

LIVING IN | THE NYACKS, N.Y.

Tough Commute? They're Too Enamored to Mind



Alan Zale for The New York Times

Gesner Avenue, South Nyack, is petite, eclectic and near the Hudson River — in short, an accurate mirror of life in the area

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PEOPLE who live in the Nyacks, just across the Tappan Zee Bridge from [Westchester](#), tend to go into such raptures about the place, you might think they were discussing grand romance rather than real estate.

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The New York Times

Indeed, many use the word “love” in describing their feelings about where they live; about the unique character, the diversity and the active nightlife in the Nyacks. It is “cute” and “artsy” and “funky,” they say, a place with small-town charm but also big-city amenities.

The one thing not at all nearby, or easy to reach, is [New York City](#). Bus-to-train-to-subway commutes are the price of living here, residents say. But while the city may be less accessible, many homes here are within walking distance of the downtown, which happens to be a regional tourist attraction. There are about two dozen antique stores and more than that number of restaurants. Half a dozen annual street fairs and parades bring in at least 200,000 visitors a year, according to Heather Duke, director of the Rockland County Department of Tourism.

Part of the charm is the shabby-chic quality; the place feels like a bohemian throwback to a more genteel time. The distinctive natural environment includes Hudson River views down most side streets, as well as about 2,000 acres of nearby parks.

The plural is used because the whole comprises three riverside parts: South Nyack, Nyack and Upper Nyack. The first, abutting the bridge, covers 1.7 square miles and has a population of about 3,400. The

second, just one square mile but containing the magnetic downtown, is home to about 6,700 people. Upper Nyack, with about 1,900 people, has the largest lot sizes, and extends about four square miles north, to the Nyack Beach State Park. The Nyacks are about 30 miles from [Manhattan](#). (There are two other Nyacks, West and Central, but they are thought of as distinct, because they are inland from the Hudson.)

They are not “like most suburban communities, because the bulk of homes are unique and different,” said Richard Ellis, the owner of Ellis Sotheby’s International Realty in Nyack. “We get a lot of people from Manhattan and [Brooklyn](#), who like the downtown for its artsy feel.”

Nishea and Charles Fields moved early this year from Manhattan to a four-bedroom contemporary home in Upper Nyack, for which they paid \$879,000. “There’s something old-fashioned, but in a cool way, about Nyack,” said Ms. Fields, 33, who has a 4-month-old daughter and who works from home as a marketing consultant. “It’s not Podunk. We’ve got what we need right here.”

And it is some kind of testament to the place that her husband, a consultant on Wall Street, also loves it, despite a tortuous commute: He drives to Weehawken, N.J., to the New York Waterway terminal, which takes at least 45 minutes, and then catches a ferry to Lower Manhattan, another 20-minute ride. The round trip, at rush hour, costs \$455 a month, plus the cost of gasoline.

Acknowledging that “being on this side of the river is sort of a challenge,” Mr. Fields, 37, explained that the alternative to his car-and-ferry trip — a bus, then a train, then the subway — would take too long, “and you’re held hostage to the subways. There are too many connections.”

Sylvia Blaustein and her husband, Michael Kasper, moved to Nyack last year from a four-bedroom home in nearby Valley Cottage, downsizing after their children grew up. Ms. Blaustein, a midwife

with a practice on 59th Street in Manhattan, said she sometimes drives to work.

Other times, she walks to the bus that crosses the Tappan Zee Bridge, then takes the Metro-North Railroad from Tarrytown. Door to door, public transport takes her two hours. Her assessment: “It’s horrible.”

But she has no intention of moving. She adores her saltbox home, for which she paid \$525,000. She describes the two-bedroom 1800s house as “tiny as a dollhouse.”

The community has come a long way over the last few decades, said Jan Haber, 70, who along with her husband, Sheldon, publishes a monthly magazine, *The Nyack Villager*. The couple owned a crafts store in Nyack for 44 years, and she recalled that in the early 1960s, “Nyack was called the ‘Town That Died.’ ”

She added, “It was a very sad little place, and the river was terribly polluted, nobody wanted to know about it.” But after the river got cleaner, “we became a destination village for culturally minded day-trippers.”

What You’ll Find

Many of the homes on Broadway — the main artery, which parallels the Hudson — retain the charm of the turn of the last century, said Debbie Blankfort, owner of Baer & McIntosh Real Estate in Nyack.

On the blocklong Gesner Avenue in South Nyack, there is a Queen Anne Victorian, a turn-of-the-last century colonial, and a red brick Cape from the 1950s that looks as if it escaped from somewhere in [Queens](#). There is a California-style condominium development at 1 Main Street in Nyack, right on the river. In Upper Nyack, Van Houten Street is a steep downhill into Lower Castle Heights, which runs right to Peterson’s Boat Yard, on the Hudson River.

There are small saltboxes as well as a huge Queen Anne Victorian home with sunbursts and towers.

