



# The Morphing of a Forgotten Neighborhood

I don't live in Near Southeast, but I may be the ultimate nosy neighbor.

Since 1995, I've lived on Capitol Hill just north of the Southeast-Southwest Freeway, the Berlin Wall-like dividing line between the Hill and the neighborhood to the south. There were few reasons to venture under the overpasses into blocks of run-down housing, walled-off government enclaves and little else. Although the Anacostia River looked tantalizingly close, the frequent police sirens, occasional helicopters with spotlights circling at night, and news items about drug busts and killings made those seven blocks seem like miles.

In the past few years, however, the idea that my neighborhood might someday be known as "Capitol Hill/Waterfront" has come closer and closer to reality.

The first visible evidence of change came in 1999, when construction began on the new Navy Sea Systems Command headquarters at the Navy Yard, along with two new office buildings on M Street SE. In 2000, three of the four Arthur Capper apartment buildings between Fifth and Seventh streets were demolished to make way for the planned Marine Bachelor Enlisted Quarters. The old Washington Star warehouse at Second and Virginia was also torn down in 2000, which unfortunately took away of one of the few architecturally interesting buildings in the area.

In 2001, Near Southeast's Great Leap Forward came in two parts: The federal government gave D.C. a grant to replace the Capper-Carrollsborg housing project with more than 1,500 new subsidized and market-rate housing units, and the General Services Administration decided to build the new Department of Transportation headquarters on 11 acres at the Southeast Federal Center on M Street SE, with additional plans for housing, retail and office spaces, plus a riverfront park.

I had never thought of myself as an urban revitalization enthusiast. Nonetheless, it sprouted in me as I realized that this area within half a mile of my home—so close in as to have views of the Capitol dome from many locations—would be utterly transformed and that my neighborhood might someday no longer seem to be rudely sheared off at the freeway embankments.

Watching the efforts to turn one of the city's poorest areas into something shared and vibrant—as was happening just a few blocks away at the Ellen Wilson townhouse project as well as in many other D.C. neighborhoods—gave me hope for the city.

On a cold, clear day in January 2003, digital camera in hand, I forced my quietly suffering husband



BY BILL WALSH—THE WASHINGTON POST



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Jacqueline Dupree, left, has photographed images of the long-neglected Near Southeast neighborhood, located within a mile of the Capitol. Her goal: to save memories of the area before revitalization plans proceed further. Above, a rendering of the new Department of Transportation headquarters.



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Above, a rendering of the Fifth Street elevation of the Arthur Capper Senior Building at Fifth Street and Virginia Avenue SE. At right, the last remains of a defunct public housing project in the same area.



BY JACQUELINE DUPREE—THE WASHINGTON POST



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D.C. OFFICE OF PLANNING

At left, the concrete-and-brick promenade at the Washington Navy Yard offers just a hint of what the Anacostia River access is to look like when the Southeast Federal Center waterfront park is completed, above.

to drive me around the 'hood, and even across the river to Anacostia Park, so that I could take pictures of the old Near Southeast before any more of it began to disappear.

Photographing overgrown lots, bleak public housing tracts and acres of asphalt was not exactly documenting the end of a beautiful and historic area, but having always been fascinated with images of Washington in its past, I thought that one day I would enjoy comparing the new Near Southeast to what it had been when I moved to the Hill in 1994.

I initially created a page on my Web site so that I could share the

photos with my family, but before long my obsessive streak took over, and I found myself surfing the Internet looking for government reports, developer news releases, renderings of proposed projects, anything that would help me to know what might be slated for Near Southeast. (Heaven help me, I even once went to a zoning board hearing about the Capper-Carrollsborg project.)

And after Google found me, anytime someone searched for "Southeast Federal Center" or "new department of transportation headquarters," my page was available to them, too.

I've continued to take pictures—hundreds of them—although there were few visible changes to capture until early this year, when construction began at the DOT headquarters and the Capitol Hill Towers apartment-hotel project at New Jersey and L. And my Near Southeast Web site has continued to grow, apparently attracting a small following of residents, urban renewal fans and developers wanting to keep apprised of the latest.

It will be years before all of the plans for Near Southeast are completed, and it's possible some of them will never come to fruition at

all or could ultimately prove disappointing. But in the meantime, my camera and I will be zipping around the neighborhood, snapping away while buildings fall and rise, and hopefully greeting lots of new neighbors and businesses, some of whom might one day want to know what their streets looked like before they moved in.

Now, about burying that freeway. . . .

Jacqueline Dupree is editor of The Post's newsroom intranet. Her Near Southeast Revitalization Web site is at [www.jdland.com/dc](http://www.jdland.com/dc).