

LIVING IN

Pelham, N.Y.: Close to the City, but With a Friendly Vibe

By Susan Hodara

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Abby Balafas wasn't sure she wanted to live in the suburbs. But the Manhattan apartment she and her husband, Evan Balafas, were renting started feeling cramped after the birth of their first daughter. So the couple began researching towns with an easy commute and a strong school system. Once they narrowed their focus to Pelham, N.Y., they made a date with a real estate broker. "We took the baby, got a Zipcar and headed out," said Mr. Balafas, 36, who is a vice president of finance for a media company in Manhattan.

A little more than two years ago, they moved into one of the first houses they saw: a 2,300-square-foot, four-bedroom Tudor built in 1928. They paid \$905,000, \$57,000 over the asking price, as there were multiple bids. "When I saw it, I

could picture us there,” said Ms. Balafas, 35, an admissions director at a private school on the Upper East Side. With that, she changed her mind about the suburbs.

Since then, the Balafases, who now have two girls, ages 3 years and 5 months, have embraced their community — not only its proximity to the city but also its friendly, small-town ambience. Just two and a half square miles, Pelham is the southernmost town in Westchester County, bordered by New Rochelle, Eastchester, Mount Vernon and, to the south, the Bronx and the Long Island Sound.



55 WITHERBEE AVENUE A seven-bedroom, four full- and two half-bath Tudor Revival house, built in 1920 on .89 acre, listed for \$2,150,000. 914-643-6185

It is also the county's oldest town, dating to 1654, when an English aristocrat, Thomas Pell, bought 9,160 acres from the Siwanoy tribe and named his manor for his tutor, Pelham Burton. When Pelham was incorporated in 1788, it encompassed parts of the Bronx; it was reduced to its current size in 1895. (The town should not be confused with Pelham Bay, Pelham Gardens, Pelham Bay Park or Pelham Parkway, all in the Bronx.)

Today, the town of Pelham, which has a population of approximately 12,500, forms a sort of triangle divided across the middle into two villages: Pelham to the north and Pelham Manor below it. The downtown, in the village of Pelham, forms a north-south strip about a mile and a half long that includes the train station, town hall, shops, restaurants, businesses and the recently redesigned, five-acre Wolfs Lane Park. The village of Pelham Manor has a modest shopping center at Four Corners, where Boston Post Road intersects Pelhamdale Avenue; along the Bronx border, Post Road Plaza is anchored by Fairway Market and several national chains.

The rest of the town is residential, its homes nestled on streets lined with well-used sidewalks. People know one another and, as Mr. Balafas put it, “there are lots of bump-intos, walking around.”

What You’ll Find

“One of the things people like about Pelham is that the houses are all different,” said Sona Davidian, a broker and the owner of McClellan Sotheby’s International Realty and a resident since 1981. “There’s nothing cookie-cutter about them.”

The housing stock is primarily single-family homes — about 2,800 of them, said Michele Casandra, the town assessor — including colonials, Victorians, Tudors, ranches and Mediterraneans, many built in the 1920s. Quarter-acre lots are common near downtown; farther south, lots are larger and houses more spread out. “An acre for us is a great piece of property,” Ms. Davidian said.

There are also more than 600 units in six cooperative complexes and four condominium complexes, Ms. Casandra said, as well as a few hundred multifamily rental homes and

about 200 rental units in 23 apartment buildings and mixed-use properties.

What You'll Pay

“It’s rare to find a single-family house for under \$600,000,” said Arthur L. Scinta, an associate broker with Houlihan Lawrence.

On Sept. 11, Ms. Davidian said, there were 42 single-family homes on the market. Only three were less than \$600,000, including a two-bedroom, 1,114-square-foot bungalow, built in 1923 on .06 acre, listed for \$475,000. The highest-priced home was a six-bedroom, 7,019-square-foot Victorian, built in 1914 on .8 acre, listed at \$2,988,000. There were also 17 condominiums and co-ops for sale, from a 700-square-foot, one-bedroom co-op for \$129,000 to a 2,182-square-foot, two-bedroom condo for \$799,000.



244 PELHAMDALE AVENUE A seven-bedroom, six full- and one half-bath Mediterranean house built in 1920 on .51 acre, listed for \$1,775,000. 914-738-2006

The median sales price for a single-family home during the 12-month period ending Sept. 11 was \$921,000, up from \$846,000 the previous 12 months.

The Vibe

“Pelham’s variety of housing attracts a diversity of people economically, ethnically and professionally,” Ms. Davidian said. Together, they form a tight-knit community, in part because of Pelham’s walkability and the “bump-intos” Mr. Balafas mentioned.

There are no school buses, so many students walk to school. And distances are short. Residents might walk downtown to catch a train, run errands or grab a bite at restaurants like Jordan Hall, La Fontanella and J Café. Or they might walk to one of the town's parks, like Shore Park, abutting the Sound.

The sense of community is reinforced by Pelham's myriad nonprofits, which recruit residents as participants, volunteers and donors. Options for art aficionados include the Pelham Art Center, Pelham Children's Theater and the historic, single-screen Picture House cinema. The biannual Novel Night raises funds for the Pelham Public Library through book-themed dinners in private homes.

Architectural restoration is the purview of the Pelham Preservation and Garden Society. The civic-minded have several organizations to choose from, including the Pelham Civic Association and the Junior League of Pelham.

“What makes Pelham special,” said Peter DiPaola, the town supervisor and a 65-year resident, “is that it's a community that cares, neighbor to neighbor.”

The Schools

The Pelham Union Free School District's approximately 2,800 students live in the villages of Pelham and Pelham Manor, and along a strip of the Bronx bordering Pelham Manor, where educational costs are covered by the City of New York. From kindergarten through fifth grade, students attend one of four neighborhood elementary schools. Sixth to eighth graders attend Pelham Middle School before moving on to Pelham Memorial High School. In 2015, the district began implementing the International Baccalaureate Middle Years Programme, offered from sixth to 10th grade.

Mean SAT scores for the 2016 graduating class were 564 in critical reading, 567 in math and 570 in writing; statewide equivalents were 489, 501 and 477. On 2017 fourth-grade state assessment tests, 67 percent met English standards and 73 percent met math standards, versus 41 and 43 percent statewide.

The Commute

With easy access to the Hutchinson River Parkway and Interstate 95, Pelham is 17 miles from Midtown. The rush-hour commute on Metro-North Railroad's New Haven line

between Pelham and Grand Central Terminal takes 27 to 35 minutes; monthly fare is \$239.

The History

Patrons of the bagel shop, bakery, wine store and other businesses at Four Corners may not be aware of the complex's historical significance. Constructed in 1931, it was one of the first self-contained shopping centers in the country with its own off-street parking lot — an innovative alternative to curbside parking and a model that is now widespread. This structure was expanded in the 1940s and again in the 1990s, but it retains its original Tudor Revival features, including slate roofs, timbered-and-stucco exteriors, arched doorways and fanciful chimneys.

A correction was made on Oct. 1, 2017: A picture last Sunday with the Living In column, about Pelham, N.Y., was published in error. The picture with the description of 55 Witherbee Avenue did not show that property. The correct photograph is online at [nytimes.com/realestate](https://www.nytimes.com/realestate).

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A version of this article appears in print on , Section RE, Page 8 of the New York edition with the headline: You Can Just Put That Cookie Cutter Away