

LIVING IN

Edgemont, N.Y.: Strong Schools and Aspirations of Autonomy

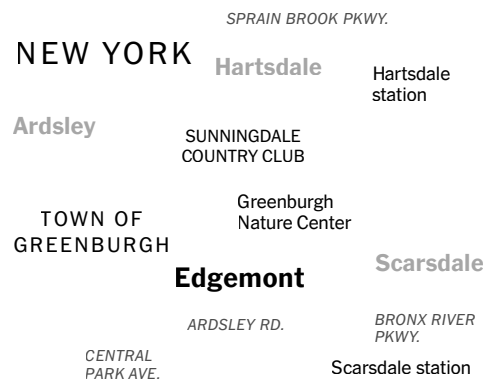
The Westchester County community known for its esteemed school system is in the midst of a fight for independent status.

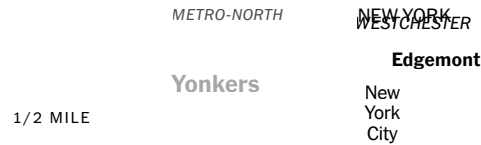
By Julie Lasky

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Ask Michael Goldstein what attracted him to Edgemont — a community in Westchester County, east of Ardsley and west of Scarsdale — and his answer is as predictable as the return of “Cats.”

“It has a really good school system,” he says.





By The New York Times

Edgemont takes the old bromide of location, location, location and boils it down to schools, schools, schools. The 2.6-square-mile community, which has winding streets, mature trees and flashes of deer, sits within an unincorporated part of the town of Greenburgh, though most of the approximately 2,900 households have Scarsdale addresses.

The community's boundaries are roughly aligned with the school district (they also closely resemble those of the fire district, known as Greenville), and 60 percent of property taxes go to support the schools, said Jeffrey Sherwin, head of the Edgemont Incorporation Committee. In its most recent analysis, Niche, the educational review website, ranked the Edgemont Union Free School District 17th out of 677 in New York State.

Convenience is another sweetener. In 2015, Mr. Goldstein, 40, a vice president at Mastercard, and his wife, Lindsey, 40, a lawyer, paid \$1.156 million for a 1951 house about a 25-minute drive from Mr. Goldstein's office in Purchase, N.Y. Ms. Goldstein has a choice of trains in neighboring Scarsdale or Hartsdale (both within three miles of her home) for the 40-

minute trip to Manhattan, where she works. The couple is seven minutes by foot from the elementary school attended by their 8-year-old daughter, and soon by their 5-year-old son.

Of course, one can find excellent schools and easy commuting in other parts of Westchester — not least, Scarsdale. What sets Edgemont apart?



The Greenburgh Nature Center offers 33 acres with trails, live animal exhibits, after-school programs and summer-camp activities. Tony Cenicola/The New York Times

Alice Ma Wu, an interior designer in her mid-40s who moved to Edgemont with her family four years ago from nearby Eastchester, said the small school system was the ultimate

decider. Whereas Scarsdale has five elementary schools, Edgemont has two. Scarsdale's high school graduating classes number about 400 students; Edgemont's, about 150.

"Also, the community is very international," said Ms. Wu, who is Chinese-American. Her neighbors are transplants from Spain, Japan, France and Greece. Several languages float through the air, and her two young children ask for lunches packed with food they learned about from their school friends.

Other residents praise the bonds that are formed in a community defined by education. Among other initiatives, citizens have banded together to found a multifaceted recreation program and a scholarship council to help fund college studies for high school graduates in need.

Even when residents are able to move to lower-tax communities after their children leave home, they often stay.

"Thirty percent are empty-nesters," said Andrea Weiss, a broker for Julia B. Fee Sotheby's International Realty, who lives in Edgemont. "It's a community where people feel very comfortable."

A local spirit of self-sufficiency has helped propel a push for Edgemont's independence. In 2017, a petition with more than 1,400 signatures called for a referendum to vote on

incorporating Edgemont as the seventh village in the town of Greenburgh. Pointing out that Edgemont residents pay a disproportionate amount in town taxes while having meager electoral sway, supporters of incorporation seek to control their planning and zoning, and to take over municipal services including the police and public works. (Edgemont has its own fire department; the village boundaries would be those of the Greenville fire district, which are similar to those of the school district).



