

History, Geography and Land Use

History of Westchester County

Westchester County covers an area of 450 square miles and has a diverse population residing in 45 municipalities. Its geographical setting is a favorable one, with the Long Island Sound and Connecticut on the east and the Hudson River on the west. It has retained much of its rural character while adopting the urban and suburban lifestyles as a result of its proximity to New York City.

First Settlers

Members of the Algonquin tribes made up Westchester's native population when the Hudson Valley area was first explored by Giovanni Verrazano, an Italian exploring for France in 1526 and Henry Hudson, sailing under the Dutch flag in 1609. The County's first permanent European settlers were Dutch, soon followed by the English. Many of the County's English colonists came seeking religious and economic freedom. The County's earliest English settlements were at Rye, Mamaroneck, Eastchester and Bedford.

Colonial Westchester

By 1664, the Dutch lost control of the County to the English and large tracts of Westchester land were established as manors or patents. Manors were held by a single proprietor, while patents were held by groups of associates. The lords of the manors and patents leased land to tenant farmers and provided many essential services to the tenants.

Westchester County was created by an act of the New York General Assembly in 1683 and included what is now the Bronx, which was transferred in stages during the 19th century to New York City. During the colonial period, life in Westchester was quite primitive. Roads were few and in poor condition. Transportation was heavily dependent on water routes. Nearly everything settlers consumed was raised or made on their farms. They bartered wood, cattle and food for items that they could not produce themselves. Colonial churches not only served as religious centers but also played an important social and political role.

Although the economy was still primarily agricultural, farmers began to supplement income through cottage industries - shoe making and furniture crafting. These industries led to heavier use of local roads; heavier use necessitated road improvements which encouraged increased travel. Taverns providing accommodations for travelers were established and ferries were launched. By 1775, Westchester was the richest and most populous County in the colony of New York.

Revolutionary Transition

During the Revolutionary War, Westchester County saw more fighting and suffering than any

other area in the country. The Revolution was in some ways a civil war, as families were often divided between patriot and loyalist sympathies. After the battles of Pelham and White Plains in 1776, the main American headquarters was at Continental Village, north of Peekskill in Putnam County. The British were headquartered in New York City. Westchester was the "Neutral Ground" between the two camps and the countryside was pillaged by both sides.

Although the Revolution devastated the County, recovery after the war was rapid. The large landowners in Westchester were mostly Loyalists, and after the war their lands were confiscated by the state and sold. Many local farmers were able to buy the lands they had previously farmed as tenants. In 1788, five years after the end of the Revolutionary War, the County was officially divided into 20 towns. In 1798, the first federal census recorded a population of 24,000 centered in northern Westchester.

Early Infrastructure Improvements

In 1800, the first commercial toll road, the Westchester Turnpike, which ran through Pelham and New Rochelle, was chartered. Other toll roads including the Croton (Somersetown) Turnpike were later established. During this same period, steamboats began to appear on the Hudson River. Expansion of transportation options encouraged economic expansion. Larger industries – iron foundries in Peekskill and Port Chester, brickyards in Verplanck and Croton, marble quarries in Ossining and Tuckahoe - were gradually established.

Two developments in the first half of the 1800s - the construction of the first Croton Dam and Aqueduct and the coming of the railroad - had enormous impact on the growth of both Westchester and New York City. Construction of the Croton Dam and Aqueduct began in 1837 and was completed in 1842. The Aqueduct carried water 41 miles from Croton to two reservoirs in Manhattan to be distributed to the city. The reservoirs were located on the present sites of the Great Lawn in Central Park and the New York Public Library on Fifth Avenue. Now a National Historic Landmark, the Aqueduct is considered one of the great engineering achievements of the 19th century.

In the 1840s, the railroads came to Westchester. In 1844, the New York and Harlem Railroad reached White Plains. The New York and Hudson River line was completed to Peekskill in 1849. That same year, the New York and New Haven opened its route through eastern Westchester. The railroads often determined whether a town grew or declined. The railroads contributed to a population shift from northern to southern Westchester. By 1860, the total County population was 99,000 and the largest city was Yonkers. Many small downtowns, centered around a railroad station, flourished.

Post Civil War

The period following the Civil War brought vast fortunes to a new class of entrepreneurs in the New York area, and many built large estates in Westchester. Several magnificent mansions of this era are preserved and open to the public. Among them are Lyndhurst in Tarrytown, Kykuit in Pocantico Hills, the Jay Heritage Center in Rye, Caramoor in Katonah and Glenview in Yonkers.

