

Brookfield, Conn.: Lakeside Homes, Good Schools and, Soon, a Town Center



Eva Deitch for The New York Times

By Susan Hodara

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When two of their three children had moved out and were living on their own, Anthony and Kristen Papucci knew it was time to downsize. They also knew they wanted to stay in [Brookfield](#), Conn., where they had owned a four-bedroom house since 2000. They liked the small-town feel, and they especially liked the proximity to [Candlewood Lake](#).

Last summer, Ms. Papucci, who works as a banker in Ridgefield, Conn., and Mr. Papucci, a director at a media company in Manhattan, bought a 1,900-square-foot, three-bedroom ranch house in [Candlewood Shores](#), a private lakeside community. The couple, both 51, paid \$260,000 for the house, which was built in 1960 on a third of an acre. Now, they and their 15-year-old son enjoy lake views from the kitchen and living room. “When I wake up in the morning, I feel like I’m on vacation drinking my coffee,” Mr. Papucci said. “Then it’s like, ‘Oh, wait, I live here year-round.’”

Candlewood Lake is one of two lakes that bookend Brookfield, a 20-square-mile town of about 17,000 residents in northern Fairfield County. The largest lake in Connecticut, it forms part of Brookfield's western border. Along the eastern edge is the long, narrow [Lake Lillinonah](#), a dammed section of the Housatonic River. In between, residential neighborhoods line roads that wind through open fields and rolling woods. "It's hilly here," [Patty McManus](#), an associate broker with William Pitt Sotheby's International Realty, said. "Flat lots with flat driveways are hard to find."

A stretch of strip malls and office parks near Brookfield's southeastern border with Danbury is filled with big-box stores, fast-food chains and businesses to satisfy most needs. Yet despite decades of thwarted intentions, there is no walkable downtown.



19 Cove Road A four-bedroom, four-bath contemporary home, built in 1986 on nearly two acres, listed at \$995,000. 203-790-9500 Credit...Eva Deitch for The New York Times

That is about to change. In late June, ground was broken at an intersection called Four Corners, currently the site of four gas stations. What's to come is a [three-phase revitalization](#), beginning with a \$6 million installation of pedestrian lighting, a bike path and sidewalks with benches and planters. A four-building complex of mixed-use retail and residential rentals called Brookfield Village is already underway, aimed at millennials and empty-nesters. The vision for the area is a quaint town center with shops, restaurants and gathering places.

"We have two beautiful lakes, beautiful residential areas and great schools," Stephen C. Dunn, Brookfield's first selectman, said. "What is the only thing we don't have that a Darien, Westport or Ridgefield has? A real downtown. And now we're doing it. We talked about it for 30 years, and now we're actually doing it."

What You'll Find

Of Brookfield's roughly 6,500 homes, about three-quarters are single-family: colonials beside raised ranches beside farmhouses. Tucked among them are small subdivisions, many built in the 1980s. Most of the town's 18th- and 19th-century antique houses sit close to what was originally Brookfield's center.

Hundreds of smaller homes, built as summer cottages in the 1950s, are clustered around Candlewood Lake. Along Lake Lillinonah, the lots are larger and the houses more secluded.

The remaining residences are primarily condominiums. The new rental buildings that are part of the Four Corners renewal are welcome. “We need rentals,” [Linda McCaffrey](#), a broker with Coldwell Banker Residential Brokerage, said. “They support our young people staying in town and drive industry to move in.”

What You’ll Pay

Ms. McCaffrey, a Brookfield resident since 1981, described the town’s real estate market as “vibrant” and “active.” “We sold more houses in Brookfield last year than we did in any year since 2006,” she said.

On July 17, there were 114 single-family homes on the market. They included a three-bedroom, 1,225-square-foot ranch, built in 1961 on half an acre and listed for \$170,000, and a five-bedroom, 5,754-square-foot farmhouse, built in 2003 on almost half an acre and listed at \$2,885,000. Of the properties priced over \$1 million, Ms. McCaffrey said, “most are waterfront homes.”

