



## South End vs. Dorchester: The battle to be Boston's 'gayborhood' star

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Bobby Ortega, a former South Ender, in his Dorchester home. *Jessica Rinaldi/Globe Staff*

There's always infighting among LGBTQ+ friend groups as to what was the key moment when the South End lost its crown as Boston's leading "gayborhood" to Dorchester.

Was it when the Eagle — a longtime gay bar known for generous pours and salacious stories from the gravelly voiced late owner, [Jack Repetti](#) — [shuttered its doors](#)? Others say the “paved paradise and put up a parking lot” moment was when [Stella](#), a restaurant that was the closest the South End had to Cheers, turned into an elementary school. Some even say the neighborhood lost its edge years ago when people started to feel safe walking south of Tremont Street.

Now the community appears to have gone *well* past Tremont and into a new neighborhood entirely: Dorchester.

“It used to be, when everyone lived in the South End, you’d meet the occasional person who lived in Dorchester, and it was met with embarrassment,” said Bobby Ortega, a former South Ender who now calls Dorchester home. “But I remember after a night at [Dorchester LGBTQ+ bar] [Blend](#) one night, we went to a party, and everyone’s saying where they lived. And someone said, ‘Oh, I’m in the South End,’ and everyone goes, ‘Why?’ There’s definitely been a 180-degree turn.”

There’s been chatter for years in gay circles around when Dorchester’s star would finally shimmer in terms of queer real estate appeal. Sure, there was always a defector here or there from the South End, but it always seemed out of the realm of possibility that the hub of Victorian brownstones and brunch spots would lose its grip as the hub of gay [real estate](#).

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But just as every pop diva knows, loyalty can be a fickle thing in this community — at least in terms of home purchases and song of the summer contenders. Soaring home prices during the pandemic may have finally tipped the scales in Dorchester’s favor — as well as other parts of the region — as part of a broader rearranging of the deck chairs across the country as to where the queer community concentrates.

Plus, Dorchester also has an established stretch of LGBTQ+ bars and restaurants like [dbar](#) and [Blend](#).

“We decided to buy something, and we went to every open house in the South End for two years,” said Martha Tierney, who lived in the South End for eight years before moving with her partner to Dorchester. “I think we saw everything there was to see. In the end, the cost per square foot was just not competitive to what we could get for our money in Dorchester.”

As of March 29, the average home value in the South End’s 02118 ZIP code was \$958,536, according to Zillow. In Dorchester’s 02125, which includes portions of Savin Hill, it was \$611,496.

“We have clients that were looking for a specific unit where, in Dorchester, they end up finding it for a million dollars. That same thing in the South End would have been \$1.8 million,” said [Ricardo Rodriguez](#), a real estate agent with Coldwell Banker Realty. “There is a real difference in affordability.”

Rodriguez also noted Dorchester’s appeal to younger renters; the South End was once a place where you could find a single-family homeowner willing to rent individual bedrooms out for a couple hundred dollars a month. Affordable rent is more a possibility farther south.