Who’s Moving into the Neighborhood?
Who’s Moving into the Neighborhoods?

“Pittsburgh’s going through a new renaissance right now where many people are looking to move back into the city,” says Sarah Madia, a realtor with RE/MAX Select Realty. “There has been a lot of housing demand just in the past two years.”

Lawrenceville in particular, Madia says, is one of the hottest city neighborhoods with demand from buyers. “In addition to the amazing restaurants, shopping, and retail, we’re now able to offer new housing that wasn’t available before. By new housing, I mean new construction, renovation, or even rehabbing an older home.”

One reason the Strip District and Lawrenceville are so popular is their central location, according to Madia. “The proximity to downtown is great if that’s where you work. In Lawrenceville, you’re able to buy a house for the same price or much less than the price of a condo in the Strip District or downtown.”

Lee McDowell, an accountant, and her husband Brian, a manager at a health-care company, originally purchased a fixer-upper in Greentree but decided to move to Lawrenceville. They’ve
been living in the neighborhood for three years now—one year renting and two years as home-owners.

“When we were in our first house, we loved the idea of getting our hands dirty with renovations,” says McDowell. “The reality of it, though, is that for us it wasn’t as fun or as easy as it appears on HGTV. Though we loved our first house and would never change that experience, we eventually grew tired of spending every weekend at home-improvement stores and working on projects around the house. We decided that while we were still young and without children, we had time to experience the convenience that city living offered.”

McDowell says they love the convenience of living in a walkable community such as Lawrenceville. “We have a tiny yard that requires little maintenance but enough for our little dog to explore, and we’re within walking distance to so many local shops, bars, and restaurants,” she says. “We love the comedy shows at Hambones, the taproom at Beirport, and brunches at The Vandal and Smoke. I look forward to every year to community events like Art All Night and the Rock All Night tour. These are just a few examples, but there are so many great things and events offered here.”

They also love Lawrenceville as a community, she notes. “It’s an old neighborhood that is blooming again. It’s open, inclusive, diverse, and a great mixture of old and new.”

Marco Centurione, a visiting professor at Duquesne University, agrees. He moved to a house that he co-rents with a friend in Lawrenceville this past April. Being familiar with the neighborhood already, Centurione knew what Lawrenceville had to offer. He particularly liked the diversity of the people and activities.

“It’s a vibrant and a lively community with a nice mix of young and older people,” he says. “There’s a lot always going on and many new places opening all the time. There’s also a sense of a community that I have found here that you don’t find in other neighborhoods.”

Doughboy Square Apartments

Featuring high-end kitchens, spa-like bathrooms, in-unit laundry, air conditioning, private balconies, and indoor parking, the Doughboy Square Apartments (doughboysquareapartments.com), which opened in December 2014, is located at 3459 Butler Street. At the street level the building has 16,000 square feet of retail space with an entrance lobby to the apartment building above. There are 13 units per floor on three floors for a total of 45 market-rate luxury apartments with high-end kitchens that include stainless steel Energy Star appliances.

Carolyn Maue, an executive leadership coach and consultant and founder of the Maue Center, moved there with her husband, Bryan Hunt, about a year ago.

“We decided to buy a home in Orlando, Florida, because that’s where our daughter and grandchildren live. Also, I do business in Orlando and we needed a place where we can go back and forth since we wanted to keep our business and life in Pittsburgh,” she says. “We looked at several places, and one of the criteria for my husband is that we still needed to be able to walk to the Strip District. We had lived in Washington’s Landing and were able to walk to the Strip and loved it there.”

They were also looking for a place where they could have an urban experience. “After looking at several places, we decided that we liked the Doughboy Square Apartments the best,” says Maue, who appreciates that the community at Doughboy is a mix of older and young people. “The apartment itself is laid out very well and has a garage onsite. The best part is just being able to walk outside and have a vast array of restaurants, interesting shops, and interesting people.”

Five on 47th

One of the newest properties in these neighborhoods is Five on 47th (FiveOn47th.com) in Lawrenceville. The property consists of five new townhomes centrally located in the neighborhood. These homes were designed by Lawrenceville-based Moss Architect and are known for their modern urban designs. PW Campbell is the
community’s builder, who has committed to building quality homes in the Pittsburgh area for 100 years.

