

LIVING IN

Lawrence Park West, Yonkers: Affluent Setting, Without the Price Tag

The area resembles nearby Bronxville more than it does the rest of Yonkers, except when it comes to the (much lower) home prices and property taxes.



By **C. J. Hughes**

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In Westchester, take every address with a grain of salt. A tangle of political boundaries and postal zones, school districts and community associations means many neighborhoods that appear to be part of one place actually belong to another.

Searching for a home in the affluent village of Bronxville, N.Y., for instance, yields a long list of properties that are technically in the city of Yonkers. The two share a ZIP code (10708),

although they're separated by the skinny Bronx River, with Yonkers on the west side and Bronxville on the east.



By The New York Times

At first blush, Yonkers might appear no different than its better-known, opposite-bank counterpart; historic houses, winding streets and mature trees adorn both. But in the neighborhood of Lawrence Park West — which encompasses adjacent enclaves like Cedar Knolls, Longvale and Armour Villa — properties can trade for a third of the cost of similar Bronxville versions. Taxes are also steeply discounted relative to those of their neighbor, another major selling point.

On the flip side, Yonkers's public schools are considered weaker than Bronxville's. But many residents say the trade-off is worth it.

“We feel like it’s a gift to not pay the same taxes but still be a part of the community. That’s the beauty of it,” said Nonie Flannery, 59, who bought a four-bedroom, two-and-a-half-bathroom 1900 house in the summer of 2016 for \$835,000, with her husband, Robert, 61, a Manhattan lawyer.

Their property and school taxes total \$9,000, Ms. Flannery said, although she pointed out that Yonkers, like New York City, imposes an income tax.

A stay-at-home-mother to six children, Ms. Flannery may be a good judge. For 14 years, she lived in Bronxville, in a vintage colonial with the same number of bedrooms as the house she has now, but her property taxes were about \$48,000 a year. To be fair, she pointed out, her previous house was larger and on a bigger lot. The true tax discount, brokers say, is about 50 percent.

Those who have gathered impressions of Yonkers from a passing car or train window might think the city is solely urban, which is an apt description of the downtown area, a once-gritty section that is rapidly gentrifying.

Buyers also get confused. “I always thought Yonkers wasn’t very nice. And then you get to Lawrence Park West, and you say, ‘This is Yonkers, too?’” said Donna Bancroft-Lewis, who

bought a six-bedroom, three-and-a-half-bathroom colonial built in 1922 on about a quarter of an acre last fall. It cost just under \$1 million.



Westlands, at Sarah Lawrence College, was built in 1917 as the home of William Van Duzer Lawrence, the developer of much of the area and the college's founder. Tony Cenicola/The New York Times

Indeed, Ms. Bancroft-Lewis, who works in finance in Manhattan and shares the house with her husband, Bryan Lewis, 45, a retired police officer, and their two young children, said she didn't even really realize she lived in Yonkers until she received a city bill.

But straddling a divide has benefits. Pondfield Cafe, which anchors a tiny retail area on Pondfield Road West, is popular for breakfast, but its lunch-counter layout is too narrow for strollers, Ms. Bancroft-Lewis said. Instead, she often walks over to downtown Bronxville, which has a lively and nearly vacancy-free shopping district, where Coals, a gourmet pizzeria, is a roomier destination. Other Bronxville retail includes a health-food store, a bookstore, a bakery, a stationery store and Slave to the Grind, a coffee shop.

When the family lived in a three-bedroom house in Colonial Heights, a hillier part of Yonkers, getting around on foot was tough. Now, Ms. Bancroft-Lewis said, she can hoof it anywhere within minutes. “I can actually do things,” she joked, “instead of being trapped on top of a mountain.”



The Bronx River Reservation is a natural spot for walking and jogging. Tony Cenicola/The New York Times

What You'll Find

Roughly bordered by the Bronx River to the east, Tuckahoe Road to the north, Central Park Avenue to the west and the Cross County Parkway to the south, greater Lawrence Park West packs about 11,600 people into 1.4 square miles, according to the department of sociology at Queens College.

A diversity of housing stock and terrain makes up this eastern swath of Yonkers, with Lawrence Park West perhaps the area's highest-profile enclave.

That's due in part to the opulence of some of the houses, often hidden behind gates and with enough stonework to recall fairy-tale castles. Another reason is the presence of Sarah Lawrence College, whose Jacobean-style Westlands building, which houses offices and dorm rooms, was once the home of William Van Duzer Lawrence, the enclave's early-20th-century developer.



188 BRONXVILLE ROAD | A six-bedroom, three-and-a-half-bathroom house on 0.16 acres, built in 1914 and renovated in 2005, listed for \$1.174 million. 914-645-6640
Tony Cenicola/The New York Times

Nearby, on rectilinear streets where Tudors are interspersed with more prosaic houses, is Sunnyside Park, a once-common moniker that has fallen off maps. Other micro-neighborhoods are minuscule, like Longvale, which comprises a few blocks along Millard Avenue.

