

**LIVING IN**

# New Rochelle: When a Smaller City Fits

**By Pamela Gwyn Kripke**

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When Jordan and Jane VanLare decided to leave Manhattan three years ago, they looked throughout Westchester County and into Connecticut to find a grand old house they could restore and a community that had some of the qualities they loved about city living.

“We were primed and predisposed to New Rochelle because of its diversity, particularly in the public schools, and the arts and culture that go on here,” said Mr. VanLare, 34, a doctor and an associate partner at the consulting firm McKinsey & Company. He and Ms. VanLare, 33, a bankruptcy lawyer, bought a 12,000-square-foot Georgian colonial built in 1928 on two acres near Beechmont Lake for \$2.25 million. The

home has Beaux-Arts detail, a formal ballroom, a carriage house with two additional bedrooms and an Aeolian pipe organ with three keyboards.

“We would have bought the house without the organ, but the fact that it was there really sealed the deal,” said Mr. VanLare, who is having the instrument reconditioned. “We have the rolls, which came with the house.”

The VanLares have an 18-month-old son and are expecting a second child, both of whom will attend public school. The diversity the VanLares seek is reflected in the school district, where the students are 44 percent Hispanic or Latino and 22 percent African-American, according to New York State Education Department data.



**109 MILDRED PARKWAY** A four-bedroom three-bath 1937 center-hall colonial needing renovation, listed at \$799,000. (914) 262-1082 Susan Fisher Plotner for The New York Times

In New Rochelle, the city’s mayor, Noam Bramson, said, “Whoever you are, whatever you are interested in, whatever your sense of an ideal lifestyle is, you will be welcomed and have an opportunity to pursue your goals.”

The mayor, who is 46, was born here, and his mother, Mira Bramson, 83, still lives in town. When she sold her family’s rambling Dutch colonial six years ago, Ms. Bramson, who is widowed, thought briefly of leaving, but instead moved to a new downtown high-rise. “The whole idea of aging in place is appealing to me,” she said.

Home to around 80,000 residents across its 13.2 square miles, New Rochelle has nine miles of coastline and a variety of parks and nature reserves. Its established neighborhoods include sprawling residential areas in the middle and northern sections and more densely packed single- and two-family homes in the south. Zoning was recently approved to continue the creation of a mixed-use downtown district that will include 5,500 apartments, hundreds of which will be designated as affordable housing.

Like the VanLares, Clive and Keeba Henry moved to New Rochelle from Manhattan, first to a 1,200-square-foot loft in the former Bloomingdale's building on Main Street (one of the country's first suburban branch department stores), where they lived from 2011 until last year. When their son turned 1, they bought a four-bedroom 1936 Tudor in the northern Bonnie Crest neighborhood, for which they paid \$755,000, and invested about \$60,000 more in renovations.

“Before buying the house, we looked at Brooklyn, like everyone else, but we had fallen in love with New Rochelle, and it became a special place,” said Mr. Henry, 44, a sales manager for Adobe Software who is originally from Toronto. Ms. Henry, 43, who is from Oyster Bay, N.Y., was most

recently human resources director for Moon Capital Management in Manhattan. Mr. Henry added that New Rochelle “feels like the towns we grew up in.”

## **What You’ll Find**

New Rochelle is shaped like the blade of a knife, just a mile and a half at its widest point and 10 miles long. It is bordered by Long Island Sound on the south, Pelham and Eastchester on the west, Scarsdale on the north, and Mamaroneck and Larchmont on the east. It sits two miles north of the New York City border.

The housing stock is varied, said Anthony Marciano, the broker-owner of Century 21 Marciano Real Estate. Split-levels and ranches from the 1950s and ‘60s characterize parts of the northern end and newer waterfront areas; older colonials, Victorians and Cape Cods occupy the midtown swath, along with stately colonials, Tudors and Mediterranean-style homes in the historic district behind City Hall, he said. Multifamily homes line some streets in the southern part of town, and co-ops and condos are predominantly found on Pelham Road and Palmer Avenue

and near the Wykagyl shopping area serving the northern neighborhood of the same name. Luxury rentals and condos are near the downtown train station.

