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# North Charleston's full Circle

BY DAVID CARAVIELLO

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Mural in the heart of park circle showing off the artistic side of the area.  
Andrew Fleet / @ThevansVagabond / Provided

When Maggie McDuffee first moved to the Park Circle area of North Charleston in 2008, it was still a sleepy neighborhood that had yet to completely recover from

the closure of the nearby Charleston Navy Yard over a decade earlier. There were a few run-down homes, lots of older ranches, and maybe four or five restaurants. But even then, the potential was evident.

“As the Charleston area grew, it just naturally progressed up to North Charleston. And it’s just spiraling now,” said McDuffee, a broker in charge at Carolina One Real Estate and manager of the agency’s location on East Montague Avenue. “It took a long time, but when it comes to the market and affordability, we always say ‘drive until you can buy.’ And that’s kind of what happened.”

What happened was that Park Circle emerged as one of the gems of North Charleston, a walkable neighborhood that today is full of restaurants, shops, craft breweries, refurbished older homes, and pockets of newer construction, all of it with a very unique and somewhat artsy character. The centerpiece is the 30-acre circular park itself, home to baseball fields, a disc golf course, a butterfly garden, a community center, and major festivals in every season of the year.

“For most people who live here, the walkability of our neighborhoods is really the draw,” said Kelly Snyder, an agent with Agent Owned Realty Co. and a Park Circle resident since 2020. “There are so many sidewalks and green spaces and parks and places to go. That really is the best part of living here, and why people like moving here. It’s just a perfect place to enjoy Charleston’s weather and be outside.”



The Park Circle neighborhood is full of older homes like this cottage built in 1950, a residence which was renovated, expanded, and listed on the market for \$465,000. Coldwell Banker/Provided

Beyond the park that gives the neighborhood its name, the East Montague corridor between Jenkins and Virginia avenues has grown into one of the region’s most extensive collections of locally owned businesses, a group that includes Madra Rua Irish Pub, Evo Pizzeria, Southern Roots Smokehouse, and Park Circle Creamery. Commonhouse Aleworks is a few blocks north, Holy City

Brewing, and Coast Brewing Company a few blocks south —though those latter locations may stretch the official boundaries of Park Circle just a bit. Coffee houses, salons, and personal services offerings further enhance the community feel.

“First and foremost, I think Mayor Summey has always done a great job of bringing in a plethora of different things,” McDuffee said, referring to North Charleston Mayor Keith Summey, who’s held the office since 1994. “We have cultural arts, we have hospitality with the hotels right by the airport, we have restaurants, we have the bar and the nightlife scene. You constantly have people riding bikes and walking dogs. We have boot camps that are taught in the park, we have yoga classes you can drop in on for like 10 bucks. It’s an all-encompassing community, and it’s very welcoming. Everybody can fit in somewhere in Park Circle.”

## Teardowns to new construction

According to the city of North Charleston, Park Circle was designed in the early 1900s by P.J. Berckmans Co., one of the South's first landscape architecture firms, whose nursery in Augusta, Ga., eventually became the grounds of the Augusta National Golf Club, home to the Master's tournament. When North Charleston was first incorporated in 1972, its boundaries were largely confined to the Park Circle area—which is why the eastern end of Montague Avenue is still referred to as “old North Charleston” by many locals today.

From a real estate perspective, the neighborhood was once dominated by brick ranches and cottage-style homes, many of which have since been renovated and seen marked increases in value as Park Circle has become a more popular place to live. One such home, a 1,162-square-foot residence that was built in 1950, was listed last week for \$465,000 after being thoroughly renovated and expanded to add a third bedroom. A two-bedroom cottage built in 1940 and measuring just 768 square feet was listed last week for \$320,000.



“It used to be that you could buy a cute little cottage for around \$220,000,” McDuffee said. “Now, if you see something with a 2 in front of it, it probably needs a total renovation, or it’s maybe even a teardown.”

Indeed, Park Circle has come a long way from the days when the city of North Charleston struggled to find a developer for what’s now Oak Terrace Preserve, a former military housing area that languished in the wake of the 2008 recession. Nothing in North Charleston would ever sell for more than \$350,000, prospective developers told city officials at the time. “They were wrong, obviously,” McDuffee said. The city took the rare step of developing the community itself, and a home in Oak Terrace Preserve recently sold for \$525,000.



This newer townhome listed for \$350,000 is part of the Oak Terrace Preserve area of Park Circle that was ultimately developed by the city of North Charleston. Carolina One Real Estate/Provided

The average sales price of a single-family home in Park Circle is around \$385,000, Snyder said. That's a substantial jump from even before the coronavirus pandemic when the number was under \$300,000. "It's increasing significantly, and not really slowing down anytime soon," she added. Homes are on the market an average of just 21 days, further evidence of how in-demand the neighborhood has become. Park Circle has benefitted from a cycle of residential and commercial growth: as more residents have moved to the neighborhood, more businesses have opened up, attracting still more people to the area.

