

LIVING IN

North Riverdale, the Bronx: A Leafy Oasis Within City Limits

By C. J. Hughes

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Strolling down certain roads in North Riverdale, a leafy neighborhood by the Westchester border in the Bronx, may prompt an intense feeling of “I can’t believe this is New York City.”

On parts of winding Palisade Avenue on a recent morning, birds trilled, the air smelled of honeysuckle, and thick tree branches nearly formed a tunnel along the street.

The appeal goes beyond the area’s borders. Hugging a ridge, North Riverdale takes in views of the Hudson River and, on the opposite bank, the Palisades cliffs of New Jersey. “It’s magnificent,” said Margaret Segreti, a nearly 50-year resident. “Every season is beautiful.”

Ms. Segreti cannot quite enjoy those views from her red-brick three-bedroom home, which cost about \$25,000 in 1966; it's on West 260th Street, on the slope away from the river.

But for years, she could savor them from her office at the College of Mount Saint Vincent, where she was an administrative assistant while also completing a degree, majoring in business. She is now retired.

The school, whose 70 leafy acres occupy the site of the 1850s former estate of the Shakespearean actor Edwin Forrest, including his neo-Gothic castle, was not alone in seeing the opportunity in huge tracts of land.

Over the years, developers, too, carved up former estates in this tucked-away corner of the city, which was once filled with orphanages, religious retreats and summer mansions; sprawling red-brick apartment complexes often went up in their place. But some institutions, including a retirement home for Catholic priests, still hang on, lending to the wide-open vibe.

If North Riverdale can feel like a fish out of water in New York City, it can seem doubly so in regard to the Bronx, whose impoverished sections are often considered the face of the borough, fairly or not.

Indeed, in 2000, when Mary Anne Cebeci was living in a rented studio on the Upper West Side and looking for something bigger, she was surprised when her broker suggested she leave Manhattan to find a decent apartment in her price range of about \$300,000.

“I grew up in New Jersey,” she said. “I thought of the Bronx as lower-income, not a middle-class area.”

But Ms. Cebeci, who had lived almost exclusively in the 212 area code since the 1980s, quickly changed her tune.



**436 WEST 261st
STREET**

A two-family two-story
1920s brick house, with a
total of 1,800 square feet,
listed at \$649,000. (718)

543-7174

Edwin J. Torres for The New York
Times

In North Riverdale, she and her husband, Hasan Cebeci, discovered Skyview-on-the-Hudson, a 23-acre complex built in the 1960s with three 20-story red-brick towers and ample parking, a dog park and a huge outdoor pool.

Their two-bedroom apartment, which glimpses the river, cost \$100,000 from the sponsor, who for another \$10,000 offered to upgrade the kitchen and bath “minus the tub,” Ms. Cebeci said.

And the couple were so under budget, Ms. Cebeci said, that she was able to be a stay-at-home mother for years. Today, the unit could sell for about \$250,000, said a friend of hers, Linda Lepson, a broker with Argo Residential.

“It’s just so soothing and peaceful,” Ms. Cebeci said. “You’re in New York City, but you are at the crossroads of suburban and rural life.”

What You’ll Find

North Riverdale is framed by the river and Van Cortlandt Park, as well as West 263rd Street, which also roughly forms the Yonkers border. Its southern edge is West 254th Street and a bend in the Henry Hudson Parkway, according to brokers, mapmakers and residents, though precise

measurements are debatable. In fact, some insist that the “estate” section — that is, west of Riverdale Avenue, which is the main retail strip — should be grouped with woodsy riverfront areas to the south.

Zoning in that section requires that lots have a 100-foot width. On West 254th Street, brick colonials have bluestone walks and slate roofs. More offbeat are houses done in what might be termed city-chalet style, with skylights and vertical siding. To the east, single-family homes also are abundant, though much smaller and simpler. On Mosholu Avenue, semidetached houses on some of the densest blocks recall other parts of the Bronx. Scattered throughout are red-brick postwar co-ops, midsize and modest.



