

LIVING IN

Fleetwood, Mount Vernon: Westchester County's 'Best- Kept Secret'

By C. J. Hughes

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Quiet nights. Private garages. Street trees that are more than withered stalks.

Suburbs have much in common. But not every neighborhood that is a hop, skip and jump from a major city is created equal, according to residents of Fleetwood, in Westchester County.

Known for its diversity of population and prices, Fleetwood, a section of Mount Vernon, is a different breed of 'burb, said residents, some of whom might have arrived reluctantly but don't seem to have ever looked back.

“I sort of caved,” said Tom Keery, 32, a composer who was living in Williamsburg, Brooklyn, with his wife, Rachael, in a cramped one-bedroom with a steep rent. The couple thought about buying a place nearby, but all-cash buyers outbid them.

What Mr. Keery knew of suburbs was based on the one he grew up in, outside Boston, which was “depressing,” he said, because nobody talked to anyone else. But Brooklyn, he admitted, could be similar: “Everybody in Williamsburg is focused on their own scene.”

So in 2014, with open minds, the couple began considering tighter-knit Bronxville and Tuckahoe, before winding up with a four-bedroom 1930s colonial-style house in Fleetwood. The house, which is spacious enough for their 1-year-old daughter, Emerson, and Myles, a Chihuahua, cost \$750,000.

A comparable property in fancier Bronxville might have fetched \$950,000, Mr. Keery said, adding that his new neighbors, who own bars, run coffee businesses and produce television shows, are all pleasantly social.



11 HUNTWOOD PLACE A four-bedroom, three-and-a-half-bath Tudor built in 1931 with a fireplace, a formal dining room and an eat-in kitchen, listed at \$669,000. 914-673-1640 Brad Dickson for The New York Times

“We are like the best-kept secret in Westchester,” he said.

Among developers, Fleetwood might be more of an open secret. In the last couple of years, as housing costs have mounted in Manhattan and Brooklyn, builders have begun

planning luxury rentals, betting priced-out New Yorkers will be willing to come north.

But in a place that seems to embrace the status quo — reflected in a housing stock with a solidly early-20th-century look — the arrival of something sleek and new has ruffled some feathers. “The issue has put a strain on our organization,” said Michael Justino, president of the Fleetwood Neighborhood Association, a nonprofit founded in 1998.

Specifically, some residents are miffed about an \$85 million plan to put a 16-story, 249-unit tower on Broad Street West, in Fleetwood’s busy shopping district. The project, from the Bluestone Organization and other developers, began demolitions in January, but only after lawsuits had delayed the project for years.

Supporters of projects like Broad Street say they promise to add a jolt of youthful energy to a population that is aging. But critics say shoehorning hundreds of new residents into dense blocks will worsen congestion.

Steering clear of any controversy, the association has stayed neutral. “We will see what happens,” said Mr. Justino, 62, who works in the construction machinery business and has lived in Fleetwood since 1986, when he bought a stone-and-stucco house for \$250,000.

For others, both sides have merits. Carmen Leon, 66, a psychiatrist who moved to Fleetwood in 2013 from Riverdale, in the Bronx, admits that the wealthy tenants that high-end apartments attract are likely to spur an increase in prices of groceries at local stores.

Then again, the shopping district, dotted with vacancies, could use more places like Casa Cubana, a bistro where Dr. Leon likes to enjoy a glass of sangria. “The competition could be good,” she said.

But Dr. Leon — who lives in a two-bedroom, two-bath co-op that she bought last year for \$223,000 and shares with her son, Matthew Sowley, 26 — has no plans to leave. “This neighborhood,” she said, “is a hidden paradise.”

What You'll Find

With essentially the same borders as the 10552 ZIP code, Fleetwood covers about one and a half square miles and has a population of slightly fewer than 20,000, according to census figures analyzed by the Queens College department of sociology.

Generally considered the most affluent section of Mount Vernon, a city that has struggled with poverty, crime and blight, Fleetwood is not easy to characterize broadly. At the southern end is a hodgepodge of Arts and Crafts bungalows, Dutch colonial-style homes and midcentury Capes on small lots. Worn multifamily homes pack streets like North Fulton Avenue.

What seems to be one of the biggest collections of co-ops outside New York City crams this area, too. The red-brick, U-shaped Westchester Gardens on Gramatan Avenue, set back from the sidewalk by lawns, is the oldest, from 1924; it went up soon after Fleetwood's passenger railroad stop was built.

