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2022 Halfway to...somewhere - by Brett Pelletier

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Brett Pelletier

We're halfway through 2022 and I'm not sure most people have even noticed. After what has been the longest staycation of our lives, time now seems to be moving at warp speed. Now that I've reflected on what has felt like a nearly unending experiment of working from home, hybrid work, and remote everything, my work life is starting to get back to a more normal pace and tone. I've come to the conclusion that I really like being home...but I really don't like WORKING from home. The firewall that used to be my commute to and from work was, and continues to be, a welcomed reset and pause, which had always been instrumental in clearing my head and physically removing myself from my work. Sometimes that's a convenience and sometimes that's an absolute necessity. In a society that praises the grind and idolizes being too busy to stand still, it's important to remind ourselves of what is important and what is essential in our lives. I write this after spending the last 2 hours in a car, stuck in traffic, going nowhere on my way back home from Boston. I am aware of the contradictions in my own practice.

The one major benefit I found while working from home was my garden. Now instead of walking down the street to grab a coffee, I'm walking in the garden to smell the roses, deadhead the perennial beds, or just sit and enjoy the birds chirping and the chipmunks foraging. It's an incredibly peaceful place while the world seems to be on fire, and I can say that it has been a great benefit to my work/life balance, mental health, enjoyment, stress, or whatever you want to call it. I've met people at plant sales, at the nursery, online, and in the garden center who all have similar stories. There has been a huge increase in gardening and gardeners over lockdown and it seems to be sticking around well after. It's been well established that access to and enjoyment of green spaces and the outdoors is good for mental health and stress. There's just something about getting into a gardening that makes good sense and helps your mind to focus and your worries just seem less present. After some 17 years in the real estate business, I can tell you that I've experienced some very long days and work weeks, and I've witnessed burnout and exhaustion. I know I'm extremely lucky to have a garden and space to reset and pause. That's not the case for everyone.

The natural and built environments are starting to reflect a realization that the way we once worked, the way we once lived, has changed, maybe forever. Public policy has started to reflect the hybrid work reality and real estate markets have already begun responding to changing environments, conditions, and realities. I note recent stories from my hometown where community groups have taken significant initiatives to increase access to children's outdoor recreation facilities, a public access dog park, and a community orchard. All in the span of the last 18 months or so. That's lightning fast for municipal government action. I am reading about initiatives for community gardens, or what are known as allotments in most of Europe, to give residents access to space to have a small vegetable patch. An opportunity to make friends, share knowledge and skills, and cultivate more than just the soil. Boston, for years, has been home to a number of community gardens tucked away in neighborhoods dotted all over. Just look for them and you'll see.

There is something magical about horticulture and the connection to real estate and the built environment. Look up and see the rooftop gardens of new buildings in the city, look down and see the plantings all around your neighborhood, and look in to those communities and housing

developments that dedicate space for residents to have access to greenspace and areas for planting. Those communities are growing more than veggies and ornamental plants, they're enhancing community, transferring knowledge and skills, and providing a place for us all to pause, reflect, and play in the dirt. It's a powerful tool and amenity that I think you'll start to see a lot more of going forward. Put it on the list with dog washing stations and Amazon lockers.

I will remind you that all housing is good housing and there is a renewed interest for increasing density, availability, and affordability in 2022. I continue to remind you that as stewards of the built environment we constantly communicate and engage with constituents, and we have many opportunities to balance the scales of equity, inclusion, dignity, respect, and kindness. I challenge you to take action and pay attention to your surroundings, especially what's planted at your feet.

Brett Pelletier is chief operating officer with Kirk&Company, Real Estate Counselors, Boston, Mass.

New England Real Estate Journal - 17 Accord Park Drive #207, Norwell MA 02061 - (781) 878-4540