

The St. Louis Central Corridor Brief

Five communities, compared honestly — whether you're moving across town or across the country.

Ladue · Clayton · Town & Country · Kirkwood · Chesterfield

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Before you read this

Most neighborhood guides are written to make every community sound wonderful. This one isn't.

Whether you've lived here your whole life or you're arriving next spring, the decision is the same one: which of these five places is the right fit for how your family actually lives? You'll hear the same names repeatedly — usually from someone who lives in one of them and is advocating for it. What you won't hear is the tradeoff. Every one of these communities is genuinely good. They're good at *different things*, and the wrong fit is expensive to undo.

This brief covers Ladue, Clayton, Town & Country, Kirkwood, and Chesterfield. For each: what the housing stock actually is, what the schools situation actually is, what your commute actually looks like, and — the part that's hardest to get from a website — what it feels like to live there. Most of the people who use it are already St. Louisans: trading up, downsizing, moving for schools, or finally leaving the house that no longer fits.

One thing to understand before anything else

School district boundaries in St. Louis County do not follow municipal boundaries. Not approximately, not mostly. **A Ladue address does not guarantee Ladue schools**, and the Ladue School District serves substantial portions of Creve Coeur, Olivette, and Frontenac. Town & Country is split between two districts. So is Chesterfield.

If schools are driving your decision, verify the district at the specific address — not the city. This single fact accounts for more relocation regret than any other.

Ladue

Established wealth, large lots, mature trees, and almost nothing to walk to.



Ladue — stone gateposts, deep setbacks, and a canopy that closes over the road.

HOUSING STOCK

Ladue is old, in the good sense. The core inventory is 1920s–1950s — Tudors, Colonials, stone traditionals — plus a significant layer of mid-century ranches on generous lots. Over the past fifteen years a steady teardown-and-rebuild cycle has added new construction, which means you'll find a 2023 build sitting between two 1938 houses. Lot sizes run from roughly a half acre to several acres. Small houses are genuinely scarce; entry into Ladue usually means either an older ranch or a property that needs work.

SCHOOLS

The Ladue School District is the draw and deserves its reputation. But Ladue also has an unusually heavy private school culture — MICDS, John Burroughs, Whitfield, Villa Duchesne, Priory, CBC, Visitation. Many families here pay Ladue taxes and private tuition simultaneously. Worth knowing before you assume the public schools are the reason everyone is here.

COMMUTE

The best in this brief. Clayton is roughly ten minutes. Downtown is twenty to twenty-five. Highway 40/I-64 is close without being on top of you.

WHAT IT'S ACTUALLY LIKE

Quiet to the point of stillness. No downtown, no commercial strip, essentially no walkable retail — Ladue has kept it that way deliberately. You drive to everything. The social network is dense and long-established; a lot of people here went to school together, and their children now do. That's either a warm community or a closed one depending on how you enter it.

Ladue is the fit if

you want proximity to Clayton employment, a large lot, and architectural character, and you don't need to walk anywhere.

Ladue is the wrong fit if

you're coming from a walkable city neighborhood and expect to replicate it, or you want new construction without a teardown project.

Clayton

St. Louis's second downtown, and the only community here where you can genuinely live without a car.



Clayton — Tudor storefronts and an office tower on the same block.

HOUSING STOCK

The most varied of the five, and the most misunderstood. Clayton has excellent single-family neighborhoods — Claverach Park, Davis Place, the streets around Wydown — with early-twentieth-century homes on smaller lots than Ladue's. It also has real high-rise and condo inventory, which is the piece most buyers most often overlook. If you want lock-and-leave, or you're testing the market before buying, Clayton is the only community in this brief with meaningful condo depth.

SCHOOLS

Clayton School District, and it's small — which cuts both ways. Smaller cohorts, more individual attention, less breadth in offerings than a large district. Clayton High is well regarded and the district's size is central to its identity.

COMMUTE

Often zero. Clayton is the county seat and a major employment center — Centene, Enterprise, a dense concentration of law and financial firms. If your office is in Clayton you can walk. Downtown is fifteen to twenty minutes, and MetroLink runs from Clayton, which is genuinely useful for Cardinals games and airport runs.