Other co-ops, with Tudor facades, are tucked here and there, like Grand Gardens, on West Grand Street, with apartments that offer archways, moldings and eat-in kitchens.

North of the Cross County Parkway, which slashes through, there is a different feel. Single-family homes sit on larger lots, and some streets end in hushed cul-de-sacs. It can be tough to tell where Fleetwood ends and the village of Bronxville begins; there are few signs, and the rich housing stock seems nearly identical.

Neighborhoods within neighborhoods include Pasadena Park, with postwar colonial-style homes and raised ranches, and Aubyn Manor, where you can find historic Tudors. But these place names live on mostly through brokers.

445 GRAMATAN AVENUE, No. ID-1 A two-bedroom, one-bath co-op with an eat-in kitchen in Westchester Gardens,

a red-brick prewar complex, listed at \$139,500. 914-310-8365 Brad Dickson for The New York Times

Besides that Broad Street tower, planned complexes include a \$48 million, five-building rental complex with 179 apartments on MacQuesten Parkway. The first building will open in spring 2019, said Sam Mermelstein, director of development for Enclave Equities, the developer.

And this winter, Mount Vernon's zoning and planning boards approved a 44-unit complex for East Broad Street.

If the architecture is diverse, so is the populace. Non-Hispanic white people represent 38 percent; non-Hispanic black people, 39 percent; and Hispanic people, 18 percent, according to the Queens College sociology department.

What You'll Pay

On Feb. 20, there were 67 houses, condos and co-ops listed for sale on Zillow. At the high end was a five-bedroom Georgian from 1932 at \$1.29 million; the least expensive was a one-bedroom co-op at \$125,000.

Prices seem to have declined slightly in the past year. In December 2017, the median list price was \$150,000, according to Zillow, but the median in December 2016 (the

oldest month for which Zillow has data) was \$162,000. The high point was in May 2017, when the median was \$195,000, according to Zillow, which measures the median on a month-by-month basis.

Renters account for 43 percent of all households, high by suburban standards. An upscale option is the Princeton, on North Terrace Avenue: Studios are about \$1,450 a month, and one-bedrooms, \$1,800. Less-expensive options include Colonial Village, a red-brick complex where a studio was listed on Zillow for \$1,250.

The Vibe

A park on Broad Street West with climbing equipment, benches and a gazebo doubles as a village green. Concerts, movie nights and a Halloween party, hosted by the neighborhood association, take place there. A half dozen blocks away is Hunt Woods, a park popular with dog walkers.

Night-life options include Bayou Restaurant, a Cajun standby, and Maggie Spillane's Ale House, with outdoor rooftop seating. Other storefronts offer a pharmacy, dry

cleaners, bagel shop, liquor store, nail salon and flower shop, as well as Harvest Field Market, known for its organic produce.

The Schools

Many students are zoned for the Pennington School, which offers prekindergarten through eighth grade for about 330 students. On state English exams last year, 32 percent of students met standards, versus 40 percent statewide, according to state figures; on state math exams, 26 percent met standards, versus 40 percent statewide.

Mount Vernon High School enrolls about 1,400 students and has a 66 percent graduation rate, state figures show, compared with an 80 percent graduation rate statewide. On SAT exams last year, students scored an average of 413 on the reading and writing section, and 399 on the math section; statewide averages were 528 and 523, respectively.

The Commute

Metro-North's Harlem line serves Fleetwood. Eight trains depart for Grand Central between 7 a.m. and 9 a.m., with the quickest, at 8:06 a.m., taking 28 minutes. Monthly fares are

\$239.

A narrow staircase runs to the station from Locust Street, or commuters can park at the station for \$150 a month. There is no wait list for permits.

Westchester County's Bee Line bus system also has several routes. And highways are never far.

The History

From 1904 to 1914, Bronxville's Siwanoy Golf Club occupied a 95-acre site in Fleetwood. The subsequent owner, a Manhattan banker named Jesse Winburn, sought to turn it into a golf course for men only. But in 1925, Westchester County took 34 acres, for \$142,800, to create the road that became the Cross County Parkway, according to The New York Times.

Mr. Winburn thought women had killed his plans, or those "who didn't like the idea of not getting to play golf on a course they had used when it was occupied by Siwanoy," he told The Times. The remaining 61 acres were sold as building sites. Fairway Street's name is believed to honor the sporty past.

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