North of the Sprain Brook Parkway, which cleaves the neighborhood, is Cedar Knolls, a 145-property historic district (announced by brown street signs) that is one of four such districts in Yonkers. Capacious Tudors, a common style in southern Westchester, are prevalent.

East of Chatfield Road is Armour Villa, the oldest and most diverse of the historic districts, with open-porch Victorians, stucco-walled 1930s colonials and the occasional raised ranch.

“I affectionately refer to this area as the land that time forgot,” said Steve Wagner, 68, the president of the Armour Villa Neighborhood Association, a 1,000-member group that

publishes the “Villa Voice” magazine six times a year.

“I’ve traveled a lot,” said Mr. Wagner, who moved to the area from the Upper West Side in 1988 after family members were mugged. “I think this is the best place to live in the country.”

Co-ops are plentiful, some of them in handsome prewar mid-rises along Pondfield, others in Brooklands, a three-building, 138-unit complex. Condominiums, though, are rare; red-brick conversions of rentals include 1133 Midland and Rockledge Manor.



137 PARKVIEW AVENUE | A four-bedroom, two-and-a-half-bathroom house, built in 2003 on almost a fifth of an acre, listed at \$950,000. 914-760-8863
Tony Cenicola/The New York Times

What You’ll Pay

In early November, 82 properties in the neighborhood were for sale, according to Zillow, most of them single-family houses and co-ops — and some of which were revealed as being in Yonkers only in their ads’ fine print. The least expensive was a

co-op studio at Devon Plaza listed for \$119,999; the priciest was a nine-bedroom, six-bathroom estate designed by Delano & Aldrich on almost two acres, listed for \$4.5 million.

Prices are relatively stable. As of early November, 183 single-family houses, condos and co-ops had sold in 2018 for an average price of \$457,000, according to Zillow's data; during the same period in 2017, 177 homes sold, at an average price of \$494,000.

But the 2017 tax law limiting property-tax deductions has been chilling the market, said Joseph B. Houlihan, an owner of the local Houlihan & O'Malley Real Estate Services: "We're in a market that doesn't know where it is."



60 PONDFIELD ROAD
WEST | A four-bedroom,
two-and-a-half-bathroom
colonial, built in 1971 on
0.14 acres, listed at
\$890,000. 917-682-4626
Tony Cenicola/The New York
Times

There are ample rentals, including co-op sublets. The least expensive unit, a one-bedroom at the Bronxville Terrace co-op, was \$1,450 a month, according to Zillow, while the priciest was

a two-bedroom at the Deco-style Croydon co-op for \$2,800.

The Vibe

Though once vilified for aggressive expansion, Sarah Lawrence College, with 1,400 students, seems mostly at peace with its neighbors, who praise things like the swimming lessons offered at its pool. On a recent day, students milled quietly on campus, in the opposite of a rowdy party scene. Under construction nearby was the Barbara Walters Campus Center, a new \$35 million social hub.

A natural spot to bike and jog is the Bronx River Reservation, a path-lined, river-hugging park.

The Schools

In Yonkers, students are not zoned but select their schools, although preference is given to nearby residents, according to city policy.

One local option is the Patricia A. DiChiaro School, which offers prekindergarten through eighth grade for about 520 students. On 2017-2018 state exams, 59 percent met standards in math, versus 45 percent statewide, and 50 percent met standards in English, versus 45 percent statewide.

Of the city's eight public high schools, only one, Yonkers Middle High School, offers an international baccalaureate program. Getting in requires passing a test.



Apart from a few stores along Pondfield Road West, on the eastern edge of Yonkers, there isn't a lot of retail in Lawrence Park West. Tony Cenicola/The New York Times

Occasionally students from outside the village of Bronxville may enroll in Bronxville's public schools, if there is room; the cost is \$20,220 a year for kindergarten to sixth grade and \$25,752 for seventh to 12th grade, said Connie Lourentzatos, a clerk, who added that it is usually easier to enroll in the high school. Of the 1,652 students currently enrolled in Bronxville's schools, 10 are from outside the village, she said.

St. Joseph's, a Catholic school in Bronxville, is also well liked.

The Commute

Metro-North Railroad has a Bronxville stop on its Harlem Line. From the red-tile-roof station, commuters can catch seven trains to Grand Central between 6 a.m. and 8 a.m. Trips take between 32 and 44 minutes, and a monthly pass is \$239. The station is a short, pleasant walk from most parts of Lawrence Park West. The Fleetwood station, on the same line, is also a possibility.

Bee-Line buses offer a handful of routes, with one, the BxM4C, running to Midtown Manhattan for \$7.50.

The History

Tanneries once lined the Bronx River, before the country estates arrived. One that belonged to C.J. De Witt stretched across dozens of acres, some of which are now part of Sarah Lawrence College. Mr. De Witt's house, a tall chateau, survives on Castle Street.

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