

Rooms With Views Replace Factories on Hudson's Banks

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First came the gracious estates and summer getaways of the 1800's, built for [New York City](#) businessmen who yearned for Hudson River breezes and Palisades views. Then came decades of suburban-style home building, with colonial- and Tudor-style set back in hills and valleys while heavy industry and noisy trains came to dominate the riverbanks.

But now another housing boom is unfolding along the Hudson. From Yonkers to Kingston, thousands of units of town houses and apartments to buy or rent are planned for the river's edge, where manufacturing has long been in decline.

A confluence of forces - a cleaner river, empty lots created by vanished factories, a housing boom, the proliferation of suburban developers, a willingness by local officials to embrace a new source of tax revenues, and a crystallizing Hudson Valley consciousness - have come together in recent years to generate interest in building and living along the Hudson.

Almost all of the planned housing falls in the luxury category, with condominiums costing as much as a four-bedroom house inland. With it will come the amenities of a rejuvenated Hudson River, with docks, riverside dining and parkland.

The plans are not universally popular. Vehement antidevelopment efforts extend up and down the Hudson, with environmentalists and river enthusiasts joining forces to try to rein in the projects. But most of the battles are over scale, riverfront access and affordability. And it is becoming increasingly clear: The next great phase for the Hudson River is housing.

Some of the proposals are so ambitious that they would create villages within villages, leading to population increases and, some critics charge, a total change in the character of the towns. Several smaller projects are in the works as well; some have recently opened.

Sleepy Hollow, in Westchester County, is considering a plan for 1,250 units of housing on a 100-acre site where General Motors once assembled cars that affords stunning views of the Tappan Zee Bridge.

Across the river in Rockland County, construction has begun on the first of 850 units in Haverstraw, a former brick-making center.

In historic Kingston, the first state capital, in Ulster County, a developer wants to transform an abandoned cement plant into 2,182 rental and condominium apartments and town houses.

Altogether, there are about 15,000 units of housing now under review or being constructed along the river, according to an estimate by Scenic Hudson, an environmental organization. Scenic Hudson has formed a coalition with several groups to oppose the Kingston plan.

Elected officials have raised concerns about the density of the plans, but have, for the most part, embraced them, particularly in communities that have felt the sting of departing industries.

"There are two things we can do," said James M. Sottile, the mayor of Kingston, which has lost a fifth of its population since the 1960's. "We can grow our tax base or we can grow our tax rate. We're going to develop here in the City of Kingston, and we're going to do it responsibly."

But some of the same groups that helped defeat a proposal this year for a huge new cement plant in Columbia County have now shifted their attention to what they call the new megaprojects. They say the developments will introduce sprawl to the banks of the Hudson, with its implications for traffic, visual blight and pollution runoff.

They also fear the upscale nature of most of the proposed housing, saying the developments will stand apart in areas like Sleepy Hollow, Haverstraw, Kingston and Yonkers, which are mostly blue collar and ethnically and racially diverse.

"These megaprojects threaten to damage the ecology and world-class vistas that make this a tourist destination and a great place to live," said Ned Sullivan, Scenic Hudson's president.

"It's critical that citizens come together and share their vision of what the waterfront should be like rather than have elected officials turn it over to developers whose sole motive is to make a profit," he said.

Early in the 19th century, the banks of the Hudson were ideal for building homes, until the addition of railroad lines kept builders away.

Washington Irving, author of "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow" and "Rip Van Winkle," built his home, Sunnyside, now a historic landmark, just feet from the river in Tarrytown. Irving, a former envoy to [Spain](#) with political connections, tried to prevent the railroad from slicing across his placid retreat, as did his neighbors, but to no avail.

"If the garden of Eden were now on earth, they would not hesitate to run a railroad through it," Irving lamented, according to a biography by his nephew, Pierre M. Irving, published several years after Irving's death in 1859.

Down by the River

Over the decades and into the 20th century, inexpensive worker housing was situated near the factories that were rising along the river. With some exceptions, more generously proportioned houses for the new commuter class rose on winding streets that snaked up hillsides, many with distant river views. The pattern is still evident in many communities.

But most of the factories are gone, leaving large tracts of land available for development. As for the railroad tracks, triple-glazed windows in houses and quieter, electrified rail cars have made the rumbling Metro-North Hudson Line, Amtrak and freight trains less of a problem.

