



# CALGARY, UNFILTERED

A REALTOR'S HONEST GUIDE TO CALGARY

*by Lisa Kauffmann*

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# Every Neighbourhood Has A Story.

*Mine is helping you find the one that fits.*

Written from the ground — the stuff clients ask me over coffee, not the polished brochure version.

Calgary is one of the easier Canadian cities to fall in love with: no provincial sales tax, mountains 45 minutes away, a river pathway system most cities would kill for, and housing that — while no longer "cheap" — still buys more square footage than Toronto or Vancouver. But it's a sprawling city of quadrants, and where you land changes your daily life more than almost any other factor. This is the version I actually tell clients.

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# 01 Commutes: The Quadrant Reality

*Calgary is built on a grid split into four quadrants (NW, NE, SW, SE) radiating out from a downtown that sits slightly west of centre. That geography drives almost everything about commute pain.*

*The general rule: SW and inner-NW communities have the shortest, most reliable commutes downtown. SE and outer-NE communities*

*have the longest, and they're more exposed to Deerfoot Trail*

*— Calgary's main north-south freeway, congested at rush hour and prone to closures from collisions since it has few service roads or alternate routes.*

## Outer North

**Livingston, Carrington, Evanston, Sage Hill**

Stoney Trail (the ring road) has made these dramatically more livable than a decade ago, but downtown is still 30–40 minutes.

## Outer NE

**Saddle Ridge, Skyview, Cityscape, Redstone**

Similar story — 35–45 minutes, plus proximity to the airport means some road noise in pockets.

## Inner NW

**Hounsfield Heights, Rosedale, Capitol Hill, Varsity, Briar Hill, Banff Trail**

15–25 minutes, benefits from the LRT Red Line running right through it.

## Inner-city

**Beltline, Mission, Sunnyside, Bridgeland, Inglewood**

10–20 minute commute downtown, often walkable or a short LRT/bike ride. This is the single biggest reason inner-city real estate holds a premium.

## Inner SW

**Altadore, Marda Loop, Killarney, Richmond**

15–20 minutes by car, good existing bus network.

## Outer SE

**Mahogany, Auburn Bay, Cranston, Seton**

35–50 minutes downtown in rush hour, and almost entirely car-dependent. Deerfoot congestion is the main culprit. Great communities, but I'm always honest with clients about the drive.

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*Practical note: if a daily downtown commute matters to you, I always point the conversation toward LRT proximity over straight-line distance — a community 25 minutes away with a 5-minute walk to a C-Train station often beats one 15 minutes away that's 100% dependent on Deerfoot at 8am.*

02

# School Catchments

Calgary has two main public boards— the Calgary Board of Education (CBE) and the Calgary Catholic School District (CCSD) — plus a robust private and charter school scene. A few things I make sure every family understands:

## **Catchment boundaries are not static.**

CBE redraws them periodically as communities grow, and a school that's "your catchment school" today isn't guaranteed to be in five years, especially in newer communities still waiting on a permanent school building.

## **New communities often start without an in-community school.**

Families in early-phase southeast and north communities (parts of Rangeview, Wolf Willow, Homestead, Chelsea) sometimes bus kids to a neighbouring community for a few years until their own school opens. I always check the CBE and CCSD school locator with clients rather than relying on a builder's sales centre map, since those can be aspirational.

## **Program interest can outrank catchment.**

Calgary has a strong system of alternative programs — French immersion, IB, Traditional Learning Centres, sports academies — that families apply into regardless of address, which changes the calculus for some buyers entirely.

## **Established communities tend to have settled, well-regarded schools.**

Places like Tuscany, Edgemont, and Signal Hill have mature school infrastructure and long track records, which is part of why they command a premium with move-up family buyers.

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*My advice to every family client: confirm current catchment and program availability directly with CBE/CCSD before writing an offer — don't take it on faith from a listing.*

03

# Some of the Best Neighbourhoods for Families (not all)

## Legacy (SE)

Consistently a Community of the Year winner. Large environmental reserve, strong pathway network, growing retail, and some of the better value-per-square-foot in the south.

## Tuscany (NW)

Mature, tree-lined, mountain views, excellent schools, and a private residents' club. Easy commute to downtown and the mountains

## Mahogany (SE)

Calgary's largest lake community, with a 63-acre lake with two private beach sites, wetlands, and a vibrant Village Market retail strip. Gold standard for lake-lifestyle family living.

## Evanston (N)

Feels more "finished" than a lot of newer northern communities — established schools, mature trees, a front-porch culture from the site design.

## Auburn Bay (SE)

Same lake-community formula as Mahogany, slightly more established, close to South Health Campus hospital.

## Evergreen, Woodlands (SW)

Backs onto Fish Creek Provincial Park, one of the largest urban parks in North America — huge draw for families wanting nature access without leaving the city.

