

# The New York Times

REAL ESTATE

## Maplewood, N.J.: If Brooklyn Were a Suburb

### Living In

By JILL P. CAPUZZO Oct. 8, 2014



A direct train into the city and an environment welcoming to diversity attract residents to Maplewood, N.J.

Just call it “[Brooklyn](#) West.”

That’s how many of the residents of Maplewood think of their town, especially those who have followed the typical migration pattern of moving from [Manhattan](#) to Brooklyn to Maplewood, which they see as an extension of the hip, cultured, community-involved lifestyle they’d grown accustomed to in New York.

“A lot of like-minded transplants have come here from various enclaves of the city seeking the same kind of life in a suburban setting, which happens to be a beautiful

setting, with parks and rolling hills and colonial houses,” said Alexis Robie, a television producer who moved here from Greenwood Heights, Brooklyn, last October with his wife, Corie, and two young children. They bought a 1920 side-hall colonial with three bedrooms and one full and two half baths, paying \$630,000.

Bonnie Ramsey, a recent arrival from Park Slope, Brooklyn, agreed, noting that she and her husband, Matt, and their three children were “welcomed with open arms” when they moved last November to this Essex County town of about four square miles. One set of neighbors invited them to a barbecue the day they arrived, while neighbors on the other side invited them to dinner the following evening.

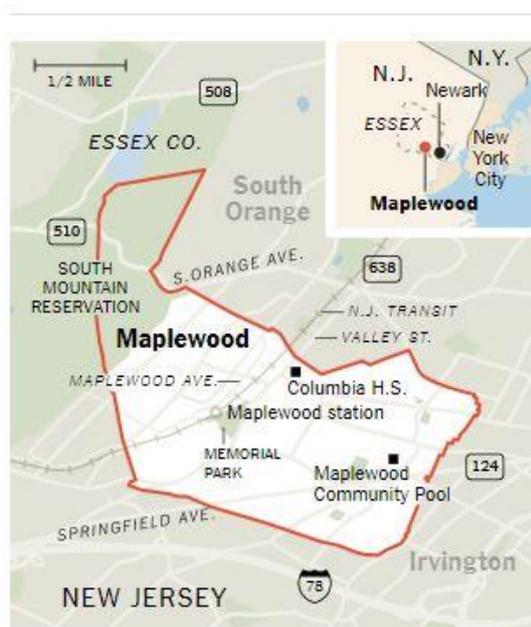


16 LEWIS DRIVE A [house](#) with three bedrooms and two-and-a-half-baths on 0.23 acres, listed at \$685,000. (201) 290-0279 Bryan Thomas for The New York Times

“There’s such an amazing community of people who are artists or actors or work for great organizations,” said Ms. Ramsey, a pastry chef who is married to the associate director of live shows for the [Blue Man Group](#). “And everyone’s a New Yorker, or from Brooklyn, so it feels very familiar.” They, too, bought a 1920s colonial, with four bedrooms and two-and-a-half bathrooms, for \$555,000.

Last month, the Ramseys helped prepare for the annual block party on their street, stringing lights, pulling out lawn chairs and grills, and setting up the water-balloon and egg-toss games for the 60 to 70 neighbors expected to come out. On almost any given weekend in the spring and fall, similar block parties are happening around town, according to Mark Slade, an agent with Keller Williams Mid-Town Direct Realty, himself a transplant from Brooklyn 17 years ago.

Citing the top three reasons home buyers choose Maplewood, Mr. Slade listed: “No. 1, the direct train into the city; No. 2, diversity; and No. 3, lifestyle.”



“Everybody feels comfortable living here,” he said. “If you’re in a mixed-ethnic marriage, or of mixed religions, you’re O.K., because that’s what we do here.” The 2010 census figures bear that out, tallying Maplewood’s 23,867 residents as 56 percent white, 35 percent black, 7 percent Hispanic and 3 percent Asian.

“Maplewood is definitely an NPR, Subaru Outback kind of place,” said Dan Calabro, an internal recruiter for JPMorgan Chase, who moved to Maplewood from Hell’s Kitchen in

Manhattan with his wife, Christine, and their newborn son in December. The Calabros said they found a better selection in their price range in Maplewood than in other towns they considered, like Montclair and Summit, and ended up buying a three-bedroom one-and-a-half-bath colonial in the mid-\$400,000s.

While properties tend to be smaller in Maplewood, this wasn’t a problem. “The houses being closer together make for a tighter-knit community,” Ms. Calabro said.



