

LAWRENCE

# BUSINESS

MAGAZINE

2024 Q3



OUR EVER EVOLVING  
DOWNTOWN  
WITH MASS STREET AT ITS HEART



# Loving Life Downtown

Living downtown has obvious perks—local shops and restaurants, music venues, art, culture—but those who reside there chose the area for a myriad of reasons.

by Darin White, photos by Steven Hertzog

In her 1964 hit song, singer Petula Clark asked the question, “Where do you want to go?” The answer, of course, is the name of that song: “Downtown.” While most of us enjoy going downtown, do we really want to live there? For a growing number of the population, the answer is a resounding yes.

This burgeoning demographic includes a wide variety of ages, as well as having social and economic influences. The migration from smaller towns into urban areas is many times caused by the pursuit of employment. There are a growing number of baby boomers who are looking to downsize from their suburban homes into a space that allows them time to explore rather than take care of a house with a yard as they age and retire. College-aged students who want to live near a university campus but also enjoy the benefits of living amid the city’s entertainment and activities often want to live in a downtown area. Many professionals are looking for a place in the heart of the city that allows them to have downtime built into their busy lifestyles with little commute. Families with or without children wholeheartedly want to embrace the community living of the city, being within walking distance of the library, museums, community centers, the courthouse, restaurants, shops, the public pool, the river and the beautiful surrounding neighborhoods. These people value proximity, walkability, community, quality of life and experience over material excess.

Whatever the reason, there are several possibilities, including renting apartments above downtown shops and restaurants, for those who choose to live in downtown. One professional who has wholeheartedly embraced living in the Downtown Lawrence community is Daniel Smith. Smith left the metropolis of San Francisco as a child when his family moved to Lawrence, and he has lived here for 35 years. After living in different areas of Lawrence, including North Lawrence, he moved into the downtown area a few years ago and found the community for which he’d been looking. Community was a driving factor for him moving downtown and to an urban environment.

*Cate the Great juggles at the Busker Festival in downtown Lawrence*



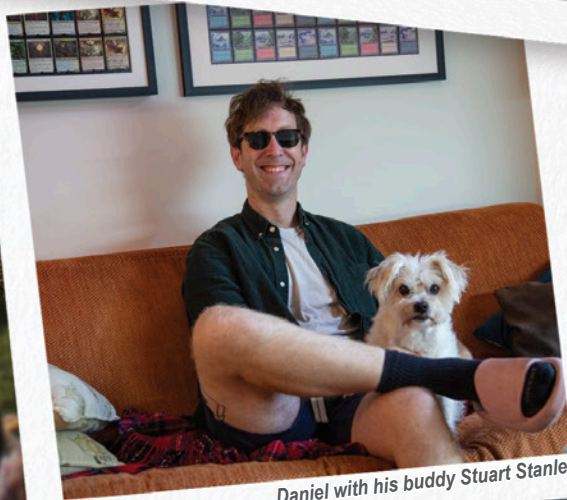
Entrance to Daniel Smiths' apartment above Raven Bookstore



Daniel and his partner Jaz grab an afternoon bite at the Cellar Door Café



Daniel on his deck



Daniel with his buddy Stuart Stanley





The apartment of Amy & Bob Barnes faces west with views of downtown Lawrence



Bob & Amy on their rooftop common area at Hobbs Taylor Lofts





The number of things going on in the downtown area at any given time allow Smith and his partner Jaz, the ability to be spontaneous, which in turn makes it easy to “pop over” to a show at The Granada, 1020 Massachusetts St., or go see what is happening at the Busker Fest without worrying about parking. Or they can sneak down for a cup of joe and lunch at Cellar Door, 7 West 11<sup>th</sup> St, at a moment’s notice.

One challenge with this ease of accessibility is the draw of the amazing restaurants. Smith and his partner try to cook at home as much as possible, but sometimes, it is just too tempting to grab a quick bite or enjoy a leisurely dinner out instead.

Living above the Raven Book Store, at 809 Mass. St., has its advantages, being able to simply trot downstairs and pick up a book. The space the couple shares is smaller than other places they could have chosen to live, with a large, combined kitchen and living room, a bedroom with a bathroom and a combination laundry and utility. Smith considers the Downtown Lawrence area extended living space—like a front yard for someone in a house—which really opens the space up.

While some may consider downsides of living downtown to include a lack of parking and safety, these really haven’t been an issue for Smith and his partner, who have one vehicle. She commutes to work and is gone during the day, and he rides his bike to the nearby health center for work. The only time the couple really must contend with parking is on Saturdays, and it is easy enough for them to park a couple blocks away and walk. Even with some of the recent violence issues among the unhoused community, he has not felt unsafe at any time.

