that fit their needs. First-time buyers, Stout said they needed affordability, suburban environs that still provided easy commuter access to the city and enough space for their growing family.

The house that met all their criteria was waiting for them in Newington Forest, a Springfield, Virginia, neighborhood just south of the Fairfax County Parkway. It was a 1970s white Colonial dating to the neighborhood's establishment, she said, and had never been remodeled.

"We felt like we got to come in and really put our touch on everything," Stout said, adding that when they purchased the house in 2023, they gutted and remodeled the kitchen, turned a formal dining room into a playroom for their two small children, and decorated their daughter's bedroom with florals and their son's with airplanes.

But Stout's favorite part of the neighborhood needed no remodeling: the streets lined with decades-old trees.

"The huge, tall trees are something that you cannot manufacture; that's something that you only find in a well-established community. And it just has such a homey feel pulling into this neighborhood, my kids will always have that nostalgic feel of, "This is where I grew up," she said. "This place has been around so long, and the trees in the fall are so gorgeous. It just reminds me of my grandparents' home in that way."



Newington Forest, which has roughly 1,800 townhouses, split-level houses and Colonials, according to local real estate agent James Nellis, dates to about 1978. A 734-acre planned community built through a partnership between two local developers, it's surrounded by wooded trails, includes Newington Forest Elementary School within neighborhood boundaries and – a favorite feature for many residents – has a community pool with membership included as part of the quarterly HOA assessment, administered by the Newington Forest Community Association.

Residents estimate that about half of Newington Forest's houses belong to the original owners, and young families live in many of the others, drawn to the safety and accessibility of the neighborhood and the quality of local schools.

Katie Mattiuzzo, a home-schooling mother of three who became one of Stout's first friends in the neighborhood, said her children love the forest trails and creeks within a stroll of the house they purchased in 2021.

“In that wooded area by the creeks, you can hear giggles and laughter bouncing around. It's magical in there,” she said. “We feel nestled away from the busyness of the city.”

Mattiuzzo has done her part to add to the magic, on one occasion transforming a wooded trail into a “storywalk” by posting laminated pages of the Jan Brett children's book “The Mitten” for a kids' hiking group to enjoy.

For all the feeling of forested getaway, though, the neighborhood is within easy reach of suburban shopping and convenience. There's a Costco within 10 minutes, as well as the Springfield Town Center, a mall with trendy food options, a theater and recent retail space renovations.

Nellis, a third-generation real estate agent with the Nellis Group who grew up in and around Springfield, said Newington Forest has stayed relatively affordable, even though it meets a lot of top home buyer criteria in location, convenience, safety and community offerings. While houses in the neighborhood come up for sale fairly often, he said, he estimated they average fewer than 10 days on the market.

In the last year, he said, 23 single-family houses and 31 townhouses had sold in the neighborhood. The most expensive single-family house sold for \$982,000, it was a five-bedroom home with expansive renovations and features including an in-home theater and gym that Nellis believed set a price record for the neighborhood. The lowest sales price was \$475,000 for an as-is house covering less than 1,000 square feet. Townhouses ranged from \$385,000 to \$575,000.

Two townhouses are on the market, listed at \$465,000 and \$595,000.

Across generations of residents, one source of community pride and identity is the neighborhood swim team, the Neptunes. Last season, the team had about 145 members, ages 3 to 18, said Jamie Visbeck, head coach of the Neptunes.

Visbeck, who grew up in Newington Forest and taught himself to swim just so he could land a spot on the team alongside his two older brothers, got his first coaching job in 2010, shortly after graduating college, and became head coach in 2018. Just as when he was a kid, he said, he enjoys seeing the recognition that standout swimmers and team staff receive in the close-knit community.

"We have a lot of younger kids that look up to the older kids. And then when they're out walking their dog, they get to see their hero from the summer," Visbeck said.

Visbeck estimates he's coached about 1,800 local children in his years with the Neptunes, and he still gets excited for the start of a new summer season.

"I always look forward to Memorial Day," he said. "It's the peak of my year."

Boundaries: The neighborhood is roughly bounded to the north by Fairfax County Parkway; to the east by Pohick Road; to the south by Southrun and Silverbrook Roads; and to the west by Hooes Road.

Schools: Newington Forest Elementary, South County Middle, South County High.

Transit: The Fairfax County Connector bus route 305 makes stops in the neighborhood. The Franconia-Springfield Metro station, on the Blue Line, is a 10-minute drive from Newington Forest.

HOA: Fees are \$192.90 per quarter for detached houses and \$287.45 per quarter for townhouses.