Expansion of the New York City water system also impacted local development. Between the

1880s and the 1920s, the construction of the Kensico and expansion of the Croton water supply systems created new dams, bridges and roads. The flooding of thousands of acres for reservoirs created considerable dislocations in many towns north of White Plains. The building of the New Croton Dam and its reservoir, for instance, resulted in the relocation of the hamlet of Katonah to higher ground. In North Salem the hamlet of Purdys was moved when five percent of the town was inundated, including hundreds of prime acres of dairy land.

During the last half of the 1800s, Westchester's transportation system and labor force attracted many manufacturing concerns, particularly along the Hudson River. Pills and patent medicines were manufactured in Ossining; greenhouses in Irvington; beer in Dobbs Ferry; sugar, paving material and conduit in Hastings; and in Yonkers, elevators and carpets.

Twentieth Century Development

During the 1900s, the primarily rural character of Westchester would yield to the suburban County we know today. Between the County's railroad network and the proliferation of the automobile in the early 20th century, working in New York City and living in the country became possible for the middle class. In 1907 the Bronx River Commission was established to acquire the necessary lands to eliminate nuisance conditions along the river's banks and improve its water quality through a joint undertaking between New York City and Westchester County. The Commission's efforts lead to the creation of the Bronx River Parkway Reservation, completed in 1925, and the first modern, multi-lane limited-access roadway in North America.

The success of the Bronx River Parkway Reservation encouraged the County government to develop its outstanding parks system, preserving great tracts of open space. Playland Amusement Park in Rye, a National Historic Landmark, opened to the public in 1928, was the first totally planned amusement park in the country. It continues to be operated by Westchester County. The development of Westchester's parks and parkway systems supported existing residential communities and encouraged the establishment of new ones. New homes were constructed on former estates and farms. The parkways were a boon for commuters and transformed the development pattern of Westchester. New businesses appeared in response to expanded markets; White Plains, with branches of many New York City stores, became the County's central shopping center. With the need for new homes for new families following World War II, multistory apartment houses appeared in the urbanized areas of the County, while the market for single family houses continued to expand. By 1950 the total County population was 625,816.

Major interstate highways were constructed in Westchester during the 1950s and 60s. The establishment of these roadways, along with the construction of the Tappan Zee Bridge, encouraged many major corporations, such as PepsiCo, General Foods, Ciba-Geigy and IBM to establish headquarters in Westchester. They accomplished this by assembling large tracts of property to construct office facilities, which were often designed by world-famous architects and enhanced by extensive landscape.

The County's intense development during the 20th century, while generating prosperity for the region, raised the consciousness of its residents regarding the loss or compromise of Westchester's open space, air and water quality and historic resources.

Sustainable Growth

Striking scenic beauty, proximity to Manhattan, outstanding educational institutions, and a rich cultural history combine to make Westchester an area with both rural character and urban sophistication. While large-scale suburban and corporate development has supplanted most of the County's agricultural areas, Westchester retains much of its original character. The County's residents begin the 21st century with an understanding of the need to protect Westchester's special character while assuring its economic stability and their own well-being.

Geography

Westchester County is 450 square miles in size. The County shares its northern boundary with Putnam County and its southern boundary with New York City. It is bordered on the west side by the Hudson River and on the east side by Long Island Sound and Fairfield County, Connecticut.

The Long Island Sound shore is generally rocky. Tidal mud flats and marshes as well as several natural and artificially-maintained sand beaches are interspersed on the coast. Several islands can be found offshore. The uses of these islands vary: Glen Island is a County park for passive and active recreation, Huckleberry Island is largely undeveloped and has one of the largest rookeries for some shore bird species in western Long Island Sound, and Hen Island contains a residential community. David's Island, the former location of the U.S. Army's Fort Slocum, is undergoing an environmental cleanup and is slated to be used as passive parkland. Public waterfront access is limited by residential and other development, although municipal- and County-owned parks provide access to public beaches, nature preserves and passive and active waterfront recreational facilities.