**5700 ARLINGTON
AVENUE, #16F**

A two-bedroom one-bath
co-op in a 1960s complex
with pool and tennis,
listed at \$239,900.

(646) 305-4009

Edwin J. Torres for The New York
Times

Less affluent than southern Riverdale, brokers say, North Riverdale also has one of the city's larger concentrations of older residents. Historically, Irish and Jewish populations have predominated. Irish flags flutter from some fire escapes; the area also has the Hebrew Home at Riverdale, with 1,000 residents. It is now seeking to build 300 extra units on a 14-acre parcel next door, a plan opposed by some neighbors.

What You'll Pay

In mid-July, there were 145 properties for sale, according to Streeteasy.com, at an average list price of \$318,000. Among the highest-priced was a six-bedroom house with a spacious deck, at \$1.7 million. The most affordable listing was a co-op studio in Netherland Gardens, a red-brick postwar complex, at \$68,500.

Prices seem to have slid a bit recently. In the first six months of 2014, 8 single-family homes sold at an average of \$653,000, according to data from Trebach Realty, a local firm, while over the same time in 2012, 12 single-families sold at an average of \$723,000. In the first six months of this year, 46 co-ops sold at an average of \$184,000, while in 2012, 36 did, at \$202,000, the data show.

Brad Trebach, an associate broker at Trebach Realty, said a recent post-recession surge in inventory may be dampening prices. Also, fluctuating mortgage interest rates can stifle buying at the lower end, he added: “You are dealing with a population where every little bit matters.”

What to Do

An A.& P. anchors the Sky View Shopping Center on Riverdale Avenue. Nearby are Carlos and Gabby’s Glatt Kosher Mexican Grill and Connaughton’s Riverdale Steak House. A cluster of shops on Mosholu Avenue includes the Bronx Burger House, where the Fieldston burger, with blue cheese, is \$11.95.

Van Cortlandt Park has a few fields along Broadway, and for indoor fitness, the Riverdale Y.M.-Y.W.H.A. on Arlington Avenue offers a heated saltwater indoor pool and racquetball court among its facilities.



5640 NETHERLAND AVENUE, #4A

A two-bedroom one-bath unit in a postwar co-op with wood floors, listed at \$169,000.

(718) 878-1725

The Schools

Public School 81 on Riverdale Avenue has about 640 students in kindergarten through fifth grade. It got an A on its recent city progress report. On state exams in 2013, 42 percent of third-graders met standards in English, versus 28 percent citywide. In math, the numbers were 46 percent versus 33 percent.

For a combined middle and high school, an option is Riverdale/Kingsbridge Academy, outside the neighborhood, on West 237th Street, which together enroll about 1,330 students. On its progress reports, the middle and high schools received B's. On the 2013 SATs, students scored an average of 456 in reading, 468 math and 441 writing, versus 437, 463 and 433 citywide.

The Salanter Akiba Riverdale Academy, an Orthodox Jewish elementary school on West 254th Street, together with the S.A.R. high school on West 259th Street, enrolls about 1,400 students.

The Commute

Metro-North Railroad's Hudson line takes about a half-hour to get from the Riverdale station to Grand Central Terminal. Monthly passes are \$193, and permit parking is available. Some commuters take Hudson Rail Link buses, which are timed to meet trains, instead of driving to the station. Fares are a MetroCard swipe. A joint bus and train pass is \$228.75 a month.

There are also express buses to Midtown East, Midtown West and the financial district, though residents say they can be slow. Drivers have easy access to the Henry Hudson Parkway.

The History

A 20-story Soviet-style tower between Mosholu Avenue and Fieldston Road, a home for Russian diplomats, was completed in 1974. Once the site of a planned middle-income housing project, the property cost the Russians \$900,000, according to news reports; \$8 million was spent on construction.

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