WHAT IT'S ACTUALLY LIKE

Urban texture at suburban scale. Restaurants, Shaw Park, the DeMun and Wydown corridors, Washington University adjacent. Density is higher and lots are smaller — you trade acreage for walkability. Street parking and traffic are real considerations in a way they aren't in Town & Country.

Clayton is the fit if

you work in Clayton, you're coming from a city and want to stay in one, or you want the option of a condo rather than a house.

Clayton is the wrong fit if

you want land. You will not find three acres in Clayton.

Town & Country

Acreage and newer construction, with the tradeoffs that come from being spread out.



Town & Country — white fence, open pasture, and a trail instead of a sidewalk.

HOUSING STOCK

Large lots are the entire proposition — one to three acres is common, and the zoning protects it. Housing skews newer than Ladue: substantial builds from the 1980s through today, larger square footage, more contemporary floor plans. If you want a big new house on real land inside the county, this is where it is.

SCHOOLS

Split between the Parkway and Kirkwood districts. This matters enormously and is the single most important thing to verify at the address level before you make an offer. Two houses on the same road can feed different districts.

COMMUTE

Roughly twenty minutes to Clayton, thirty to downtown, depending where in Town & Country you land — it's a geographically large municipality. I-64 and I-270 access is good.

WHAT IT'S ACTUALLY LIKE

Green, private, and quiet. Longview Farm Park and the trail system are genuine amenities. There is no downtown and no walkable core; this is a fully car-dependent community by design. Neighbors are further apart, which some people experience as privacy and others as isolation.

Town & Country is the fit if

land and newer construction are your priorities and you're comfortable driving for everything.

Town & Country is the wrong fit if

you want a neighborhood where your children can walk to a friend's house, or you want any kind of street life.

Kirkwood

The only community in this brief with a real, functioning downtown — and the most accessible price point.



Kirkwood — the farmers market on a weekday morning, church steeple behind it.

HOUSING STOCK

The most architecturally interesting inventory of the five. Victorians, Craftsman bungalows, Cape Cods, mid-century ranches, and a steady stream of new construction on infill lots. Lots are smaller and the streets are closer together, which produces the neighborhood feel Kirkwood is known for. Price per square foot is meaningfully below Ladue and Town & Country, and the range is wide — modest bungalows through substantial homes in the older sections.

SCHOOLS

Kirkwood School District, with strong community identification. Kirkwood High is a genuine center of civic life here in a way that's less true in the other four communities.

COMMUTE

Twenty-five to thirty minutes downtown via I-44. Thirty to Clayton. Notably, Kirkwood has an operating Amtrak station in its downtown — a real amenity if you travel to Chicago or Kansas City with any regularity.

WHAT IT'S ACTUALLY LIKE

Kirkwood has something the others don't: a downtown people actually use. The farmers market, the Greentree Festival, the holiday walk, restaurants and shops on Kirkwood

Road and Argonne. Community identity here is strong and participatory. If you want your family to be *from* somewhere, this is the strongest candidate on the list.