The widest section across the Hudson River, at 3.6 miles, is found between the Westchester and Rockland County shorelines immediately north of Croton Point in Croton-on-Hudson. In Colonial times, this area was called the Tappan Zee or Sea. The Hudson River is tidal and brackish through Westchester and contains a small number of estuarine marshes. Two bridges span the Hudson in Westchester; the Bear Mountain Bridge crosses at Cortlandt and the Tappan Zee Bridge at Tarrytown. Municipal, County and state-owned parks provide access to waterfront landmarks and sites, including Croton Point in Croton, Kingsland Point in Sleepy Hollow and JFK Memorial Marina in Yonkers.

The Hudson River waterfront in Westchester is in the midst of a renaissance, converting from primarily industrial uses to mixed residential, commercial, retail, and recreational uses. This transformation is most notable in Yonkers, Hastings-on-Hudson, Dobbs Ferry, Irvington, Tarrytown, Sleepy Hollow, Ossining, and Peekskill, where redevelopment projects are in various stages of design and construction. In 2004, Westchester County embarked on a project to create a 50-mile long Hudson RiverWalk which will provide public access between New York City and Putnam County along or close to the river. RiverWalk will weave through the Hudson River communities and provide access and linkages to recreational, cultural, and historic resources as well as community business centers.

The County's interior generally is more hilly north of Interstate 287, which bisects the County.

Regional Locator Map



The highest point, at an elevation of 976 feet, is Bailey Mountain in Mountain Lakes County Park in the northeastern part of the County in the Town of North Salem. The lowest point is sea level. The County is divided into six primary drainage basins or watersheds, which are the Lower Long Island Sound, Upper Long Island Sound, Bronx River, Upper Hudson River, Lower Hudson River and Croton River basins. Within these primary drainage basins are approximately 60 smaller basins, or subwatersheds. The principal streams draining the southern part of the County include Beaver Swamp Brook, Blind Brook, Bronx River, Hutchinson River, Mamaroneck River, Saw Mill River, Sheldrake River, Stephenson Brook and Tibbetts Brook. The primary streams draining the central part of the County include Byram River, Kisco River, Mianus River, Mill River, Pocantico River and Silvermine River. And the principal streams draining the northern part of the County include Dickey Brook, Furnace Brook, Hallocks Mill Brook, Hunter Brook, Muscoot River, Peekskill Hollow Brook, and Titicus River.

The County contains several major reservoirs for public drinking water supply: The Croton system and the Kensico Reservoir are important components of the New York City water supply system. The system is a series of interconnected reservoirs and lakes in northern Westchester and Putnam Counties that provides 10% of New York City's water under normal conditions and up to 30% of the in-City consumption in times of drought. The components of the system include the New Croton Reservoir in Cortlandt, Yorktown, Somers and Bedford; the Cross River Reservoir contained largely in Bedford; Titicus Reservoir in North Salem; Amawalk Reservoir in Somers; and the Muscoot Reservoir in Somers, Lewisboro and Bedford. The Kensico Reservoir is located in Mount Pleasant, Harrison and North Castle; and Byram Lake Reservoir in North Castle and Bedford. A number of other smaller reservoirs exist throughout the County.

Land Use

In general, the southern part of the County, along Long Island Sound and the lower portion of the Hudson River in Westchester, is more densely developed and populated than the northern portion. Development in the northern portion is largely comprised of low- to medium-density residential development and a much lesser extent of commercial development and a dozen small hamlets. The southern part is home to several cities and densely populated villages. The historical development of the County is based around three primary components: centers, corridors, and open space. These three elements remain the focus of the County's long-range planning strategy.

Centers

Westchester's centers are the focal points in the County's pattern of development, the "downtowns" that create and sustain a sense of place and community. Centers, consisting of a commercial or mixed use core and surrounding residential and industrial areas, are likely to have the principal services on which most communities depend.

Centers can be categorized into four types based on their size and function. Hamlets are the smallest centers, mostly found at the crossroads of historic transportation routes, which have basic retail, religious, and government facilities. Local centers are served by major road, train, and transit corridors, typically with well-defined downtown businesses districts with office, retail, and public uses. Intermediate centers have well-developed infrastructure systems and have a distinct urban character, with mid- and high-rise buildings, large-scale retail, and some indus-

trial uses. Finally, major centers are the County's largest places of economic activity, with high-density development and extensive infrastructure.

