

Mix of housing, travel costs make overlooked suburbs attractive

By Bob Tita
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(Crain's) — Some of Chicago's most overlooked suburbs rise to the head of the class in a new study of communities with the most affordable housing and transportation costs in the Chicago area.

West suburban Forest Park offers the best mix of housing and transportation costs in the region, according to the Center for Neighborhood Technology, a nonprofit research and advocacy group for urban communities.

For Forest Park families with average incomes of between \$20,000 and \$75,000 a year, housing and transportation costs account for 40.8% of their income, compared with 41.7% for the entire city of Chicago.

Other communities in the top 10 include smaller communities of Hometown, near south suburban Oak Lawn, Harwood Heights, Norridge, North Riverside, and Rosemont .

These older, inner-ring suburbs in Cook County share many of the same characteristics as Chicago neighborhoods, including easy access to major street thoroughfares and public transit service and densely populated residential areas that allow residents to walk or drive short distances to work, stores, schools and hospitals.

"In a world in which gas prices are rising, we can no longer continue to ignore transportation costs when we assess whether housing is affordable," said Kathryn Tholin, CEO of the center.

The research is intended to counter the notion that area residents are being driven to the outer edges of the metropolitan area for affordable housing because prices in older communities are too expensive.

But transportation costs in McHenry, Will and other collar counties can offset the affordability homebuyers think they're getting, according to center's calculation.

Trips to work, stores and destinations are longer – and more expensive – in these communities.

Americans nationwide spend 18% of their household budgets on transportation.

Housing & transportation index for Chicago's suburbs

Community	County	Rank	Costs* as a % of income
Forest Park	Cook	1	40.8
Chicago	Cook	2	41.7
Harwood Heights	Cook	3	43.5
Hometown	Cook	4	43.5
Oak Park	Cook	5	43.6
North Riverside	Cook	6	44.1
Cicero	Cook	7	44.1
Chicago Ridge	Cook	8	44.4
Elmwood Park	Cook	9	44.4
Norridge	Cook	10	36.0
Pingree Grove	Kane	278	61.9
Lincolnshire	Lake	279	62.3
Tower Lakes	Lake	280	62.4
Winnetka	Cook	281	63.5
Forest Lake	Lake	282	63.7
Kildeer Lake	Lake	283	63.8
North Barrington	Lake	284	63.9
Hawthorn Woods	Lake	285	66.7
Kenilworth	Cook	286	68.1
Lake Forest	Lake	287	71.2

* Average of housing and transportation costs for households with weighted average incomes of between \$20K and \$75K

Source: Center for Neighborhood Technology

In the city of Chicago, the neighborhoods with the most affordable housing and transportation combination for households earning \$20,000 to \$75,000 are Uptown at 36.4%; Edgewater, 36.5; Douglas, 36.8%; and the Lower West Side, 37.4%.
