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Adrian Washington's D.C. roots are guiding Neighborhood Development Co.'s new projects

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Adrian Washington remembers riding his bike past the St. Elizabeths East campus as a kid. These days, he's helping to build its future.

Washington's Neighborhood Development Co. is the latest developer to score the chance to build on the massive Southeast D.C. property, winning the right to develop a 421-unit mixed-use building near the Entertainment and Sports Arena. That would be a big opportunity for just about any developer in the city, but it feels especially meaningful for Washington, who spent his childhood in Bellevue and historic Anacostia.

"Those were streets that I knew when I was a little kid, so to me doing that project is like coming home," Washington said. "To be able to go back to literally where I grew up across the street and do something of such importance there is just an opportunity of a lifetime."

The project is a big deal financially for NDC as well, of course. Though the firm has chipped in on big developments in the past (most notably at CityCenter), this will be one of the largest buildings NDC has ever tackled on its own. Many of the company's



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Adrian Washington, CEO and founder of Neighborhood Development Co. posing for a portrait in front of one of his affordable housing projects on Eastern Ave. NE.

previous efforts have been smaller residential projects, including several affordable developments in communities east of the Anacostia River.

Washington believes that work has helped his company build toward winning a project as big as the one at St. E's, and a lot of it stems from his roots in this section of the city.

"I didn't grow up in a fancy part of town, so it gave me a comfort level with going to areas that other developers might see as not a good place to develop," Washington said. "It was just understanding the people that live there, they were people just like you and me, and they wanted the same things that upper-income people wanted. A safe and comfortable place to live, great places to eat, to shop, they wanted recreational opportunities, to be close to transportation."

How did you decide to get into development? I fell into it almost by accident. I was working in management consulting and had bought an old Victorian in Shaw, well before things started to take off, and just started fixing it up in my spare time. I found I really liked that process of taking something old and rundown and turning it into something new and functional.

How did you go from home renovation to big multifamily projects? I wanted to gain experience and take it to a higher level, so I went to work for a national company, [the NHP Foundation], where I did multifamily work. I worked there for four or five years and really learned a lot and enjoyed it, but I always had an entrepreneurial bug. So I started NDC in 1999, right when things started to take off in the city and really rode that wave.

Your portfolio includes a lot of affordable developments as many financing sources have come under stress amid the pandemic.

How has Covid impacted that work? Construction costs have continued to go up, mostly due to a lack of labor and material costs going up and the need for physical distancing on projects. You just have to accept those challenges and understand the mission you're on to preserve the city, really, to make sure that people who have been in the city, often for generations, are not pushed out.

How has Covid affected the way you and your employees do your work? I've been fortunate myself — I've been able to work remotely a lot, as have the development staff. The folks who are really the heroes of our organization are our front-line development staff. We operate several properties, hundreds of units around the city, and we have on-site staff in management offices and maintenance. They're coming to work every day.

Has the pandemic impacted those workers? We were really concerned at the beginning of the pandemic: Would we lose people, would they refuse to come? And all of our folks on site have just continued to come in every day. We've had very few cases. We had one individual who did contract Covid. Luckily, he had minor symptoms and was able to go back to work. They're the real heroes in our organization.

What have you missed most during quarantine? Just the human connection. From a work perspective, me and the team, we talk, we do Zoom calls. Every day, we see each other. But just missing that human connection and the casual conversations, it's really tough.

Have you picked up any new hobbies while you've been stuck at home? My son is 17, and we've both been getting kind of stir-crazy. I've put on a few pounds, so we started working out together. We've got a pretty decent basement gym, and now it's become a ritual for us. Every other night, we go down there, and I program the workouts. And I'll tell you, when you work out with a 17-year-old, it really pushes you, so it's been beneficial for my physical and my mental health.

The basics

Adrian Washington

CEO and Founder, Neighborhood Development Co.

- **Residence:** D.C.'s Ward 4
- **Education:** Bachelor's in economics and political science, Stanford University; MBA, Harvard University

• **Family:** Wife Donna; children Jessica, Samantha and Alex; dog Leo

• **First job:** Paperboy

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