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Karen Roberts, 37, a cable news reporter, is enthusiastic about her new home, a two-bedroom town house that she and her husband bought last year after moving from Manhattan. “Nyack has a West Village feel,” she said. “You can find the same qualities of the city that we loved — the diversity, the culture, the energy, but with more space.”

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The Nyacks are, in fact, diverse. Census data show that 59 percent of Nyack residents are Caucasian and 26 percent are African-American.

There is also a large rental market, and although river views abound, just 77 parcels of land are directly on the river, 40 of them in South Nyack, according to Ms. Blankfort.

Nyack’s popularity with visitors inevitably means that on weekends and holidays, there isn’t enough parking, despite the several municipal lots. The village of Nyack nets \$500,000 each year from parking fees and fines, said John J. Cincotta, the village treasurer.

What You’ll Pay

Many potential buyers arrive in the Nyacks wanting something “old, with character,” Ms. Blankfort said.

The typical home is a “village Victorian,” she said, priced at \$740,000 or so for three bedrooms. The same home in South Nyack, which gets bridge noise, might sell for \$495,000. “There’s never a lot of inventory here,” she added, “and the only homes that don’t sell are the ones that are overpriced.”

Homes on the market range from a three-bedroom, two-bath 1910 colonial listed at \$369,900, to an 18-room 1900 colonial on the Hudson River, listed for \$9.65 million. Condos, most near the river, range from \$230,000 for a one-bedroom, one-bath unit, to \$1.05 million for a three-bedroom.

While prices vary considerably, the median for the 11 Nyack Village homes sold between January and June was \$477,000, according to Ann Garti, chief executive of the Greater [Hudson Valley](#) Multiple Listing Service. Over the same period, the median price for the eight homes sold in South Nyack was \$516,000; in Upper Nyack, it was \$835,000 for 13 homes.

Although taxes tend to take less of a bite than in Westchester, they aren’t necessarily low. The annual tax on a four-bedroom 1966 contemporary in Upper Nyack listed at \$2.475 million is \$25,379. A three-bedroom 1851 colonial in South Nyack listed at \$525,000, has a \$8,529 tax bill.

What to Do

Seven public parks are in or near the community. Nyack Beach State Park has five miles of trails along the Hudson River, with a separate three-mile-trail connecting to Rockland Lake State Park. There are cultural offerings, too, including the Edward Hopper House Art Center, an homage to a Nyack favorite son.

Among the restaurant options are Japanese, Thai, Mexican, Indian, Irish, Latin, Italian and New Orleans-style. There are also bars and day spas, bookstores and clothing boutiques, a health food store and several pizza parlors.

On weekends, bicyclists from New York City stop to rest and load up on carbohydrates at village spots, among them the Runcible Spoon, a bakery on North Broadway.

An annual highlight is the Halloween parade, which attracts about 30,000 people and this year is scheduled for Oct. 27.

The Commute

Tappan ZEEExpress buses leave from two stops in Nyack, and go to the Metro-North station in Tarrytown. The trip takes 18 minutes to half an hour or more, depending on traffic. The ride to Grand Central Terminal adds another 40 minutes. A monthly UniTicket, for both the bus and the train, costs \$243.

Red and Tan Line buses run from two stops in Nyack, leaving about every 20 minutes during rush hour, to the George Washington Bridge, which takes about 50 minutes, or to the Port Authority Bus Terminal in Midtown Manhattan, which takes 70 minutes or more. A 20-trip fare to the bridge is \$112; a similar ticket to the Port Authority is \$127.65.

Another option starts with a 35-mile drive to Weehawken, N.J., which takes 45 minutes to an hour or more. From there, the New York Waterway ferry travels to 39th Street and 12th Avenue. The monthly fare is \$211 for the eight-minute trip. The ferry to Pier 11 in Lower Manhattan takes about 18 minutes, for a monthly fare of \$280. Parking in Weehawken is \$175 a month.

The Schools

The district serves South Nyack, Nyack, Upper Nyack, Central Nyack and Valley Cottage. In all, 2,902 students are enrolled in three elementary schools; Nyack Middle School; and Nyack High School. Fifty-five percent of students are white, 24 percent black, 12 percent Latino and 9 percent Asian, said Valencia F. Douglas, the schools superintendent. Last year, 93 percent of graduates of Nyack High went on to two- or four-year colleges, she said. On the 2007 SAT, averages were 531 in math, 515 in reading and 519 in writing, versus 510, 505 and 504 statewide.

Nearby nonpublic schools include Dwight-Englewood School in Englewood, N.J., and the Rockland Country Day School in Congers.

The History

The Nyack area was settled by the Dutch in the early 1700s, mostly for shipping down the Hudson to Manhattan. After World War II, it was a retail center for Rockland County. The Tappan Zee, built in 1955, put Nyack on the map and made the area more accessible, but the popularity of shopping malls killed it as a shopping destination. The village was a target of urban renewal in the 1960s and '70s. Well-known residents today include the comedian [Rosie O'Donnell](#), the actress Ellen Burstyn and the director Jonathan Demme.