From the developer’s side, RE/MAX’s Sarah Madia says Lawrenceville is attractive due to its location and its great Main Street area.

“It’s nearly 30 blocks of retail on Butler Street,” she says. “It’s also one of the biggest neighborhoods in the city because you have three different wards that comprise the neighborhood, with Butler Street as the connecting road. Another point is that Lawrenceville is one of the few areas in the city that actually has land. Most of our neighborhoods have built up long ago, but Lawrenceville still has what’s called intro lots where we can build a single house, or there are larger lots where you’ll see communities such as Five on 47th, where we’re building five townhouses. To be able to offer that makes it really attractive to developers—the location and the availability of land.”

From a buyer’s perspective, the walkability of the neighborhood is the main attraction. Typically, that’s the number one thing that Madia hears from buyers—they want to have a full, urban experience of being able to walk from their house, or even a quick Uber or Lyft ride, to go wherever they want in the city.

“But, you don’t even need to take a ride. You can walk to many places,” she says. “In addition, we have many residents who are from Pittsburgh, or maybe moving here from other cities, and looking for an opportunity to buy a new-construction home. Lawrenceville offers that, and we also offer a lot of contemporary design that maybe hasn’t been offered in other neighborhoods.”

As the listing agent for Five on 47th, Madia says the community offers you an opportunity to customize your home. The standard packages offer upgraded finishes but you can add optional upgrades and customizations. Optional upgrades include but are not limited to smart-home technology, audio and surround sound, and more. You can work with Five on 47th’s kitchen, bathroom, and lighting designers to design a home that is truly your own, she adds.
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The Yards at 3 Crossings and the Cork Factory

Another main draw for residents looking to move to the Strip District or Lawrenceville is the amenities that many of these developments offer, according to Maria Bisceglia, founder at Harrison Everette Corporate Housing. Whether you need housing for relocated employees in-between houses, task forces on temporary assignment, or trainees and interns, Bisceglia’s company places traveling professionals in affordable luxury housing units. She has units in the Strip District’s Yards at 3 Crossings and Cork Factory, along with several private places in Lawrenceville.

“There are several new developments popping up with wonderful amenities,” she says. “It seems like the amenities are really what people are going for these days.”

For example, at the Yards at 3 Crossings (theyardsapts.com)—where Bisceglia and her family currently live—some of the community-wide amenities include: a salt-water pool and hot tub; a fitness center; a club room with fireplace; a game room with bar, TVs, darts, and pool and foosball tables; a computer lounge; a bicycle storage and maintenance area; car- and bike-sharing programs; electric-vehicle charging stations; 24-hour concierge service; an onsite parking garage; and a dog park.

“We decided on the Yards because of the location and the amenities,” says Bisceglia. “It’s close to good schools and it’s an easy commute for my husband to get to work. In my line of work, this area also made sense for me business-wise.”

As far as the amenities at the riverfront apartment residence, Bisceglia says the attached garage is a huge bonus for them, adding, “It’s also great that the kids can hang out in the club room here. They also enjoy the pool and hot tub. These are just a few things that you don’t find too often in the city.”

The Yards, a 300-unit pet-friendly community, is set on a former Pitt Ohio Express truck yard and offers residents sustainably designed and modern studio, one-, and two-bedroom apartments, and an acre of green space along the Allegheny River.

2500 Smallman Street and Otto Milk Condominiums

Like the Yards, 2500 Smallman (www.2500smallman.com) is also located on the former site of a Pitt Ohio facility. 2500 Smallman...
features 11 city homes, ranging from 3,450 to 5,985 square feet. For Darla Jobkar, a realtor with Northwood Realty and listing agent for 2500 Smallman along with the Otto Milk Condominiums in the Strip District, the residential real estate market in the Strip District and Lawrenceville is simply amazing, especially if you’re buying. “The appreciation is over the top—more than I’ve ever anticipated in two years in both neighborhoods,” says Jobkar.

Jobkar notes that people are moving into these neighborhoods because of the quality of the developments. “We finally have something of quality being built for people who are not looking to flip but to actually have a real home in a city environment without being in the congested part of the golden-triangle downtown area.”

