

Melrose, Massachusetts

SMALL CITY, BIG OPPORTUNITY

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Melrose, Massac

SMALL CITY, BIG

Courtesy of Raj Das, ED Photography



Massachusetts OPPORTUNITY

With its tree lined streets, wide open spaces, and historic Victorian architecture, Melrose, Massachusetts offers the picture perfect escape from big city life – without compromising on amenities.

Located just seven miles outside of Boston, the picturesque metropolitan suburb offers a prime mixture of big city action and small town charm. “We have great schools, terrific restaurants, and a lot of both passive and active recreation,” says Melrose Mayor Paul Brodeur. “We are a very attractive spot just north of Boston.”

Sitting at just 4.7 square miles, Melrose may be small, but it has a lot to offer. There’s never a dull moment in the city of 29,817, which hosts many public art projects and a plethora of events that run all year long. “We always joke that there’s almost too much to do on weekends here in Melrose,” says Lauren Grymek, the city’s Director of Economic Development. “There’s something for everyone. Every weekend there’s something happening.”

Many of the events are run through a partnership with the Melrose Chamber of Commerce, which has a membership of over 300 active local businesses. “The Chamber, as one of the private partners of the city, does a lot to bring people to the downtown, to the business districts, through a wide variety of marketing initiatives, and four signature community events

AT A GLANCE

MELROSE, MASSACHUSETTS

- WHAT:** A small city of just 4.7 square miles; population nearing 30,000
- WHERE:** Located seven miles north of Boston
- WEBSITE:** www.cityofmelrose.org



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that run throughout the year,” Grymek explains.

The Chamber events celebrate everything Melrose businesses have to offer. Summer Stroll turns the downtown into a pedestrian walkway each July to enjoy live musical performances, food, and the chance to check out local retailers. September’s Victorian Fair features entertainment, performances and food, while showcasing local businesses, products, groups, and services. As spooky season arrives, children in third grade and under can hunt for candy at Trick or Treat at Melrose Businesses. Melrose kicks off the holiday season with Home for the Holidays, a multi-day, city-wide open house that includes performances of the Nutcracker, holiday caroling, trolley rides, craft fairs, and more. In addition, many volunteer groups and non-profits offer programming throughout the year ranging from concerts and art shows to a weekly Farmers’ Market starting in June through October.

Melrose is made up of distinct business

districts that have evolved around its commuter rail stations. But the city's shining star is its downtown – a main street filled with bustling family-owned shops and a diverse selection of restaurants.

“Downtown is probably Melrose’s most significant feature,” says Denise Gaffey, Melrose’s City Planner. “When people visit from out of town they speak most highly of it. It’s very compact, it has kind of a Victorian theme running through it with beautiful Victorian architecture and period lighting. We tend to have very few vacant properties in our downtown area, and even in our neighborhood business districts. When they do turn over, there’s very little lag time. That’s always been something that is really nice and very beneficial to the community.”

When city residents aren’t shopping or taking part in the many weekend events the city has to offer, you’ll find a lot of them commuting into





nearby Boston for work. Melrose is primarily a bedroom community, with three commuter rail stations taking residents and visitors in and out of the city in just 15 to 20 minutes. “It’s an incredibly quick trip to North station, which is the northern tip of Boston, and that puts you into a transit hub where you can get anywhere else you want to go throughout the city,” Brodeur says. Melrose also has access to several nearby highways, including Route 99, Route 1, I-93, Massachusetts Route 16 and Route 128/I-95, as well as an active bus network. The city uses this wealth of transportation to its advantage. Melrose’s master plan, updated in 2017, has put a huge focus on smart growth and transit-oriented development.

“All of our focus on zoning and land-use planning has been around maximizing the development potential along these transit lines and promoting mixed-use development wherever we can,” Gaffey says. “We’ve seen quite a bit of development interest since we

started doing this work in zoning to create these opportunities about 20 years ago. It’s been very successful, we have a lot of development going on for a city our size.”

One of the city’s latest developments is the Radio Factory Lofts, located just an eight minute walk from the MBTA Orange Line Subway. The three-storey building is a former radio equipment manufacturing facility dating back to the 1880s. The century-old building has been converted into 141 loft apartments that maintain the historic charm of the old building, complete with exposed brick and wood beams.

“It was really over the years an underutilized property, as the whole area went away from manufacturing on the rail lines to more of a commuter model,” Brodeur explains. “It’s a very exciting piece that’s been a game changer for Melrose in terms of increasing the variety of housing, increasing opportunities for folks that might not have thought of Melrose as a commute into Boston kind of place, and maybe a



younger demographic. We're really excited about what we've been able to do there. That's the model and we want to continue that on up the tracks a little bit."

Despite its small size, Melrose has a good mix of housing stock available, with both single and multi-family units available. Most of the city's housing is concentrated around the rail line, with green space surrounding it. "The term in the planning parlance is a 'garden community' design," Gaffey says. "We are surrounded on all four sides by open space. We have decreased density as you get further out to the outskirts of town."

