

Minneapolis, Chicago and Philadelphia Are the Most Affordable Sustainable Cities

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Just Three of the Cities that Top the Ranks for Walkability, Bikeability, and Transit and Park Access Also Have Home Prices Below the National Median

There are many ways that all of us as individuals can do our part for the environment. Limiting use of single-use plastics, recycling, and being mindful of things like energy efficiency. But one of the biggest environmental choices we make is where we live. The closer you are to your daily activities like work, restaurants, shopping, and recreation, the less of an impact you have on the environment getting to those things, and the less of your own time and energy you lose to moving from point A to point B.

To help quantify some of the benefits of being close to amenities, we combined four measures of sustainability for residents of a city—walkability, bikeability, and access to public transit and parks—for the 50 most populous U.S. cities, which we ranked according to a metric we’re calling the “Sustainability Score.”

For these measures we used data from our own [Walk Score®](#) (Walk Score, Transit Score® and Bike Score®) and [ParkScore®](#) rankings from The [Trust for Public Land](#). Each of the four components is measured on a scale of one to 100, where 100 best rating and one is

the worst. The overall Sustainability Score is an average of the four components.

[San Francisco](#), with a Sustainability Score of 79.2 out of 100, ranked highest among the biggest cities in the nation. [New York](#) was a close second with a score of 79.0.

[Arlington, Texas](#) (29.3), [Charlotte](#) (27.5) and [Fort Worth](#) (25.3) had the lowest Sustainability Scores, and were the only cities with scores below 30.

Below we rank the 50 largest cities for which we have park data, according to their Sustainability Score:

Rank	City	Sustainability Score	Median Home Price (March 2019)	ParkScore®	Walk Score	Transit Score	Bike Score
1	San Francisco, CA	79.2	\$1,407,500	80	86	80	71
2	New York, NY	79.0	\$605,000	75	89	84	68
3	Washington, D.C.	74.2	\$568,000	82	77	71	67
4	Boston, MA	73.4	\$645,000	71*	81	72	69
5	Minneapolis, MN	73.1	\$275,000	84	69	57	82
6	Chicago, IL	72.7	\$286,500	76	78	65	72
7	Seattle, WA	69.1	\$681,000	73	73	60	70
8	Portland, OR	68.9	\$435,000	78	65	52	81
9	Philadelphia, PA	67.9	\$200,000	60	79	67	66
10	Oakland, CA	62.5	\$757,500	57	72	56	65
11	Miami, FL	61.8	\$310,000	48	79	57	63
12	Long Beach, CA	61.8	\$571,000	64	70	52	61

Rank	City	Sustainability Score	Median Home Price (March 2019)	ParkScore®	Walk Score	Transit Score	Bike Score
13	Denver, CO	60.3	\$415,000	62	61	47	71
14	Milwaukee, WI	57.9	\$136,750	67	62	48	54
15	New Orleans, LA	57.1	\$265,000	63	58	44	64
16	Baltimore, MD	55.8	\$157,500	45	69	57	52
17	Los Angeles, CA	54.5	\$720,000	43	67	53	55
18	San Jose, CA	53.1	\$1,020,000	62	51	41	59
19	Cleveland, OH	53.0	\$80,100	58	60	45	50
20	Sacramento, CA	52.7	\$332,500	64	47	34	66
21	San Diego, CA	48.5	\$612,000	67	51	37	39
22	Atlanta, GA	47.7	\$299,900	53	49	47	41
23	Albuquerque, NM	47.1	\$180,040	55	43	30	60
24	Dallas, TX	45.3	\$315,000	49	46	40	46
25	Detroit, MI	44.8	\$40,000	34	55	39	52
26	Austin, TX	44.6	\$375,000	53	40	34	51
27	Las Vegas, NV	44.4	\$275,000	59	41	34	44
28	Tucson, AZ	43.9	\$210,500	34	42	35	64
29	Phoenix, AZ	43.6	\$255,000	45	41	36	52
30	Houston, TX	42.8	\$226,320	38	49	37	48

