

F O U R T H E D I T I O N



Mastering DC

A Newcomer's Guide to Living
in the Washington, DC Area

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Dealing with the Local Bureaucracy

Most newcomers enjoy looking for an apartment, buying furniture, setting up house and getting to know the place they now call home. These activities are considerably more fun than dealing with the bureaucratic labyrinths you must navigate in order to establish residency. This chapter helps you plan your route as you deal with car ownership—drivers' licenses, registration and insurance—and income and property taxes, as well as establishing bank accounts. Also included are pointers on making sure your four-footed friends are legal residents of the metropolitan Washington area.

THE RESPONSIBILITY OF CAR OWNERSHIP

While some local residents simplify things by living life as pedestrians, most people in the area do own and regularly use a car to get around. For those people, the bureaucratic responsibilities of car ownership must be taken seriously. No matter where you live in the area, you need to acquire a local driver's license, register your vehicle, and be sure that it is adequately insured. Traditionally, these activities have consumed the most time and inspired the best stories about dealing with local bureaucracies. In recent years, however, a concerted effort has been made to make these types of services more accessible and efficient. While improvements have been made, the District still lags behind the suburban cities and counties. If you don't relish the thought of dealing with these kinds of details, contact the local company, **United States Vehicle Registration Service** at 202-342-2558. For \$45 in the District and Virginia and \$50 in Maryland, they will obtain a title, registration and parking permit for your car. Double the fee and you can get your car inspected as well.

Getting Your Driver's License

Regardless of where you live, bring your checkbook, your current license (if you have one) and your social security card (if you can find it). You must also bring one other form of identification bearing your name and birth date. Birth certificates, passports, and employer and school IDs are all acceptable, but only the original documents; photocopies will get you nowhere. Take these materials—as well as patience and a sense of humor—to the closest full-service motor vehicle office.

Current out-of-state license holders have a 30-day grace period to get a local driver's license and license plates. If you surrender a valid driver's license from another US state or territory, you do not need to take a