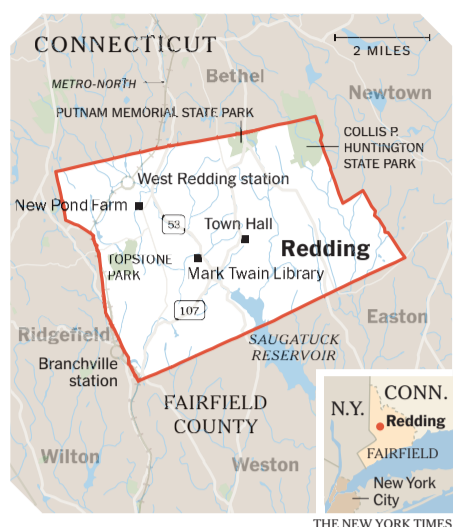


LIVING IN | REDDING, CONN.

They're Drawn to the Wide-Open Spaces



By SUSAN HODARA

On a recent mild morning, Jacob Hamilton was outside on the porch in his pajamas, taking in the view while enjoying a cup of coffee — something he never could have done before moving to Redding, Conn.

Mr. Hamilton, 38, and his wife, Kathleen, 32, had been living in a bustling complex by the train station in Darien since they married a year and a half ago, in a two-bedroom townhouse that was too small for their newly blended family of three children, now ages 12, 9 and 8. When Ms. Hamilton became pregnant, the couple began house-hunting in nearby towns. “We wanted to be where there were great schools, more woods and less people,” Ms. Hamilton said.

Ms. Hamilton is a social worker at Hope Academy, a special-education school in Orange, Conn.; Mr. Hamilton is a salesman for the Chefs’ Warehouse in the Bronx. Last July, they closed on a 2,460-square-foot, four-bedroom colonial in Redding, built in 1973 on 2.6 acres. They paid \$368,500 — “quite a steal for the area,” she said.

The Hamiltons were drawn to Redding by the same thing other like-minded residents prize: the expanses of glorious open space. With approximately 9,300 people spread across 31½ square miles, Redding is one of Fairfield County’s most rural and least densely populated towns. Narrow roads meander through forests and meadows, past splashing brooks and old stone walls.

Nearly 38 percent of Redding is protected land. Some pieces are town- or state-owned, some are watershed properties surrounding the Saugatuck Reservoir, and 1,700 acres were acquired by the robust Redding Land Trust, established in 1965 to preserve the town’s natural beauty.

The remainder of Redding is primarily residential. Marking the middle, Redding Center is a small historic area where the town hall sits on the town green. The West Redding neighborhood, in the northwest corner, contains the Metro-North Railroad station and a few shops. Redding’s southwest corner is in a district called Georgetown, where portions of Redding, Wilton, Ridgefield and Weston meet.

There, in the Redding section, stands the abandoned Gilbert & Bennett wire factory, which operated in the 19th and 20th centuries before going bankrupt. Several redevelopment plans for the 55-acre campus have been thwarted. “Our goal is for it to be sold and developed in a manner that is consistent with the needs and character of our town,” said Julia Pemberton, Redding’s first selectman.

The Norwalk River cuts through the site. “One day, there may be a wonderful pedestrian walkway along the water,” she said. “I can envision that.”



A wintry landscape surrounds the 102-acre New Pond Farm Education Center in Redding, one of Fairfield County’s most rural and least densely populated towns.

What You’ll Find

Homes in Redding are predominantly single-family, most on lots two acres or larger (the town enacted two-acre zoning in 1953). Styles are an interspersed mix. “You have colonials, Capes, farmhouses, ranches and every manner of antique, from Federals to Greek revivals to saltboxes,” said Roni Agress, a sales associate with William Pitt Sotheby’s International Realty.

John Ford, Redding’s assessor, said there are 3,025 single-family homes, as well as 45 multifamily homes, two small condominium complexes and a luxury senior living community with 332 apartments.

What You’ll Pay

“Before the 2008 downturn, you couldn’t find a house in Redding for under \$500,000,” said Margi Esten, a broker with Coldwell Banker Residential Real Estate. “Now you can. But the bulk of our houses sell for between \$600,000 and \$1 million, and we go up from there.”

As of March 9, Ms. Esten said, there were 81 single-family homes on the market. The least expensive was a 1,020-square-foot, two-bedroom cottage, built in 1968 on 4.09 acres, listed at \$349,000. The most expensive, priced at \$4,850,000, was a 9,242-square-foot, six-bedroom colonial, with pool and tennis court, built in 1907 on 10.01 acres.

The median sales price for single-family homes during the 12-month period ending March 9, 2018, was \$490,000, down from \$537,500 during the previous 12 months.

The Vibe

Called “the Vermont of Connecticut,” Redding is crisscrossed by more than 66 miles of trails frequented by hikers, cross-country skiers and horseback riders. The town is home to Collis P. Huntington and Putnam Memorial State Parks; New Pond Farm, a 102-acre environmental education center; and the town-owned Topstone Park.

The community also gathers for weekly summertime Concerts on the Green and the annual daylong Rock’n Roots music festival in July.

While Redding has no downtown, shopping abounds in Ridgefield and Westport, about 20 minutes away. The closest movie theater is Bethel Cinema, six miles north in Bethel. The closest supermarket is Caraluzzi’s, in Georgetown.

The Schools

Redding is part of the Easton Reading and Region 9 (ER9) tri-district school system, which consists of the Redding School District and Easton School District’s elementary and middle schools and the Region 9 School District, Joel Barlow High School, shared by students from Redding and neighboring Easton. Children from Redding attend Redding Elementary for prekindergarten through grade 4 and John Read Middle School for grades 5 through 8.

Redding Elementary was named a 2015-17 National PTA School of Excellence. Thomas H. McMorrان, ER9’s superintendent of schools, said that on the Redding district’s 2017 fourth-grade state assess-

ments, 85.7 percent met English standards and 87.8 percent met math standards; statewide equivalents were 54.1 and 50 percent. For Barlow’s 2017 graduating class, mean SAT scores were 590 in evidence-based reading and writing and 580 in math; statewide means were 530 and 512.

The Commute

Commuters to Manhattan, 62 miles southwest, can catch the Danbury spur of Metro-North Railroad’s New Haven line at either the West Redding station or, about five miles south, the Branchville station, just across Redding’s western border, in Ridgefield. Four direct rush-hour trains run to and from Grand Central Terminal; travel ranges from 93 to 111 minutes. At other times, commuters must transfer in South Norwalk or Stamford. Monthly fare from both stations is \$388.

The History

In 1908, when Samuel L. Clemens, a.k.a. Mark Twain, moved from Manhattan to Redding, he found that his newly built villa couldn’t accommodate all his books. So he donated the overflow — about 3,000 volumes — to the town and enlisted the townspeople to raise funds to construct a library to house them.

Money was gathered, an effort spearheaded by Clemens and his daughter Jean, who also came to Redding. She died in 1909, and Clemens in 1910, several months before the Jean L. Clemens Memorial Building was completed.

ON THE MARKET



11 Diamond Hill Road

A four-bedroom colonial with four full bathrooms and two half bathrooms, built in 2003 on two acres, listed at \$1.195 million. 203-733-2656



248 Newtown Turnpike

A four-bedroom, two-bathroom house built in 1747 on an acre, listed at \$560,000. 203-241-8453

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