Community is very important to Smith, and the community in the downtown area is fairly small and quite connected. Community might include their neighbor living in the apartment next to them, or it could be a party living a few blocks over or the person who occupies the concrete space in front of the window area of a downtown vacant building. Living in the downtown community is something that Smith truly enjoys.

Pop out of Smith’s apartment above Raven and walk to the corner of Eighth Street, then head east to find local flavors such as Grounded Coffee, 11 E. Eighth St., and Richard’s Music, 15 E. Eighth St. Kitty-corner northeast from The Sandbar, 17 E. Eighth St., is Hobbs Taylor Lofts, 730 New Hampshire St. Hobbs Taylor Lofts are luxury lofts and one of the first condominium-living offerings in the downtown area of Lawrence. Of the five-storied building, the first two stories are businesses, with the top three floors being living spaces.

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The Busker Fest fire breather performs on Mass St

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## A Lofty Idea

Bob and Amy Barnes recently purchased a condo at Hobbs Taylor Lofts and made some renovations in their new space. The Barneses both attended The University of Kansas (KU) and have lived in Lawrence for many years. They made the decision to downsize from their larger country estate to the downtown district for a number of reasons. One of those reasons was they were mostly living on the main level of their rural home south of Lawrence, near the southeast side of Clinton Lake. Amy Barnes says the couple wanted to simplify their lifestyle and didn't need the extra space. They enjoyed going for walks and the quiet in their previous community, but it would take them 20 minutes or so to get downtown to shop, eat dinner, run errands or attend events. When they were looking for a change, they liked the idea of living downtown and wanted to find a place where they wouldn't have to take care of a lawn that had property and building upkeep, and where they could enjoy the urban lifestyle and have the ability to travel, Bob Barnes explains. They found this and more at Hobbs Taylor Lofts.

The couple admits the move was a huge change. In downtown, it is never dark compared to country living, but the biggest change, Amy says, was the noise.

There are many advantages to living in Downtown Lawrence. The walkability of the area, the ability to make a last-minute decision to eat at one of the local restaurants or go to an event such as the Busk-





The Lawrence Farmers' Market

erfest, the farmers market, being close to the shops. The Barnes' condo faces west, and they say they have "loved seeing the sunsets and watching the storms come in." They note that people downtown have been very friendly, and they've really enjoyed the community in the lofts.

One of the many elements of Hobbs Taylor Lofts the couple enjoys is the rooftop garden. When weather permits, they have their morning coffee in the garden overlooking East Lawrence and beyond the river. When you walk into their loft, there is a great room complete with kitchen, eating area and living room. They have a good-sized bedroom complete with a large, beautiful arched window that echoes the main loft space. The primary bathroom is attached to the bedroom. A laundry room is just off the entrance, and going through it opens into a shared office area.

The Barnes' adult children don't live at home. Their son will be living only two blocks away, at 10th and New Hampshire streets, soon. One of their daughters lives in Kansas City, Missouri, and another daughter lives in San Diego. The couple travels to San Diego, especially during the cold months, to visit their daughter and enjoy the weather, happily returning home to enjoy their downtown-living experience.

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Andrew Holt (ex director of DLI) chats with Jill Elmers, owner of Moon on The Meadow



A couple dancing to an accordion player at The Lawrence Farmers' Market

## From Rent to Own

Across Eighth Street to the south is 800 Lofts, named for its 800 New Hampshire St. address. Seven years ago, four stories were added onto the 800 Lofts building, making it five stories. The previous building was at one time an armory. The current first floor is the entrance, lobby and offices. The multistory lobby is freshly updated, including a cascading contemporary chandelier. Keller Williams Integrity realtor John Esau and business associate and realtor Carson Levine are the agents offering the property. Until recently, the lofts have been leased apartments.

After ownership changes and a new vision, the decision was made to offer all 55 units for sale rather than lease. The interior halls and public spaces have been updated. There is a terrace area on the second floor that has a grill and a lounge with barstool seating, a new hot tub, all new furniture and an updated fireplace available for the residents. A buyer can purchase the loft as is and handle their own updates, or purchase an upgrade where the building provides a refreshed build-out. The building offers a high level of security, with keypad entrances, double doors and a security team.

At the time of this writing, a few of the spaces are still leased, but more than half of the building's units (26 with eight under contract) have sold—and more are selling quickly, Esau explains. There has been an unmet demand for condominiums for retirees downsizing or looking to travel, for remote workers, for those wanting cultural changes in experience over space, KU alumni and staff looking for a location, and out-of-town visitors coming to Lawrence for reasons such as having a place when visiting their children at KU or a spot to stay when here for sports-related events, such as KU football and basketball.