Kirkwood is the fit if

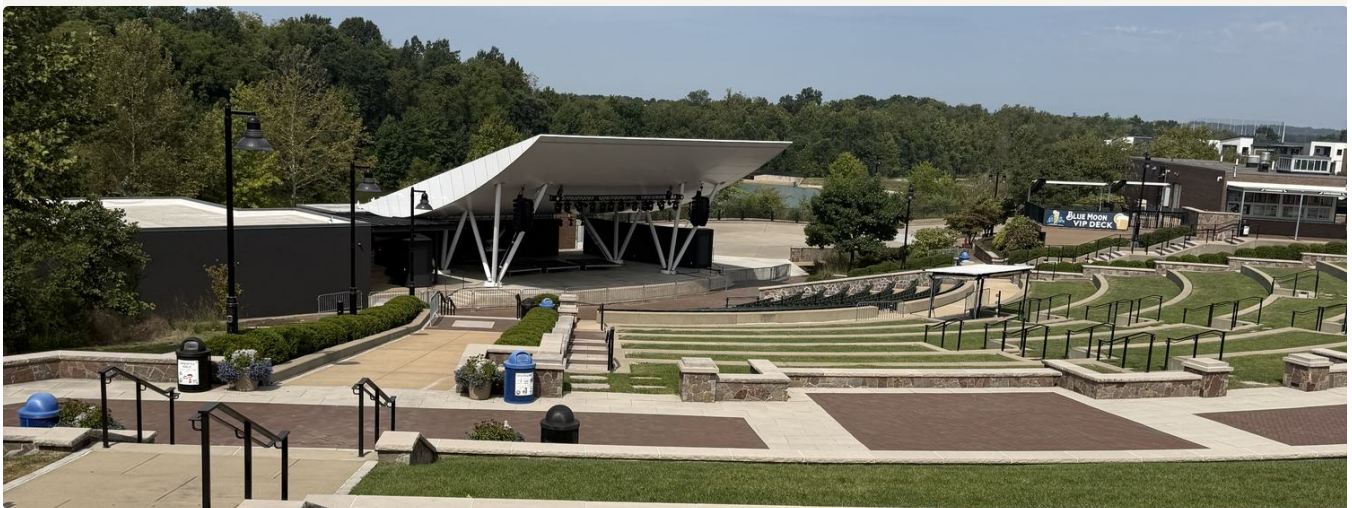
you want walkability, community, and character, and you're willing to trade lot size and commute minutes for it.

Kirkwood is the wrong fit if

you need a short Clayton commute or you want a large lot.

Chesterfield

The most house for the money, the newest construction, and the longest drive.



Chesterfield — the amphitheater and the planned civic core around it.

HOUSING STOCK

The newest inventory in this brief by a wide margin. Subdivisions from the 1990s forward, plus significant recent construction and a deep maintenance-free villa market that's particularly relevant if you're downsizing or want to travel without worrying about a yard. Square footage per dollar is the best of the five, and not by a small margin.

SCHOOLS

Split between the Rockwood and Parkway districts, both well regarded. Again: verify at the address, not the city.

COMMUTE

The real cost. Thirty to forty minutes to Clayton, thirty-five to forty-five downtown, and I-64 westbound at rush hour is a genuine consideration rather than a theoretical one. If your office is in Clayton, drive this route at 5:15 on a Tuesday before you commit.

WHAT IT'S ACTUALLY LIKE

Newer, more planned, more HOA-governed than the others. Chesterfield Valley has substantial retail and dining, and the former mall site is under redevelopment as a mixed-use district. More families here work in West County — the corporate campuses along Olive and Chesterfield Parkway — for whom the commute math reverses entirely.

Chesterfield is the fit if

you want new construction and space,
you're not commuting to Clayton daily, or
you work in West County.

Chesterfield is the wrong fit if

you want historic character, walkability to a
downtown, or a short trip to the central
corridor.

The comparison at a glance

Closed sales, trailing twelve months. Data current as of August 2026.

	Ladue	Clayton	Town & Country	Kirkwood	Chesterfield
Median sale price	\$1,478,110	\$915,000	\$1,495,000	\$476,004	\$605,000
Homes sold	105	207	111	361	744
Typical lot size	0.5–3 acres	0.15–0.5 acres	1–3 acres	0.15–0.5 acres	0.25–1 acre
Dominant housing era	1920s–50s + new	1900s–30s + condo	1980s– present	1900s–60s + infill	1990s– present
School district(s)	Ladue	Clayton	Parkway / Kirkwood	Kirkwood	Rockwood / Parkway

	Ladue	Clayton	Town & Country	Kirkwood	Chesterfield
Drive to Clayton	~10 min	0–10 min	~20 min	~30 min	30–40 min
Drive to downtown	20–25 min	15–20 min	~30 min	25–30 min	35–45 min
Walkable downtown	No	Yes	No	Yes	Partial
Condo / villa inventory	Minimal	Substantial	Limited	Limited	Substantial

What these numbers actually tell you

Four things stand out, and none of them are what most buyers expect — including people who have lived here for decades.