Corridors

The County's corridors are Westchester's historic paths of movement and development, connecting the County's centers to one another and to places outside of Westchester County. While the County's corridors serve an important transportation role, they have also had important functions beyond transportation. In many cases, housing, commercial, and industrial development has occurred along corridors because of the access that they provide to places of employment and markets for goods. Other corridors have developed based on their scenic qualities and the access they provide to major open spaces and recreational opportunities. These three functions of corridors (transportation, development, and open space access) overlap in many cases, but they also conflict in others.

Open Space

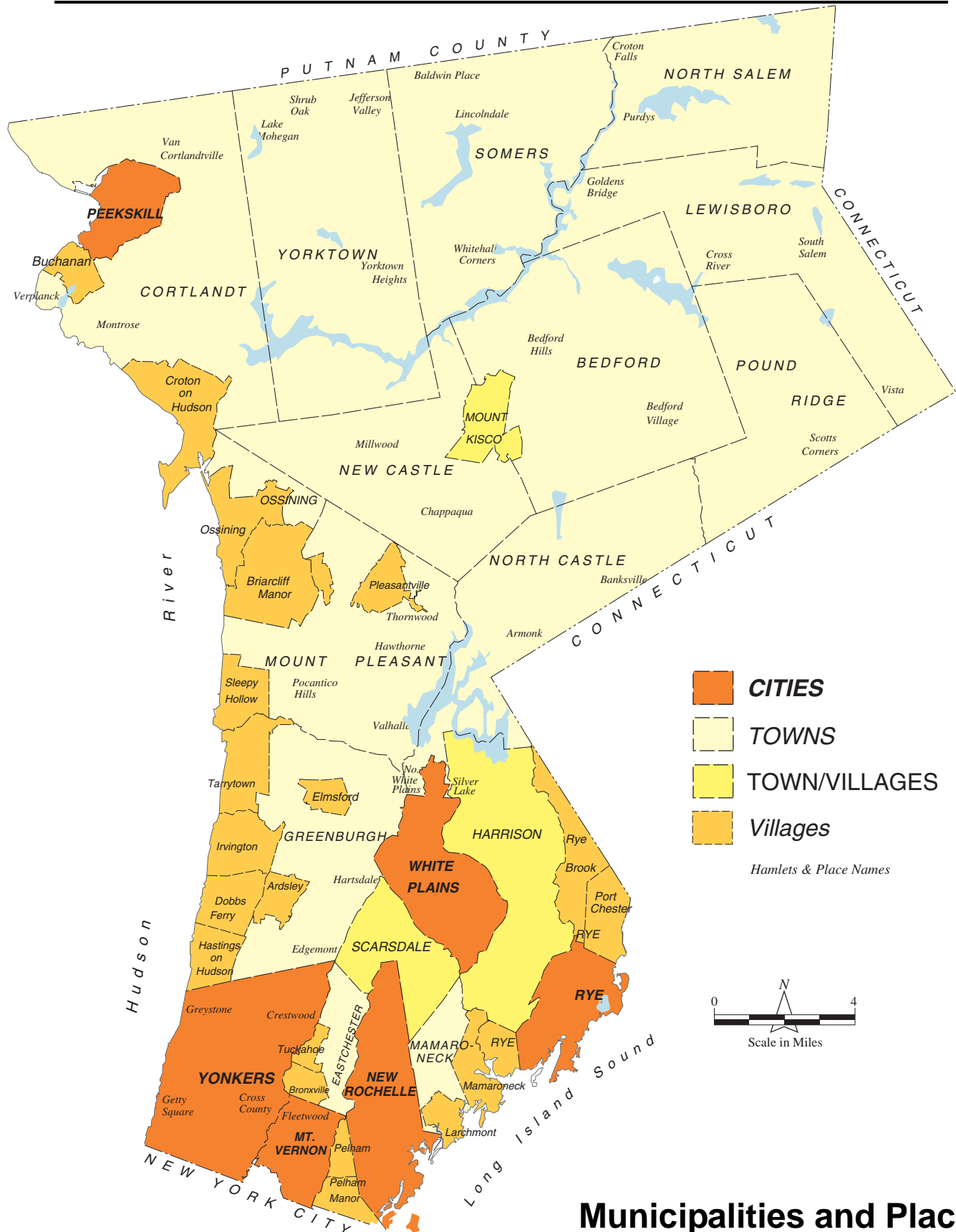
Westchester County's open spaces have many manifestations, including undeveloped land and shoreline, active recreation space, and rare or economically valuable lands requiring permanent protection. In the first decade of the 20th century, foresighted planners recognized that some open space would have to be preserved in a systematic way. Their vision led to the land acquisition and other techniques that have permanently established the open space nature of Westchester County. The acquisition of the Bronx River Parkway lands shortly after 1900 led to development of the County's first open space corridor – a scenic travel route linking centers and, eventually, additional County facilities and parks.