The fact that both the Strip District and Lawrenceville are walkable neighborhoods is also a huge benefit. “These neighborhoods have transformed themselves into walking communities with wonderful stores, restaurants, and amenities,” adds Jobkar.

When you take a look at the demographics of who are moving into these neighborhoods, Jobkar says it is very broad. “The demographics are across the board and it is simply delightful,” she says. “We are seeing very young professionals, empty-nesters, and retired people moving in, as well as people who are well-traveled. That’s what makes these neighborhoods so special and unique.”

The Foundry at 41st

Located just a few steps from Butler Street, The Foundry at 41st also offers luxury living in Lawrenceville on a 4.5-acre site. The Foundry, which opened in May 2017 and is located at the site of the former Phoenix Roll Works, features micro, one-, and two-bedroom units and an incredible list of amenities, including high-end apartment features and finishes, a beautifully landscaped courtyard and rooftop terrace, swimming pool, indoor/outdoor fitness area and yoga studio, and pet spa.
Alex Simikas, developer of The Foundry at 41st, says that the neighborhood itself is the attraction for residents. “You have this really cool and diverse mix of people of different age groups who are living here,” he says. “That’s the one really unique quality about Lawrenceville. It’s also safe and there’s something for everyone to do on Butler Street. And the location is great. You have easy access to Route 28, which gets you to the Pennsylvania Turnpike and to I-79. You’re also just 20 to 25 blocks from downtown.”

The apartments are located adjacent to Bay 4, a plaza for community events developed from a reclaimed architectural artifact. Simikas says that they hope to hold night markets there. “We’re talking with the Lawrenceville Corporation about hosting a possible Farmer’s Market,” he says. “We already have a monthly pop-up beer garden scheduled for that space and we’re also hoping to do a summer concert series. We want it to be an active and very unique Pittsburgh destination.”

Other Housing Units

While the new developments are certainly catching people’s attention, some people still prefer smaller housing units or apartment buildings.

Jessica Gumbert, 34, moved to Lawrenceville in December 2009 when she bought a 1,344-square-foot home. Gumbert, who runs youth-employment programming in Braddock and Wilkinsburg under the county’s Department of Human Services, moved back to Pittsburgh in 2008 from France, where she was teaching English. “At the time I was looking for a house, I joked that I was willing to move all over the world, but if I lived in Pittsburgh, I needed to be walking distance from Bloomfield, where I grew up,” she says. “I was able to find a nice home in Lawrenceville for less than comparable ones in Bloomfield at the time—which now is surprising considering the current state of housing prices in the neighborhood.”

The walkability and vibrancy of the neighborhood are her favorite parts of living in Lawrenceville. Gumbert lives right across from Arsenal Park, which she says she loves. “Having lived in France, La Gourmandine Bakery is one of my favorite places. For drinks I like Arsenal Cider House and I just recently went to Arriba at the Clemente Museum for the first time. In the summer, I enjoy walking along the river trail and hope to see it expand.”

Tyler Kendrick, 27, who works at the Andy Warhol Museum, coaches improv, and is a stand-up comedian, is moving to an apartment in Lawrenceville with a friend in June. Originally from Jamestown, New York, Kendrick moved to Pittsburgh five years ago because it was an inexpensive and attractive city for young professionals like himself. Having lived in the South Hills, Oakland, South Side, North Hills, and Bloomfield, Kendrick always enjoyed visiting Lawrenceville.

“I love the area and it’s close to the theater we perform at—the Unplanned Comedy Warehouse,” says Kendrick. “I also perform at Hambones’ open mic night every Monday so I was very familiar with Lawrenceville already.”

Kendrick can understand why Lawrenceville has become a hot neighborhood to live in. “It’s very easy to navigate because everything is geographically laid out on a flat main street. It’s accessible by walking or biking. And if you’re a family with young kids, it’s easy to push your kids up and down the street on a stroller as well. From antiques shops to arts to new restaurants, there’s something for everyone here.”

Daniel Casciato is a full-time freelance writer and social media specialist from Pittsburgh. In addition to writing for The Strip!, he writes health, legal, real estate, and technology-related articles for trade and consumer magazines and has his own copywriting business. His website is www.DanielCasciato.com.