The city's wealth of open space means it's very walkable, and there's plenty of opportunity for recreation. Melrose is home to 60 park sites that include pocket parks, neighbourhood parks, playgrounds, and general open space, as well as a skateboard park, multiple trails and conservation areas. The city is in the process of putting in pickleball courts, an inclusive park,

and upgrading its softball field.

There's also the 226-acre, municipally owned, 18-hole Mount Hood Golf Course. "It was built in the 1930s from the WPA projects and has some great fieldstone exterior to the clubhouse," says Joan Bell, Melrose's Parks Department Supervisor. "There's also a five-storey tower on the furthest northeast corner of the property and when you're up there you can oversee Nahant Beach, Revere Beach, and the Boston skyline. It's a beautiful trek, just for the scenery." The Melrose Recreation Department offers youth and adult active programming, much of which takes places in Melrose parks and many youth sports organizations as well as the Melrose Public Schools offer a variety of sports and club activities.

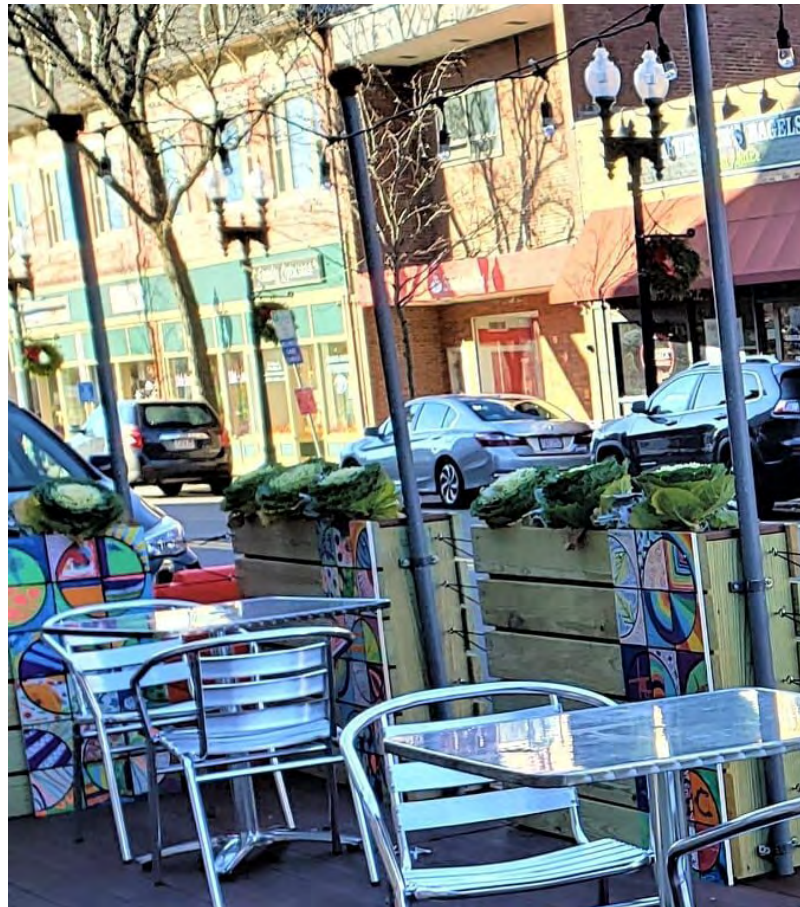
Melrose is currently investing in upgrades to its Soldiers and Sailors Memorial Hall, as well as its Carnegie library. The memorial hall, a 100-year-old facility that includes function and auditorium space, will receive a \$4 million renovation for

basic TLC. Work is about to break ground on the \$20 million library renovation, which will include removing a 1960s addition and replacing it with a modern two-storey addition in its place. “It really is a community space and we desperately want to preserve it,” Brodeur exclaims. “This will allow us to do tech upgrades, meeting upgrades, ADA upgrades, and provide an exceptional building to go along with the exceptional service the library has always provided.”

The renovation is being completed thanks to a state program that provides capital matching funds to do renovation work on public libraries. The city thrives on state, federal and public-private partnerships to help with development and improvements throughout Melrose. Brodeur attests, “We absolutely live and die by public-private partnerships and local state and federal government cooperation.”

Looking to the future, Brodeur hopes to continue those partnerships and encourage more investment in public transportation at the state and federal level. He notes, “We really thrive as a community over time by that ease of commute and it kind of stirs everything else. That drives so much of what we have been able to accomplish here in Melrose.”

He also plans to continue to build on the successes the city has already achieved. “By that I mean that we have really been focused on multi-family development, good schools, good quality of life,” he explains. “So we will continue encouraging that transit-oriented development, continue to reinvest in our schools, continue to pay attention to a vibrant downtown to make sure that we are continuing to offer opportunities both for the business community and for our residents and the greater region. That’s where we want to be. We want to lead our area in terms of economic growth, economic redevelopment, and quality of life.”



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