Homes in Park Circle tend to fall into one of three categories: older homes that have been extensively renovated, older homes that haven't been renovated, and newer construction. The final phase of Oak Terrace Preserve, an oval-shaped enclave in Park Circle's northwest corner, was completed in 2014. Mixson, a higher-density, mixed-use development that includes

roughly 250 townhomes and single-family homes, opened in 2017 with prices starting in the \$300,000s, and has since seen resale values climb into the \$500,000s.

Outside of major developments, Park Circle has also seen newer construction in lots that were either vacant or previously the site of homes that had been torn down. One street can feature a row of brick ranches, McDuffee said, and then a lot which has been subdivided into two, with Charleston single-style homes going up on each. The new construction in Park Circle also stands out due to the price point; several recent new builds have sold between the mid-\$400,000s and mid-\$500,000s, well above the neighborhood's average sales price. The biggest recent closing was 1086 Buist Ave., a 1,800-square-foot home built in 2016 that sold for \$575,000.

And like everywhere else in the Charleston area, inventory is historically tight. An online search showed just seven





homes available in the Park Circle area as of last week, two of them new or planned builds in the \$600,000s. Anything priced competitively gets gobbled right up. “There are homes coming on at that under \$400,000 price point,” McDuffee said, “but as soon as it comes on, it goes.”

Newer construction in the Park Circle area can stand out in both style and price point, as with this 2,049-square-foot home in the Mixson development that was listed for \$560,000. Matt O’Neill Real Estate/Provided

## Maintaining that Park Circle vibe

From a buyer’s perspective, Park Circle offers that combination of walkability and neighborhood amenities that some might have looked for in another part of town—downtown Charleston.



Maggie McDuffee

Given the preponderance of local businesses, the available restaurant and nightlife options, the ease of walking or bicycling everywhere, and the unique vibe of the place, it's easy to see parallels between Park Circle and the northern end of the Charleston peninsula. Park Circle in some cases has proven a welcome refuge for those priced out of Wagener Terrace or Hampton Park Terrace, but still seeking a similar urban lifestyle.

“If you can't afford to buy a house on the north end of the peninsula, this is a better option,” Snyder said. “Because there is a significant price difference, even when compared to Mount Pleasant. Park Circle is a good, natural place to go.”

Newer residents of Park Circle tend to be young families, McDuffee said, drawn not just by the nearby parks but also schools like Creative Arts Elementary, Academic Magnet High School, and Charleston County School of the Arts, which are within easy walking distance of many Park Circle homes. Some retirees want to be able to ride

their golf carts to a restaurant for dinner. And some properties have been purchased for use as short-term rentals, given North Charleston's more lenient stance on that practice compared to other area municipalities.

The wealth of older homes also makes Park Circle irresistible to investors. "My team has had a lot of investor clients in the Park Circle area," Snyder said. "They're looking at older houses that are 60 or 70 years old, that haven't been updated, and are renovating them. We don't work with people who just do flips—these are long-term renovations that they'll sell and make some extra money off of. There is a lot of that going on. People just have the cash to spend right now."

Could that kind of cash, and the new residents that come with it, change the fiber of Park Circle? Many communities in the Charleston area share that concern. McDuffee believes Park Circle is strong enough to maintain its character, which is the reason more people are moving there in the first place.

“The type of commercial businesses that have coming in there, they’re going to keep attracting a certain type of person,” she said. “For example, we have Sparrow, which is a bar and music venue. It’s very, very small, and the types of bands that play there are very particular. We’ve got breweries now, we have Firefly, we have Holy City, we have all kinds of things that I think are going to help hold that charm for a while. The character of Park Circle really hasn’t changed, at least not since I’ve been here. Maybe when we get a new mayor, that might change. But for a while, I think we’ll be pretty concrete in the vibe we have going.”

That distinctiveness is enhanced by a tight-knit sense of community, one fostered by having so many homes and businesses within walking distance of each other. “It’s just invaluable,” Snyder said. “We had the St. Patrick’s Day



Kelly Snyder

parade, and they shut down the street, and there were hundreds and hundreds of people out there. It is a welcoming community. If you're driving down the street or walking downtown, you see people sitting outside eating, walking their dogs, and children on bicycles everywhere. So it does have this community feel, where it's safe and everybody wants to be around other people."

And the real capper? Park Circle is just getting started. The place may have been founded in the early 1900s, but its status as an in-demand neighborhood with adjacent entertainment and dining hotspots is still a relatively new phenomenon. "It doesn't feel like we've reached the peak of what Park Circle can be," Snyder said. "So definitely, it feels like it's growing and building still."