"I'm pleased the shift is occurring," said Roger Akeley, commissioner of planning and development for [Dutchess County](#), noting that cities like Beacon and Poughkeepsie are being rediscovered. "The urban renewal of the 1970's got rid of a lot of the old industrial fabric, but it has taken this long to understand the potential of it."

Yonkers officials have for years discussed ways to reclaim the miles of waterfront in southern [Westchester](#), with its picturesque views of the Palisades that line the riverside in [New Jersey](#).

Finally, after many false starts, Hudson Park - a new 266-unit rental building near the city's historic pier - is now occupied, set back a step to accommodate a striking riverfront park that includes a sculpture garden and walkway.

To the south are the smokestacks of a Domino sugar plant, one of the last riverfront factories in Westchester. Just to the north, if a proposal gains approval, there will be a second phase of Hudson Park with 298 units in two buildings.

An earlier plan called for apartment towers along the river, with no public access, but Scenic Hudson sued. The developer later settled with the group, and Scenic Hudson became a partner in guiding the current midrise development.

"The Yonkers waterfront is very positive," Mr. Sullivan said. "Back in the mid-1980's they were proposing six 38-story high-rises that would have completely blocked the waterfront." But the group is now concerned about a newly proposed 30-story building by the river.

Even small proposals have encountered resistance. A luxury town house development with 24 units languished for more than a dozen years on the agendas of various boards in the village of Dobbs Ferry, north of Yonkers. Village officials hashed out engineering issues and tried to preserve views for existing neighbors, said the mayor, Brian D. Monahan.

Completed a few years ago by Ginsburg Development Companies, the complex, Livingston Ridge, is situated on a steep slope above the village's expansive riverside park, with sweeping views of the river, a pool and lush plantings. One apartment sold recently for nearly \$2 million.

"They're very expensive, and during the construction process the actual cost of them kept going up and up and up," Mayor Monahan said. "But it has generated significant tax revenue for the village." He added, "I don't believe any school-age children came out of it."

Despite its modest size and handsome facade, feelings remain mixed about the complex - a sign of the sense of ownership many communities have for the river. "A

lot of us are concerned that it towers over the Hudson when you look up from our park," Mayor Monahan said.

Developers say the new projects appeal mainly to empty-nesters, making them attractive to municipalities since couples whose children are grown and gone will not burden the school district. But critics argue that markets are hard to predict, and that demographics and housing trends may change.

In Ossining, Westchester's two biggest developers, Louis R. Cappelli and Martin Ginsburg, signed an agreement with the village last month to build 150 upscale condominiums on only 4.5 acres, as well as 10,000 square feet of retail space - the latest of several proposals that have set off battles over public access and open space.

The village won assurances that 60 percent of the property would be accessible to the public. "There's a lot of debate over whether the site can take 150 units, but it will give us access to a portion of the river that we have not been able to access," said Gene Napolitano, Ossining's mayor.

In Kingston, the issues of access and density have been complicated by the size of the site - more than 500 acres on a mile of riverfront. The developer, AVR Realty, and Mayor Sottile say that half the property would be preserved as open space.

"It's an abandoned quarry right now - a moonscape - with no public access to the Hudson," said Tom F. Perna, vice president of AVR Realty. "We're proposing a project with 250 acres of open space, a mile-long promenade, trail systems and parks."

But Scenic Hudson says some of the space will be unusable because it bears the scars of mining activity.

Opponents of the project also say it is not in keeping with the city's quirky historic neighborhoods.

Lowell Thing, a past president of Friends of Historic Kingston and founder of an Internet-based encyclopedia, would like to see the rehabilitation of still more deteriorating and vacant buildings rather than the construction of hundreds of cookie-cutter housing units.

Recently, Mr. Thing turned to the book sitting on his coffee table, "The Death and Life

of Great American Cities," by Jane Jacobs, for insight into the project.

"Gradualism is a good thing in cities and towns because they are complex environments," he said. "When you try to do things in one fell swoop, the results are unpredictable and often disastrous."

Librado Romero/The New York Times

The Harbors at Haverstraw residential complex is being built in Rockland County. About 15,000 units of housing are under review or being constructed along the Hudson River.