Ladue and Town & Country are the same money.

Within about \$17,000 at the median — close enough to call identical. The premium people assume Ladue commands over West County simply isn't there at this level. So the choice between them is not financial. At roughly \$1.5 million you are choosing between a ten-minute Clayton commute in a 1930s house on a half-acre, or a newer build on two acres twenty minutes further west. Same check, entirely different life.

Clayton is not the expensive one.

It gets named alongside Ladue constantly, and socially that tracks — but the median sits roughly \$563,000 below it. What you give up is land, not prestige. If walkability matters more to you than lot size, Clayton is the value play in the upper tier, and most people arrive assuming the opposite.

There are two tiers here, not five options.

Ladue, Town & Country, and Clayton occupy one band. Kirkwood and Chesterfield occupy another, at roughly a third to 40% of the top. This is the most important line in the brief: a household that can comfortably buy in Kirkwood may not be able to buy in Ladue at all. If your budget lands in the \$475,000–\$650,000 range, the real decision is Kirkwood versus Chesterfield — walkable historic character on a small lot, or newer construction and square footage with a longer drive.

Volume is the constraint nobody plans for.

Ladue and Town & Country each turn over roughly 105–111 homes a year. Chesterfield does 744. That is not a small difference — it means that in Ladue, across an entire year, something like two homes come to market per week, and only a fraction will match your bedroom count, budget, and school boundary. Buyers routinely start with a narrow window and a list of three communities, not realizing that two of them may produce a handful of genuinely suitable properties in that time. If you're targeting Ladue or Town & Country on any kind of deadline, you are not shopping a market — you are waiting for a specific house to appear, and you need to be prepared to move the day it does.

A note on medians

A median is a midpoint, not a floor. Ladue transacts below \$800,000 and Kirkwood transacts above \$1 million; the ranges overlap more than these figures suggest. Use these to understand where each market's center of gravity sits, then look at the actual inventory in your range.

How to actually decide

Drive the commute before you decide anything else.

Not on a map. In a car, at rush hour, on a weekday. Twelve minutes of difference on paper is ninety hours a year in practice, and it is the variable people most consistently underestimate and most consistently regret.

Verify the school district at the address.

Every time. The municipality tells you nothing reliable.

Decide what you're optimizing for, in order.

Commute, schools, lot size, walkability, house age, price. You can have four of these. You cannot have all six, and the communities above each sacrifice a different two. People who rank these honestly before they start looking make faster, better decisions than people who tour twenty houses first.

Understand the inventory reality.

In the central corridor, quality inventory is thin and moves quickly. Homes in the strongest submarkets frequently go under contract within days. If you're working against a school year, a closing date, or a job start, you need to be positioned — financing arranged, criteria settled, agent engaged — before the right property appears rather than after.

Thinking about your next move?

Across town or across the country, it's the same conversation. Call or text me at **314-671-8333** for a “Where Should We Live?” conversation — an honest discussion about fit across these five communities and the rest of the central corridor. No listings, no pressure.

No sign-up required to read this brief. Forward it to anyone it would help.

About Ryan Goldstein

Ryan Goldstein is a real estate agent with Janet McAfee Inc., St. Louis's leading independent brokerage, serving Clayton, Ladue, Frontenac, Kirkwood, Glendale, and the central corridor.

A St. Louis native and MICDS alumna, Ryan trained and worked as a mental health professional before entering real estate — a background that shapes how she handles the parts of a move that are genuinely difficult: deciding whether to move at all, negotiating under competition, and helping families reach a decision everyone can live with.

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Market data sourced from MARIS (Mid America Regional Information Systems), the St. Louis regional MLS, reflecting closed sales for the twelve months ending August 2026. Information deemed reliable but not guaranteed. Ryan Goldstein is a licensed real estate salesperson in the State of Missouri, affiliated with Janet McAfee Inc.