

These Seattle Burbs Have the Best Walkable Downtowns

For those seeking an urban lifestyle, suburban cities with compact and walkable downtowns offer appealing amenities, such as local shops and restaurants, and small-town civic pride



Kirkland

Although its population now exceeds 87,000, Kirkland is still a charming lakeside town where sidewalks along Lake Washington Boulevard—punctuated with parks and luxury waterfront condos—attract hordes of walkers and runners, who inevitably wind up in the compact downtown filled with shops, restaurants and galleries. Long-established favorites continue to thrive, and renovations to some buildings have brought in a more contemporary architectural style.

Kirkland is rich with other downtown amenities, including the Kirkland Performance Center, which presents popular theater and music shows (examples include The Brothers Four and the Seattle International Comedy Competition); the upscale Heathman Hotel; Marina Park, which offers summer concerts and is the departure point for some Argosy boat tours; a community center and outdoor pool; and Kirkland Urban, a mixed-use shopping center under development on the eastern edge of downtown.

There is a lot of new development taking place, but the city's goal is to ensure that when it's done, "it's still Kirkland—only better than ever," says Ellen Miller-Wolfe, the city's economic development manager. That means green space, expanding traffic accessibility and creating affordability so that the city remains attractive to families, millennials and seniors. A wide array of condos and apartments border the downtown area, and spreading beyond them are single-family neighborhoods, many with water views. Nearby, The Village at Totem Lake is currently under development and will add new residential, business and retail offerings.

Neighborhood Snapshot

Population: 87,701

Median Home Price: \$706,900

Appreciation: 18.8 percent

School Rank: Lake Washington School District, no. 3 in state

Public Transportation: King County Metro bus service, including RapidRide; Sound Transit

Commute to Seattle: 10.8 miles, 20–40 minutes

Kirkland Downtown

Long-established businesses continue to thrive in downtown Kirkland, such as popular neighborhood restaurant George's (108 Kirkland Ave.; 425.827.6622; georgeskirkland.com); Via Lago (129 Lake St. S; 425.893.9191), which sells stylish women's clothing; and Booboo Barkery and Boutique (115 Lake St. S; 425.822.0292), offering treats and other goodies for dogs. Recent newcomers include women's clothing shop Hepburn (140 Park Lane; 425.576.2730), wine-tasting bar Maison DeLille (15 Lake St. S; 425.205.2147; delillecellars.com) and men's shop Asher Goods (15 Lake St. S, No. 201; 425.576.0683; ashergoods.com). Fine-dining restaurants Volterra (121 Kirkland Ave.; 425.202.7201; volterrakirkland.com) and Trellis in The Heathman Hotel (220 Kirkland Ave.; 425.284.5900; heathmankirkland.com) continue to attract a crowd that would rather stay close to home than venture into the big city.