Westchester County's open space system, public and private, vastly enhances the quality of life in the County. Open space elements provide relief and contrast in urban and suburban settings, define and buffer communities and serve as linkages between major open spaces and concentrated centers. Open spaces also serve as community focal points for activities and assembly, especially in higher density areas. Open space policies in Westchester County protect biodiversity corridors for the welfare and preservation of wildlife.

Development Policies

The County's growth and development is guided by *Westchester 2025*, the County Planning Board's long-range policy document that focuses on sustainable development through the balancing of economic and environmental concerns. The plan also focuses on serving the needs of the changing population of Westchester County. This long-range plan establishes the importance of cooperation among the County's disparate municipalities and encourages a land use pattern emphasizing centers, corridors, and open space.

For more information on the plans and policies contained in *Westchester 2025*, visit <http://www.westchesterny.com/w2025.htm> or contact the Westchester County Department of Planning at (914) 995-4400.



Municipalities and Places

Open Space Acreage by Municipality Westchester County, NY

	Open Space Total	Municipal Acreage	Percent Municipality Open Space	County Parks	State Parks	Local Parks
WESTCHESTER COUNT	92,491	252,217	36.7%	15,992	6,767	7,111
Cities	9,164	34,363	26.7%	2,182	1,024	1,357
Towns	83,327	217,854	38.2%	13,810	5,743	5,754
Villages	10,065	35,781	28.1%	1,455	1,048	1,442
CITIES						
Mount Vernon	380	2,807	13.5%	62	100	92
New Rochelle	1,428	6,674	21.4%	210	82	269
Peekskill	840	2,805	29.9%	128	106	291
Rye	1,295	3,932	32.9%	489		269
White Plains	2,179	6,326	34.4%	349	82	157
Yonkers	3,042	11,819	25.7%	945	654	278
TOWNS						
Bedford	7,704	25,334	30.4%	130	244	379
Cortlandt	8,634	22,230	38.8%	2,575	542	336
Eastchester	757	2,192	34.5%	156	63	166
Greenburgh	4,389	11,412	38.5%	934	481	281
Harrison	3,605	11,109	32.5%	157	233	95
Lewisboro	5,423	18,740	28.9%	1,367		404
Mamaroneck	792	2,265	35.0%	210		95
Mount Pleasant	7,871	15,420	51.0%	690	1,694	340
New Castle	4,174	15,032	27.8%	367	433	986
North Castle	6,092	16,720	36.4%	368		453
North Salem	7,950	14,857	53.5%	1,010		33
Ossining	550	1,937	28.4%	31	72	73
Pound Ridge	6,121	14,795	41.4%	3,130		263
Somers	7,876	20,564	38.3%	1,108		193
Yorktown	11,389	25,249	45.1%	1,576	1,982	1,659
VILLAGES						
Ardsey	158	841	18.8%	37	15	30
Briarcliff Manor	1,209	3,816	31.7%	35	128	174
Bronxville	80	622	12.9%	25		1
Buchanan	132	938	14.1%			22
Croton-on-Hudson	1,288	3,045	42.3%	531	2	89
Dobbs Ferry	617	1,549	39.9%	13	75	98
Elmsford	203	666	30.5%	2	103	5
Hastings-on-Hudson	377	1,275	29.6%	68	67	114
Irvington	657	1,822	36.1%	146	61	155
Larchmont	81	700	11.5%			49
Mamaroneck	364	2,093	17.4%	5		72
Mount Kisco	611	1,980	30.8%		55	121
Ossining	413	2,043	20.2%		68	51
Pelham	66	529	12.5%	0	48	6
Pelham Manor	155	854	18.1%	1	33	25
Pleasantville	235	1,149	20.5%	0	68	32
Port Chester	138	1,531	9.0%			50
Rye Brook	771	2,221	34.7%		81	67
Scarsdale	1,218	4,269	28.5%	502	81	147
Sleepy Hollow	684	1,446	47.3%	18	148	80
Tarrytown	548	2,002	27.4%	43	16	37
Tuckahoe	61	393	15.5%	29		18

Source: Westchester County Department of Planning