80 CLAREMONT AVENUE A 1929 house with four bedrooms and two-and-a-half baths on 0.27 acres, listed at \$659,000. (973) 220-3050 Bryan Thomas for The New York Times

## What You'll Find

Maplewood Avenue, the town's commercial heart, maintains a small-town feel. Recent plans to turn a prime Maplewood Avenue site occupied by the United States Post Office into a mixed-use development led to a petition drive, drawing 600 signatures from those seeking more community involvement in the decision-making process. The project's chosen developer pulled out in September after Kings supermarket, currently across the street, indicated it would not move into the new space, but the township is planning to go ahead with another developer. In addition to biannual art walks, community art centers and artists' studios throughout town, Maplewood's **artistic** nature is reflected in an underground passage leading to the train station, which has been painted with murals and mosaics by local artists and organizations.

## What You'll Pay

A recent search found 78 homes on the market, mostly center-hall or side-hall colonials built in the 1920s and 30s, with an average **listing** price of \$475,860; the highest-priced was a six-bedroom 1927 brick colonial with three full and two half baths on 0.69 acres listed at \$1.395 million and the lowest-priced a contemporary two-bedroom one-bath townhouse listed at \$71,000. The average price of houses sold through September this year was \$563,710, which was 102.7 percent of their asking price, compared with \$461,284, or 99 percent of the average asking price, over the same period last year, according to Mr. Slade of Keller Williams Mid-Town Direct Realty. The average number of days on the market so far this year is just 22, compared with 63 days in 2013.

Condominiums include the Top, a high-rise luxury complex built in 1991, where four units recently on the market ranged in price from \$375,000 to \$600,000. Less luxurious condos in other developments start at less than \$100,000 and range into the high \$200,000s.

Two multistory rental complexes were built in 2013: Maplewood Crossing, with 126 apartments, where one-bedrooms start at \$1,600 and two-bedrooms at \$2,100, and the Station House, a 50-unit complex where one-bedrooms range from around \$2,300 to \$2,600 and two-bedrooms, around \$3,200 to \$3,600.

## What to Do

Residents gravitate to Maplewood's bustling downtown, full of shops, restaurants and a movie theater, or to Memorial Park, 25 acres of ball fields, picnic areas, tennis courts and playground. Here is where the town's annual [Maplewoodstock](#), a two-day music and art festival, takes place each July. Another popular summer spot is the [Maplewood Community Pool](#), open to residents through a paid membership. The [South Mountain Reservation](#), a 2,047-acre county park that is partly in Maplewood, has a zoo, an ice skating arena, a dog park, about 20 miles of footpaths and 27 miles of carriage roads. The town has two libraries, and a weekly farmer's market runs from June through October.



798 PROSPECT STREET A four-bedroom one-bath 1921 colonial on 0.06 acres, with a redone kitchen, listed at \$339,000.

(917) 797-5059. Bryan Thomas for The New York Times

The [Burgdorff Center for the Performing Arts](#) on Durand Road is home to performances and children's classes by [the Theater Project](#), among other programs.

## **The Schools**

Maplewood is part of the [School District of South Orange and Maplewood](#), where children attend one of six public elementary schools, Maplewood or South Orange Middle School, and [Columbia High School](#), which is in Maplewood. The high school prides itself in the diversity of its roughly 1,860 students, and in programs like its robotics club, which has gone to the world championships the last two years. The school offers 21 AP courses. Its average SAT scores for 2012-13 were 522 in reading, 540 in math and 521 in writing, compared with state averages of 495, 521 and 496.

A language arts teacher at Columbia High School was arrested last month on charges of aggravated sexual assault and endangering a child for her alleged involvement with five students. A letter dated Sept. 18 on the school district's website said administrators, guidance counselors, social workers and teachers were "actively supporting students and staff impacted by events."

## **The Commute**

Maplewood is around 20 miles west of lower Manhattan, a drive of 35 to 45 minutes, traffic permitting, via Interstate 78 and the Holland Tunnel. New Jersey Transit trains go directly to New York's Penn Station in about 35 to 40 minutes, or switch in Newark, taking about 45 minutes or more, with one-way tickets costing \$7.25 and a monthly pass, \$208. During rush hours a jitney takes commuters to and from the train station. New Jersey Transit buses run direct to Port Authority in about 50 minutes for \$6.50 one way.

## **The History**

John Shedden, a real estate developer, built a train station in what is now Maplewood, then known as Jefferson Village, to access the Morris and Essex Railroad, which was extended there in 1838.

### ***Correction: October 10, 2014***

*An earlier version of a photo caption with this article included an outdated telephone number for the listing at 16 Lewis Drive. The correct number is (201) 290-0279.*

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### [More Living In Columns](#)

A version of this article appears in print on October 12, 2014, on Page RE13 of the New York edition with the headline: If Brooklyn Were a Suburb.

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