## Edgemont (NW)

Borders Nose Hill Park, one of Canada's largest urban parks. Strong, stable schools and low crime — a longtime favourite for professional families.

# 04 Areas That Come With Trade-Offs

*I'd rather tell a client the truth upfront than have them find out after possession day. Every one of these communities has genuine strengths and long-time residents who love where they live — but they come with things worth knowing.*

## Forest Lawn, Dover, Marlborough, and pockets of Bowness

Some of Calgary's most affordable communities, and that affordability is exactly the draw for first-time buyers and investors. The trade-off is older housing stock, higher rates of property crime (largely vehicle break-ins and theft rather than violent crime), and in some pockets, aging infrastructure. Bowness has strong community spirit and gorgeous river-adjacent green space, but a somewhat isolated location and mixed housing stock mean conditions vary block to block

I tell clients to walk the specific street, not just the community name.

## Some outer-NE communities (parts of Saddle Ridge, Falconridge, Castleridge)

Great value and a lot of newer housing stock, but longer commutes and, in parts, higher reported crime than the city average. Worth an evening drive-through before committing.

## Communities Still Under Construction (on the edges of the whole city)

Not "bad," but buyers need to go in eyes-open about construction traffic, dust, and services (schools, retail) lagging population growth by a couple of years and what your daily commute will look like..

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*A broader context I share with every out-of-province client: Calgary's citywide Crime Severity Index has actually been trending down, well below Edmonton, Winnipeg, and the national average. Individual community reputations sometimes lag the current data by a few years.*

# 05 For Couples

*Couples, especially without kids yet, or empty-nest-ers adjacent, couples not ready to downsize fully—usually want walkability, restaurants, and a shorter commute over square footage. My go-tos:*

## Beltline

***The densest, most walkable part of the city. High-rise condos, 17th Ave's restaurant strip, closest thing Calgary has to a true urban core lifestyle.***

## Mission

***Slightly quieter than the Beltline but still walking distance to the river pathway, 4th Street's cafés and restaurants, and downtown.***

## Bridgeland

***Up-and-coming, great patios and restaurants along 1st Ave NE, river pathway access, and still slightly better value than Kensington or the Beltline.***

## Inglewood

***Calgary's oldest neighbourhood — antique shops, live music venues, breweries, and the bird sanctuary. Feels the most "lived-in" of the inner-city options.***

## Kensington / Sunnyside

***Independent shops, coffee culture, farmers' market energy, and a short walk or LRT ride across the river to downtown.***

## Marda Loop / Altadore

***A bit more grown-up — young professional couples and young families mixed together, excellent restaurant strip, still walkable but with more single-family housing stock.***

# For Downsizers

Downsizing clients almost always want three things: single-level or low-maintenance living, proximity to amenities (not isolation), and a community they can still walk in.

Garrison Woods / Currie (SW)

***Purpose-built with townhomes and villas in mind, walkable to Marda Loop, well-loved by downsizers leaving bigger SW family homes.***

Aspen Woods / Springbank Hill (SW)

***More upscale downsizing — villa-style bungalows and low-maintenance estate homes, still close to west-side shopping and the mountains.***

Varsity / Signal Hill (NW/SW)

***Established communities with a good stock of bungalows and villas, close to hospitals, university, and shopping — popular with longtime Calgarians who don't want to leave their quadrant.***

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Mahogany / Auburn Bay bungalow villas (SE)

***For downsizers who want the lake lifestyle without stairs — a growing product type in these communities.***

Bridgeland / Inglewood condos

***For downsizers who actually want more urban life post-kids, not less — walkable, characterful, and close to the river.***

# The Short List

*A quick recap*

| BUYER TYPE                     | TOP PICKS                                           |
|--------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------|
| Growing families, new build    | Legacy, Mahogany, Evanston, Auburn Bay              |
| Families, established/schools  | Tuscany, Edgemont, Signal Hill                      |
| Couples, urban lifestyle       | Beltline, Mission, Kensington, Bridgeland           |
| Couples, character + value     | Inglewood, Marda Loop/Altadore                      |
| Downsizers, low-maintenance    | Garrison Woods/Currie, Varsity, Aspen Woods         |
| Best value / first-time buyers | Legacy, Wolf Willow, Forest Lawn (walk it first)    |
| Shortest downtown commute      | Beltline, Mission, Sunnyside, Bridgeland, Killarney |

*A note on how to use this guide: neighbourhood character, crime data, and school catchments all shift year to year in a city growing as fast as Calgary. Treat this as a starting framework for a conversation, not a final answer — and always verify current school catchment and community crime data directly before writing an offer.*

*"Every neighbourhood has a story. My job is matching yours to the right one."*

— LISA KAUFFMANN



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