Central Park Avenue bisects the community with commercial businesses. Residents also go shopping in nearby Scarsdale and Hartsdale. Tony Cenicola/The New York Times

The referendum has yet to take place. Greenburgh's town supervisor, Paul Feiner, has challenged the validity of the petitions and the legitimacy of the proposed village boundaries. Following two court battles, a second petition with 1,740 signatures was rejected last month. The petitioners filed a new lawsuit in late August.

Mr. Feiner maintains that incorporation is neither in Edgemont's nor Greenburgh's best interest. "I think the taxes are going to go up and the services are going to go down," he said. A community-based website, Keep Edgemont, supports this position.

"The experience of comparable villages in Greenburgh proves him false," Mr. Sherwin, 42, a management consultant in the tech industry, said in response, pointing to information available on the Edgemont Incorporation Committee's website.

Mr. Sherwin, who moved to Edgemont for the schools even before he and his wife, Amanda, had their two children, sees Edgemont's pursuit of autonomy (or at least a vote about it) as one of many reflections of grassroots vitality. The effort, he said, "is yet another example of the community coming together."

What You'll Find

Edgemont sits between the Sprain Brook Parkway to the west and the Bronx River Parkway to the east, about 20 miles north of Midtown Manhattan. Central Park Avenue (or Central Avenue, as the locals call it) runs parallel to the parkways, bisecting the community from Hartsdale down to Yonkers.



58 WALBROOKE ROAD
| A four-bedroom, three-
and-a-half-bath
bungalow in Old
Edgemont, built in 1924
on 0.14 acres, listed for
\$1.199 million. 914-391-
5183
Tony Cenicola/The New York
Times

The area east of Central Avenue is zoned for the Seely Place Elementary School and therefore known as the “Seely side” of Edgemont. West of Central, where Greenville Elementary School is located, is called the “Greenville side”

These districts have their own neighborhoods, like the Cotswold section of Tudor-style, slate-roofed homes dating to the 1920s, and the neighborhood of Old Edgemont, with Crane’s

Pond, a popular duck pond used by ice skaters in winter. Both are on the Seely side.

The Greenville side has the “alphabet streets,” a midcentury development near the eponymous school, with roads that run from A (Anadale) to J (Juniper).

The Edgemont Community Council, an umbrella organization that dates to 1947 in its current incarnation, represents no fewer than eight neighborhood associations.

About a third of housing is in the form of co-ops, condos and rental units, most along Central Park Avenue, Mr. Sherwin said. These provide the cheapest entry points for the school district and contribute to a degree of economic diversity, especially compared with other parts of Westchester. According to 2014 housing data, 26.4 percent of the homes in Edgemont were valued under \$500,000. In Chappaqua, 15 miles north, that figure was 13.4 percent; in Scarsdale village, it was 4.4 percent.



3 ROXBURY ROAD | A six-bedroom, four-and-a-half-bath colonial in Old Edgemont, built in 1920 on 0.42 acres, listed for \$1.65 million. 917-836-2717

Tony Cenicola/The New York Times

Businesses along Central Park Avenue include megabrands like Walgreens, Buy Buy Baby and Red Lobster, as well as small operations like Candlelight Inn, a popular purveyor of pizza and chicken wings. About half of Edgemont's homes are within walking distance of Scarsdale's well-stocked commercial district. Hartsdale, to the north, also has shops and restaurants near its train station.

Green spaces thread through the hilly region. Some Edgemont houses back onto golf-course fairways. The middle school and high school occupy a leafy enclave. The Greenburgh Nature Center is a preserve set on 33 acres with trails, live animal exhibits and an array of school programs.

Last month, the Sprain Ridge pool complex reopened in Yonkers, near Edgemont's southern border, after an extensive renovation funded by the county. It includes a 50-meter-long competition pool that can accommodate 500 swimmers, plus an activity pool and spray deck for children.

What You'll Pay

At about 3.2 percent, Edgemont's property taxes are high, even for Westchester. "You're looking at \$30,000 on a million-dollar house, Ms. Weiss said, adding that Scarsdale's taxes are closer

to 2.3 percent. (She noted that these percentages are not consistent across the board: “It’s always house by house and you might get lucky and find a house a bit under-assessed.”)

