

NPR Moves to NoMa, D.C.'s SimCity of Gentrification

By Clinton Yates, Updated: June 5, 2013

You can't miss it at the corner of North Capitol and L streets NE. The colossal tower with NPR's logo stands alone, like a futuristic signpost from a sci-fi movie. And starting this week, [visitors can get a peek inside](#). But the brand-new headquarters for the public radio station is just another puzzle piece in the District's SimCity of gentrification: NoMa.

The neighborhood that has been labeled 'up and coming' by almost everyone has been looking for an anchor to really bolster its development. And while NPR's move there is a step in the right direction, NoMa is still as sterile an area as you can find in the city. Glass-and-chrome apartment complexes have popped up alongside other office buildings. On First Street, chain restaurants and establishments litter the scene with all-too-familiar logos.

Potbelly. Wells Fargo. Harris Teeter. CVS. Tynan Cafe. Petco. Although those qualify as reasonable amenities, they seem so artificially put together that you feel like you might be walking through a developer's spec video as opposed to an actual neighborhood.

NPR's facility is pristine. In addition to being an addition to a building originally built in 1927 by the old Chesapeake and Potomac Telephone Co., it feels like equal parts Tron, Starship Enterprise and newsroom. It will be intriguing to see whether its ethos and presence can change some of that corporate feel.

Maury Schlesinger, the director of real estate and administrative Services at NPR, hopes so. Along with tours, the station plans to have public events in the massive lobby and concerts at Studio 1 on the ground floor.

"There's a bit of the starving-artist culture at NPR. We moved to the Mount Vernon Square location when that neighborhood was nothing like it is today," Schlesinger said. "We took a fixer upper and fixed it up, and benefited from the development around it. Moving to NoMa, we're sort of doing that again, doing more than just a fixer upper, but putting a large addition on this existing historic warehouse building and contributing to the further development of the NoMa district."

But even the folks that live and work there acknowledge that a sense of community might be a long way off. Paul Basto of Archstone First and M was one. "We're not really having trouble getting residents to move here. We have had people vacate because of the neighborhood. However, the idea with this building was that you wouldn't have to leave, kind of thing," Basto said. "As far as day-to-day living, I

think it's very convenient. As far as getting your friends here, I think it's a little bit more difficult.”

Lindsay McLaren, who moved to NoMa this year, is being patient. “There's not all that much to do. They try to do stuff in the summer, the movie screenings and a little flea market,” she said. “Still just waiting to see what more stuff comes up.”

And while it's definitely nicer aesthetically and seemingly safer compared with years past, this particular stretch in NoMa leaves something to be desired. The days of the seedy Greyhound bus station are behind us, and even Ibiza, which is less than a decade old, seems like a relic on the strip.

Maybe the station could help take things a step further in a different fashion. NPRbar? That has a nice ring to it.

© The Washington Post Company