

# Jaybird's Jottings

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## The Washington Nationals and the Capitol Riverfront Neighborhood



What makes a great baseball stadium?

One important factor is location. Ballparks and an urban setting have always been great partners, however, success at the box office does not always depend on such a cozy arrangement.

For the Washington Nationals, part of the answer lies with the work of Christopher Leinberger, author of *The Option of Urbanism: Investing in the New American Dream*. The message is clear. Desiring mixed-use convenience and a shorter commute, significant numbers of millennials and empty-nester baby boomers are and will be choosing an urban walkable lifestyle.

For the Nationals, who play their games in the Capitol Riverfront neighborhood, this “pendulum swing” from drivable suburban to walkable urban, bodes very well. Leinberger identified Washington as having the highest number of walkable urban places (regionally significant places, not just individual neighborhoods) per capita. Fueled by good access to Metro, this remarkable smart growth has transformed the area into becoming a model for the way a region should redevelop.

Located just a mile south of Capitol Hill, the Capitol Riverfront neighborhood (marked in his book as Anacostia) is one of ten emerging walkable urban locations as identified by Leinberger. Anchored by the Navy Yard (ha, ha) and the Department of Transportation,

and soon to offer waterfront living at “The Yards” (when completed it will include 5.5M square feet of retail, housing office and civic use on 42 acres), this downtown-adjacent patch of land along the Anacostia River is on its way to attracting those who will enjoy the benefits of living in a regional destination. It’s true, the long-neglected Anacostia has a ways to go to improve its health, but the focus is sharpening on turning the situation around. In fact, an Environmental Summit will be held next spring at Nationals Park.

In his address to the neighborhood’s annual BID meeting a couple of weeks ago, Leingberger noted that Metro's Green Line, which serves the ballpark, will become the next Red Line. That is to say, transit-oriented growth will begin to fill up along this under-utilized part of the Metro system. This expansion of the favored quarter to include Southeast and Northeast DC is rare in the United States and augurs well for the District.

This past Thursday, DC Mayor Adrian Fenty held a news conference to officially announce that DC’s population is poised to rebound past the 600,000 mark, a healthy milestone for the city. It was no coincidence the Mayor chose the heart of the Capitol Riverfront neighborhood as the place to brag (Somewhere Mayor Tony Williams, who fully supported the arrival of the baseball franchise, is smiling).

The future for this part of city, stalled by the recession, is bright. The number of residents doubled this year, and the figure will only increase as north and west neighborhoods max out. According to Michael Stevens, the Executive Director for the CapRiv BID, the neighborhood’s development cycle is further along than the now vibrant Penn Quarter was when the Verizon Center opened in 1997. New bridges are being built, hopes are high for a new Harris Teeter (the true sign of arrival!), and one day in the not too distant future, street cars rolling along M Street will add a new magical dimension to mass transit.

In his book, Leinberger is fond of saying, “All eyes to the future.” In that future, driveable suburban living will still be around, and walkable urban places will also thrive beyond the bright lights of the city core. And in DC, the strongest gravitational pulls will continue to be in and around downtown.

Some of the smuggest smiles in the nation’s capital, however, will be worn by those living near Nationals Park. They will be boasting about living, working, shopping, playing and watching big league baseball, all in the same near downtown location.

Options, indeed.