Rank	City	Sustainability Score	Median Home Price (March 2019)	ParkScore®	Walk Score	Transit Score	Bike Score
31	Omaha, NE	42.6	\$192,000	59	45	27	40
32	Fresno, CA	41.3	\$255,000	31	46	32	57
33	Columbus, OH	41.0	\$174,950	44	41	33	47
34	San Antonio, TX	39.3	\$210,000	42	38	36	42
35	Virginia Beach, VA	39.1	\$252,750	62	33	21	41
36	Raleigh, NC	39.0	\$275,000	59	30	30	37
37	Kansas City, MO	38.6	\$185,000	59	34	29	32
38	Tulsa, OK	37.7	\$160,000	44	40	23	44
39	Mesa, AZ	37.5	\$256,000	28	37	27	57
40	El Paso, TX	37.1	\$158,225	37	41	31	39
41	Colorado Springs, CO	36.5	\$295,000	50	36	19	42
42	Memphis, TN	35.8	\$130,000	33	37		38
43	Wichita, KS	34.2	<i>[no data]</i>	39	35	20	43
44	Louisville, KY	34.0	\$172,500	35	33	28	40
45	Nashville, TN	32.5	\$295,000	46	28	23	33
46	Oklahoma City, OK	31.3	\$183,000	36	33	16	40
47	Jacksonville, FL	31.2	\$200,000	35	27	23	40
48	Arlington, TX	29.3	\$235,000	43	37	0	37

Rank	City	Sustainability Score	Median Home Price (March 2019)	ParkScore®	Walk Score	Transit Score	Bike Score
49	Charlotte, NC	27.5	\$250,000	25	26	29	30
50	Fort Worth, TX	25.3	\$230,000	9*	34	21	36

**Boston and Fort Worth do not have ParkScore® data, so for these cities we scored them based on the number of parks per square mile relative to the 100 most populous cities in the nation.*

For the most part, the more sustainable a city is, the more expensive it is to live there, as six out of the top 10 most sustainable cities have median home prices above \$500,000. There are a few notable exceptions, though. Minneapolis (73.1), Chicago (72.7) and Philadelphia (67.9) all ranked in the top 10 cities for sustainability, but have median home prices lower than [the national median price of \\$295,100](#).

“I often meet transplants from more expensive coastal cities like New York and D.C.,” said Redfin Chicago transaction coordinator Jon Fox. “They want to live somewhere where homeownership is attainable without sacrificing the amenity-rich lifestyles they’ve grown accustomed to. A lot of people may not think of Chicago when it comes to environmental sustainability, but they should! Between public transit, ridesharing, and bike sharing, having a car in Chicago is unnecessary, and in 2018, [Chicago became one of only seven cities in the world to receive the highest level of LEED certification](#) from the U.S. Green Building Council.”

Paying more won’t always get you access to high sustainability, though. Home prices in San Diego are nearly double the national median at \$612,000, but the city’s Sustainability Score is only 48.5, placing it 21st among the 50 largest cities.

“It’s not a coincidence that the most sustainable cities are also the ones with the most expensive homes,” said [Redfin chief economist Daryl Fairweather](#). “Many people are willing to pay a premium for the ability to live a green lifestyle that involves walking and biking and avoids driving. But there are a few places where it’s still affordable to live a sustainable lifestyle. Philadelphia for example, has plenty of [affordable housing near its city center](#) with walkable access to shops, parks and jobs.”

Interactive Map

As you can see in the map below, nearly every part of the country has at least one city with a high Sustainability Score.



Tim Ellis

Tim Ellis has been analyzing the real estate market since 2005, and worked at Redfin as a housing market analyst from 2010 through 2013 and again starting in 2018. In his free time, he runs the independently-operated Seattle-area real estate website [Seattle Bubble](#), and produces the "[Dispatches from the Multiverse](#)" improvised comedy sci-fi podcast.

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