## **What You'll Pay**

There were 163 homes for sale as of May 9, said Scott M. Cohen, an associate broker with Better Homes and Gardens Rand Realty. “To have this low an inventory means it’s a seller’s market,” he said.



**101 EMERSON AVENUE** A three-bedroom three-bath 1961 split-level near the waterfront, listed at \$679,021. (914) 235-4996 Susan Fisher Plotner for The New York Times

Eighty-seven homes had sold since January, compared with 71 in the same time frame last year, according to Marina Kolmer, an associate broker with Houlihan Lawrence. “Lots of people are looking to buy,” she said. “Many are priced out of New York City.”

Through May 9, the median single-family home price was \$625,000, compared with \$640,000 a year ago and \$633,000 in 2008, according to Ms. Kolmer.

As of May 9, Mr. Marciano said, single-family homes ranged from \$69,000 for a studio cottage needing total renovation to \$2.899 million for an eight-bedroom, 6,841-square-foot Victorian on 3.8 acres of waterfront property. Multifamily homes were priced at \$259,000 to \$719,000, with a median of \$484,900. Co-ops ranged from \$39,000 to \$509,000, and condos from \$220,000 to \$1.65 million.

In the rental market, studios typically range from \$900 for an apartment in a multifamily home to \$1,500 in a luxury high-rise, one-bedrooms from \$1,200 to \$2,700 and two-bedrooms from \$1,600 to \$4,000, Ms. Kolmer said.



**34 CLINTON AVENUE** A 1925 five-bedroom two-bath colonial near the train station, listed at \$485,000.(917) 562-5485 Susan Fisher Plotner for The New York Times

## **What to Do**

Residents enjoy two public beaches: Glen Island Park and Hudson Park, where concerts are held. Along Davenport Avenue, private beach clubs and yacht, sailing and rowing clubs are open in the summer.

Nature preserves include Ward Acres, the Leatherstocking Trail (partly in Mamaroneck) and the Davenport Neck Bird Sanctuary, all with hiking or walking paths. The city runs a marina with 300 slips and 150 mooring spaces.

The downtown improvement plan includes the construction of 990,000 square feet of retail space and a performing arts center. In recent years, decidedly nonsuburban restaurants have popped up in the city center, including Alvin & Friends, Modern Restaurant and Lounge and the Gnarly Vine Wine Bar.

For more than 40 years, the New Rochelle Council on the Arts has fostered the performing and visual arts, hosting summer jazz and fall arts festivals, music and dance concerts, art exhibitions and literary readings. Local galleries include the Mahlstedt Gallery and the Lumen Winter Gallery at the New Rochelle Public Library.

## **The Schools**

Seven elementary schools serve the city, including the Barnard Early Childhood Center, which houses the district's only prekindergarten program and extends through second grade. Two middle schools feed into the one high school, a 1926 French Gothic structure with twin lakes, a working clock tower and a planetarium. There, roughly 3,400 students have access to about 250 courses, numerous clubs and interscholastic sports teams and this fall, the Advanced Placement Capstone program, a new initiative that

introduces AP seminar and research classes in addition to the standard AP construct. Mean SAT scores for the class of 2014-15 were 489 in reading, 497 in math and 491 in writing, compared with statewide scores of 489, 502 and 478.

## **The Commute**

Metro-North Railroad service to Grand Central Terminal is scheduled to take about 35 minutes from the New Rochelle station, which was built in 1887 and is listed on the National Register of Historic Places. Amtrak's Northeast Corridor trains also stop here.

## **The History**

Huguenot refugees arrived in New Rochelle in 1688, having fled religious persecution in France after Louis XIV's revocation of the Edict of Nantes. They left the port at La Rochelle and named their new home accordingly.

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