But Ms. Weiss and other real estate agents point out that Edgemont’s houses tend to cost less than Scarsdale’s, especially at the high end. “It’s basically a wash in terms of monthly outlay,” said Laura Miller, a broker with Houlihan Lawrence in Scarsdale.



9 LONGVIEW DRIVE |

A three-bedroom, two-and-a-half-bath colonial on the Greenville side, built in 1948 on 0.16 acres, listed for

\$725,000. 914-921-9400

Tony Cenicola/The New York Times

According to data supplied by Janey Varvara, an Edgemont resident and broker at William Raveis’s Scarsdale office, the median sales price of single-family homes was \$1.17 million in July 2019, a year-over-year decrease of 6.9 percent based on 81 sales. Ms. Varvara said the reduction is more indicative of

month-to-month fluctuations in a small community than the overall health of Edgemont's market, which she said she finds strong.

As of Aug. 26, Zillow listed 49 properties for sale in Edgemont. The least expensive was a 700-square-foot, one-bedroom unit in a 1969 condominium complex on Central Park Avenue, priced at \$148,000 with a monthly \$53 homeowner's fee that includes property taxes. The most expensive was a 7,746-square-foot, five-bedroom colonial built in 2012 on 0.77 acres, listed at \$2.799 million.

The Vibe

Ms. Wu finds parts of Edgemont reminiscent of Europe. Her neighborhood, Old Edgemont, is "built into a hill. The streets are not wide; they're winding and weaving," she said. "There are old stone walls and gates."

Many streets lack sidewalks, but residents are outside anyway, walking dogs, riding bicycles and shooting baskets through driveway hoops that are as common in these parts as hydrangea.



Edgemont Junior-Senior High School enrolls about 950 students in seventh through 12th grade. The campus also contains the Chinese School of Southern Westchester, which offers classes in Chinese language and culture for people of all ages. Tony Cenicola/The New York Times

The Schools

The Edgemont Union Free School District serves about 2,000 students from kindergarten through 12th grade, 49.9 percent of whom are white, 34 percent Asian, 7.9 percent Hispanic or Latino, 6.5 percent multiracial and 1.6 percent black or African-American.

Elementary school extends through sixth grade, rather than the typical fifth. “I think people who move up here with kids of various ages like the idea that they’ll be together for an extra

year,” Ms. Weiss said.

The community is not geographically big enough to qualify for school bus service.

Among the two elementary schools, Seely Place School enrolls about 540 students in kindergarten through sixth grade. On 2017-18 state assessments, 84 percent of students met standards in English, versus 45 percent statewide; 84 percent met standards in math, versus 47 percent statewide. Greenville School enrolls about 525 students in kindergarten to sixth grade. On 2017-18 state assessments, 79 percent met standards in English and 89 percent met standards in math. (The comparative figures were aggregated from test results in grades three through eight.)

Edgemont Junior-Senior High School enrolls about 950 students in seventh through 12th grade. Average SAT scores in 2018 were 664 in reading and writing and 693 in math, versus 575 and 578 statewide. Within the campus is the Chinese School of Southern Westchester, which offers classes in Chinese language and culture for people of all ages.



Sunningdale Country Club, on Underhill Road, moved to its current site in 1916 — once an encampment for French troops who joined forces with American patriots fighting the British in 1781. Tony Cenicola/The New York Times

The Commute

Whether one takes the train from Scarsdale or Hartsdale depends on where one lives in Edgemont. Residents qualify for parking permits at the Metro-North station in Hartsdale, and can take a bus (or in many cases walk) to the Scarsdale station. The ride from either Scarsdale or Hartsdale to Grand Central Terminal takes an average of 43 minutes at peak times; tickets purchased in advance cost \$12.75 each way. A monthly ticket is \$278.

The History

The name Edgemont was first used in the 1890s to describe a development west of the Scarsdale train station, one of several communities in Greenburgh's unincorporated area that have been subsumed within the Edgemont of today.

Crane's Pond takes its name not from the bird, but from Colonel Alexander Crane, who fought in the Civil War and was a local landowner.

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