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## WESTERN PA

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### Urban alternative living presents Pittsburgh development opportunities

The impact of inflation on our lives is painfully obvious. With gas and food costs soaring, we face an annual inflation rate of 5%. The large suburban homes and vehicular-dependent lifestyles many Americans desire are becoming an increasing financial burden. As a result, many of us are considering urban alternatives.



Eric Booth

The trend towards urban living is not new; the thought of short commutes, convenient access to retail and cultural amenities, and proximity to places of architectural and civic character is always tempting. Yet with an interest, and necessity, for more economical and sustainable forms of living, our existing urban centers become viable options.

Pittsburgh, particularly its Downtown, is a prime example. Forget images of a smoky steel city: Pittsburgh is one of the cleanest (as ranked by Forbes magazine), "greenest," and, according to Places Rated Almanac, "most livable" cities in the country. It features world-class stadiums, cultural venues, a rich history, and a distinct

urban fabric born of a fascinating intersection of people, industry, and landscape. Despite the scale of its structures and breadth of its amenities, it manages to maintain a personable atmosphere. Pittsburgh is a small town with big buildings.

While its features appeal to many, the economic repercussions of rising fuel costs make Pittsburgh attractive even to the budget-conscious. Statistically, housing costs in the region are already below national standards. Still, according to the Center for Neighborhood Technology, even typical households further than 10 to 15 miles outside of Downtown could be spending over \$3,800 per year in gasoline alone. Include additional transportation

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costs, such as car payments, insurance, maintenance, and parking, and the cost of vehicular-dependent living is substantial. Though housing costs in the city core are typically higher than suburban counterparts, the overall affordability factor in many cases now favors urban living. Considering its proximity to the Strip District's nightlife, wholesale food markets and retail, the North Shore's sports attractions and museums, and the East End's eclectic retail, living in Downtown Pittsburgh is a fantastic option.

Comprehensive planning efforts by local leaders and progressive initiatives by organizations such as the Pittsburgh Downtown Partnership established the framework for successful residential development. The last 10 years produced incredible results, from cleanliness and safety programs

throughout Downtown to broad improvements to Pittsburgh's Cultural District and Market Square. Successful multi-family projects like the Cork Factory and 151 First Side have encouraged planning of new developments such as the Wholey Building project, which involves the conversion of an existing cold storage facility into condominiums. Developers have several resources to assist with development costs, including tax abatement programs, project financing options, specialty funds, and programs such as the PDP's Vacant Upper Floor Loan Fund.

Pittsburgh's Downtown and adjacent neighborhoods offer numerous opportunities for development. Of course, many challenges exist, including construction, operating, and land costs, parking, building and zoning requirements, and

the inherent difficulties of working within an existing fabric. When considering a project, it is critical that the architect and development team members not only be sensitive to these issues, but find opportunity within them.

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