

Location Affordability Portal Vignettes

<http://locationaffordability.info/vignettes.aspx>



Note: These fictional narratives illustrate how families and organizations can use the Location Affordability Portal to make more informed decisions about where to live, work, and invest.



The Larkins: Thinking Outside the Box and Inside the BeltLine

When Ron and Marie Larkin were first introduced to Lawrenceville in the early 2000s, they felt like they'd found the perfect place to raise their two girls, PJ and Brenda. The neighbors were friendly, the playground well-equipped, and a shopping center was only fifteen minutes away. They had moved to the area for Ron's new job as a high school English teacher in Duluth, 11 miles away.

In recent years, though, Lawrenceville has lost some of its luster, new developments in the area have brought more traffic and longer commutes for Ron and Marie. Ron's 25 minute commute now stretches to almost 40 minutes each way; on weekdays he now spends more time in his car than enjoying dinner with the family. Marie, now doing her nursing residency at Emory Hospital, spends even more time commuting – some weeks, she is on the road for 12 hours or more.

Marie loves working in Emory Hospital, but she can't see how she can continue commuting 75 minutes each way on a regular basis. They discuss the possibility of moving, and Ron applies for a position at the English Department of a local High School. Marie begins to do some online real estate research in the Atlanta area, and what she sees leaves her feeling deflated—housing is way out of their price range.



Marie decides to call her friend Jenny, who is a real estate agent in Lawrenceville. Marie confides in Jenny about her predicament: the jobs, the commuting, the price of housing in Atlanta, it all seems a little too much.

Jenny nods sympathetically but doesn't think things are all that bleak. If Marie really wants to make this happen, she just needs to start thinking about things that can offset the higher mortgage payments. "Like what?" asks Marie. "Like, for instance, living in a more walkable community," Jenny explains. "More transportation options can mean big savings." She suggests Marie figure out what they're currently spending for housing and transportation combined and compare it to what they'd be spending if they moved inside Atlanta's BeltLine, where better transportation options might allow them to save money by shedding one of their cars. Marie is intrigued; where can she find that kind of information? As the final whistle blows and they quickly pack their chairs, Jenny suggests Marie check out the Location Affordability Index. "It'll give you an idea of combined housing and transportation costs throughout the Atlanta metro region. You might be surprised."

When Ron comes home from Brenda's meet, he finds Marie on the computer. She tells him about the Index and its companion tool, the My Transportation Cost Calculator (MTCC). For the next hour or so, they use the HUD tools, finding that they currently spend about 23% of their income on housing and 17% on transportation and what the combined costs might be in different neighborhoods around Atlanta.



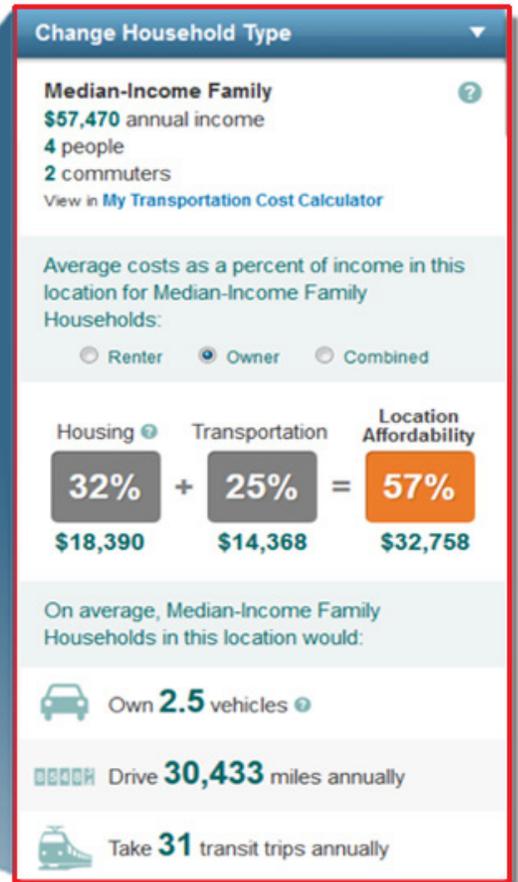
Using this information, Ron and Marie make a list of places that have good schools and public transportation, circling three neighborhoods that would shrink their transportation outlays enough to allow them to afford a higher mortgage.

Jenny connects Ron and Marie to a real estate agent in Atlanta. The agent sees that they're looking for more than just a house: they're in the market for a walkable community with good schools and transit access. Because they're so well-prepared, the search for their new home is quick. Eight weeks later, the Larkins have moved to North Grant Park and sold one of their cars.

Their housing costs are a bit higher, now 29% of their income, but their transportation costs have plummeted to around 7%. Ron now walks three blocks to the light rail stop and spends the short commute reading the paper; PJ and Brenda ride their bikes down tree-lined streets to school and practice; and, at the end of a 12 hour shift at Emory Hospital, Marie is home in less than 15 minutes.

Offsetting Costs to Keep Household Expenses Affordable

A look at Atlanta using the LAI indicates average transportation costs would be lower while housing costs would be a little higher, basically offsetting each other. Clicking on different neighborhoods provides more information as to how the costs break down.



Lifestyle Changes Have Major Impacts on Transportation Costs

