

# With rental costs going up, students balance price, sense of community

By **Samantha Ho**, Staff Reporter

Caroline Sgroi, a senior interior architecture major, lives with a roommate in her Lakeview East apartment, paying \$980 each monthly. After the cost of monthly utilities, she estimates the cost to be close to \$2,000.

After living in the Dwight residence before it became a first-year and transfer student dorm last year, she and her roommate were looking to live somewhere close to campus. Sgroi said living close to CTA's Belmont stop – the Red, Purple and Brown Line, is “really convenient” for transportation.

According to the college's Office of Institutional Effectiveness, 65.9%, or 3,265 of 4,952, of enrolled students live off-campus this spring semester.

Despite having higher rents than some other neighborhoods, Sgroi said, “If that happens to be in your price range and you like a neighborhood sort of family, homey feel, I would say that would definitely be up someone's alley.”

Comparing rent prices to Columbia's on-campus housing, the current lowest priced option for the college is \$6,104 per semester for a small double shared room in a shared apartment at 30 East and the Dwight. This past fall semester, the cost was \$5,926 per semester, as the Chronicle previously reported.

With more families and young adults in Lakeview East, Sgroi said she feels safe.

“There's obviously weird people and stuff you gotta be aware of, but nothing has scared me off too bad so I would say it's pretty safe,” Sgroi said.



Peyton Reich

The Wicker Park neighborhood off the Damen Blue Line stop, a popular off-campus living destination for students, on Thursday, April 17, 2025.

In 2024, the Illinois Policy Institute reported that the average price in rent was \$2,200, a 41% rise in a little under a decade. Last year, the average price for a one bedroom apartment was \$1,880. For two bedrooms, rent was roughly over \$2,400, and over \$3,000 per month for three or four-bedroom apartments.

This has created an affordable housing crisis in Chicago, one that impacts students and also working class families, migrants and seniors.

According to a 2023 report from the Institute for Housing Studies at DePaul University, 47.4% of Chicago renters are burdened by housing costs, spending over 30% of their annual income on rent. The Illinois Policy institute reports that the city's housing affordability is "among the lowest in the Midwest" with about 113,000 affordable housing units in 2021.

Benji Felix, a junior sound design major, splits \$1,800 in rent and around \$100 in utilities each month with his roommate for their apartment in Edgewater, which is a 40 to 45-minute commute on the Red Line. However, Felix said he almost always drives to school.

Since Felix and his roommate both have cars, he said they thought it would be better to live further away from campus and pay less in rent for a larger apartment.

"If you're not gonna have a vehicle, it's hard," they said. "If you have access to transportation of your own, I definitely would recommend it."

In a 2023 spring semester survey, 53% of students had been reported to identify as commuters, those who don't live on campus and travel over 15 minutes to get to school.

Where Felix's apartment is, they said there isn't too much to do. However, he said there are more places to go north by Loyola University Chicago's campus or south off of the Bryn Mawr train stop where there are more places such as cafes, a board game store and grocery stores.

Felix's friend, David Moreno, a junior film and television major, currently lives near Buena Park, about a 15-minute walk from the CTA Sheridan stop on the Red Line. He lives with one roommate, each paying \$850 in rent and splitting the cost of approximately \$200 in utilities.

Moreno said he wanted to live a little further up north since he heard from others that it was "a fun and vibrant area" compared to the South Loop. Moreno also said that he likes to spend time in Northalsted, commonly known as Boystown, and wanted to be closer to that neighborhood.

“It’s also a very residential area as opposed to here where you’re in the city,” Moreno said. “The streets aren’t as busy, there’s so much greenery everywhere, I just feel more comfortable.”

He recommends this area to students like him who want to get away from the busyness of downtown. He said the area has amazing food, people and smaller, more local restaurants and “mercatos.”

Moreno recommended Buena Park and Northalsted for students who are part of the LGBTQ+ community “who want to have a space they feel welcomed and accepted,” referencing all the storefronts with pride flags and queer people walking around.

For Ani Bulleit, a sophomore acting major, she doesn’t always feel welcome in her neighborhood. She lives in a two bedroom apartment in Pilsen with a roommate, splitting the rent of \$1,600. She and her roommate pay for some utilities like electric, gas and internet, typically costing them \$160 with some winter months costing more due to higher gas bills for heat.

Bulleit said she really loves Pilsen, especially for all the food options, when staying close to West 18th Street. However, she said she wants to find a new apartment where she will feel comfortable and safe walking home at night, as she’s had some “pretty crazy” encounters.

Being an acting major, she often gets home late due to classes and rehearsals or projects. “That’s kind of a big issue with where I live now,” she said. “It’s a toss up on if there are going to be people outside my apartment when I’m trying to go inside.”

Browsing other neighborhoods to move into, Bulleit said she likes Andersonville but worries about the longer commute time of 52 minutes or more with CTA, like the Red Line. She is also considering Printer’s Row; however she is concerned about the higher rent prices.

Camryn Mather, a senior arts and entertainment management major, lives in Wicker Park with two other roommates. In total they all split \$2,560 in rent and approximately \$100 in utilities per person.

Mather said they all chose to live in Wicker Park since the neighborhood has “everything.”

“You can really get anywhere from there,” Mather said. “There’s shopping, restaurants, grocery stores— really anything you need,” adding that her commute to campus is around 25 minutes.

Mather said that she would definitely recommend the “vibrant neighborhood” to Columbia students since there’s so much to do and see from art galleries and music events to all sorts of bars.

“There’s also family homes and stuff, so that makes it feel safer when you see somebody pushing a stroller or something,” Mather said. Besides families, she said the area has predominately college-aged people around 20 to 30 years old.

Mather suggested neighborhoods such as Pilsen, West Loop, Uptown, Ravenswood and South Shore. Sgroi also recommends students to look into areas like Palmer Square and Lincoln Park.

*Copy edited by Patience Hurston*