He says the 800 Lofts location is ideal for anything Downtown Lawrence-related, from live music, the bar scene, shopping, salons, restaurants, other events and parades. Levine, who has lived all over the world, concurs: "I love downtown. This is what made me move to Lawrence. There is so much to do."





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## Not Just Regional

The draw to Downtown Lawrence is not just regional but international. Iveta Becvarova, originally from the Czech Republic, moved to Hobbs Taylor Lofts from Basel, Switzerland. She is a professional veterinarian specialist for Hill's Pet Nutrition and a previous academic professor who chose to live in Lawrence because of its smaller, college-town feel. Becvarova, who is recently divorced and was tired of the upkeep of having a house, was looking for a place to live downtown and meet people. "Downtown is great for singles," Becvarova says. "I like to walk ... I would rather spend my time walking, go to WheatFields and buy fresh bread. The lifestyle in Lawrence is very much in line with my values. Everything I need is in walking distance. Everything I love."

Downtown Lawrence Inc. (DLI) director Andrew Holt agrees. As a resident of Downtown Lawrence as well as DLI's director, he is well-versed in promoting all things downtown. He lives in one of the busiest areas on Mass. Street, and his building opens directly onto the street. Before moving to Lawrence, Holt had already lived in many downtown environments. Upon arrival here, what struck him was how active and vibrant downtown is. No matter the week or the day or the time, "There are always people walking by from all walks of life." While there is an occasional vacant building, Lawrence has a much higher percentage of leased buildings than any of the places he has lived or visited.

Holt likes to walk, and he says Mass. Street is a very walkable area. He enjoys exploring the fabulous adjacent neighborhoods and surrounding areas. Living and working downtown, Holt finds it "very friendly, very open. It's a very welcoming streetscape."

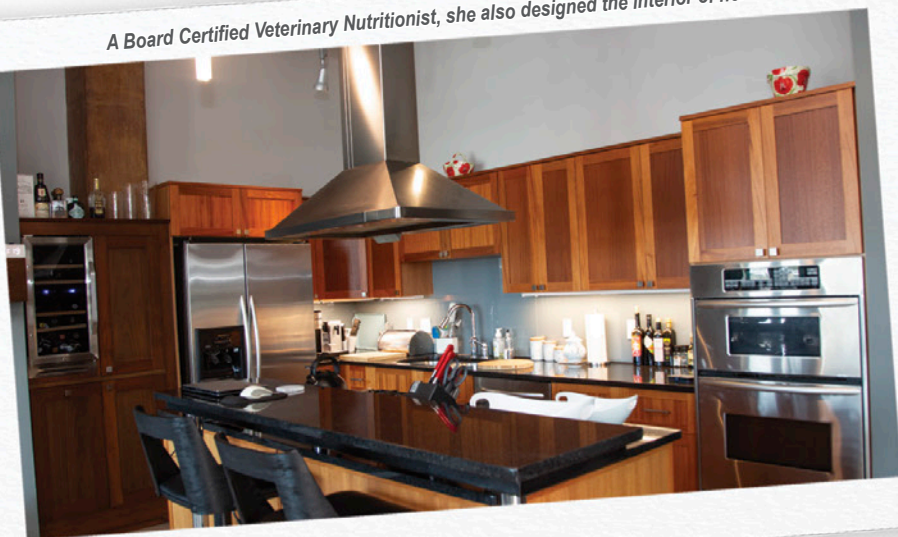
On his way by himself to get a bite to eat, he says he will run into someone, "a resident, a businessperson, a government or nonprofit person who is finishing up their day," and that person will end up joining him for the meal. Lawrence "is very community-oriented in this way," he adds.

Holt has noticed how downtown has a rhythm all its own as it ebbs and flows: the business community arriving for work, the early-morning breakfast crowd and later the shoppers; the lunch rush and normal city life throughout the day and into the night. He has enjoyed the convenience of just stepping out of his door and finding a wide variety of activities, such as a poetry reading or walking by live music, seeing friends and going to listen to a new band, running into others who invite him to join them for a drink. "It's three blocks wide and five blocks long, contiguous ... It's a different kind of lifestyle. The downtown is your street, your backyard," he says. ▲



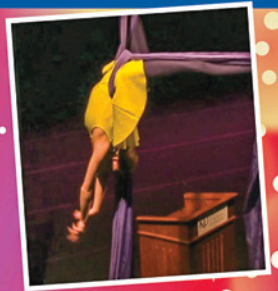
Iveta Becvarova at home in downtown Lawrence.

A Board Certified Veterinary Nutritionist, she also designed the interior of her condo





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