There were also 33 condominiums on the market, including a one-bedroom, 975-square-foot ranch, built in 1982 and listed at \$139,000, and a two-bedroom, 2,674-square-foot townhouse, built in 2007 and listed for \$459,000.



24 Riverford Road A three-bedroom, one-bath ranch-style house, built in 1958 on 3.2 acres, listed at \$325,000. 203-240-6115Credit...Eva Deitch for The New York Times

The median sales price for single-family homes during the 12-month period that ended July 17 was \$387,500, up from \$367,500 the previous 12 months. The median sales price for condominiums during the same period was \$240,000, up from \$209,500 the previous 12 months.

The Vibe

In addition to the lakes, with their swimming beaches, boat launches, private marinas and glorious vistas, Brookfield is home to 1,300 acres of open space and parks that include sports fields, playgrounds and trails like the new Still River Greenway, a two-mile, paved walkway. At the Municipal Center, a seasonal farmers' market is held on Friday afternoons, followed by outdoor concerts that Mr. Dunn said often attract audiences of 1,000.

Art exhibitions and an annual film festival are organized by the [Brookfield Arts Commission](#), which also arranged funding for the three larger-than-life horse sculptures that grace the Municipal Center's entrance. They were made of woven steel rod by [Peter Busby](#), of Cornwall Bridge, Conn.

The [Brookfield Craft Center](#), in its 65th year, offers classes in blacksmithing, ceramics, glass arts, jewelry-making, wood turning and fiber arts. An 18th-century former mill on the school's two-and-a-half-acre campus contains a gallery and crafts shop. Theater lovers can attend performances at the 60-year-old [Brookfield Theater for the Arts](#), housed in a historic stone building that was once a boys' school gymnasium.

Among the town's restaurants is [Down the Hatch](#), Candlewood Lake's only waterfront eatery, complete with dock facilities for hungry boaters.

The Schools

Brookfield's nearly 2,800 school-age children are served by the [Brookfield Public School District](#), which includes Center Elementary for prekindergartners through first graders, Huckleberry Hill Elementary for second through fourth graders, Whisconier Middle School for Grades 5 through 8 and Brookfield High School. Center Elementary, built in 1938, is one of the only remaining wooden school buildings in Connecticut.

On 2016 fourth-grade state assessment tests, 70 percent met English language arts standards, compared with 55.6 percent statewide; 63 percent met mathematics standards, compared with 48 percent statewide.

Mean SAT scores for the graduating class of 2017 were 575 in evidence-based reading and writing and 550 in math; statewide equivalents were 524 and 505.

The Commute

Accessible from two exits off Interstate 84, Brookfield is less than an hour's drive from Hartford and Stamford, in Connecticut, and White Plains, N.Y. "We're equidistant from these major employment areas," Ms. McCaffrey said. "So if people change jobs, they don't have to move again."

Commuters to Manhattan, 70 miles southwest, can drive about 20 miles into New York to catch [Metro-North Railroad](#)'s Harlem line at the Southeast, Brewster or Purdys stations. Rush-hour trains between Southeast and Grand Central Terminal take 80 to 95 minutes; to and from Brewster, 75 to 92 minutes; to and from Purdys, 66 to 84 minutes. Monthly fare from each station is \$422.

The History

For more than three decades, a rusty old railroad bridge over Junction Road has served as an ever-changing D.I.Y. community billboard. Painted mostly by high school students, it has announced coming events and celebrated sports team victories. When a popular young science teacher died in 2008, it was adorned with "RIP MR Z." Known as Graffiti Bridge, it was built in 1915 and is owned by the [Housatonic Railroad](#). It was painted to memorialize the victims of the Sept. 11 attacks and, later, those of the nearby Sandy Hook shooting. "After Sandy Hook, we did the bridge and nobody touched it for years," Mr. Dunn said. "But then time moves on."