

Connecticut Home: Retreats Under Your Own Roof
Shopping Day Trips • Gifts of Learning

CPTV
PROGRAM
GUIDE INSIDE

CONNECTICUT

connecticutmag.com

MAGAZINE

RATING THE TOWNS

See How Your Town Stacks Up
Schools, Crime, Cost of Living, Culture, Jobs



NOVEMBER 2009 \$3.95



0 74470 65778 1

RATING THE TOWNS

By Andrew Brady
and Patricia Grandjean
Illustration by Daniel Pelavin

Even as your eye moves across a state as small as Connecticut, with all its 169 towns, there are many, many differences, both obvious and subtle, to be seen. We all know about the obvious differences—one town is on the water, another nestles in the hills, etc. But seeing the subtle differences can be trickier. For instance, there are cities and towns where the schools are especially good, or where crime is virtually nonexistent, where the cost of living is reasonable and jobs are relatively plentiful.

But where are these places, and how do they compare with one another? That's what we wanted to find out as we returned for the first time since 2006 to update our exclusive ranking of Connecticut's towns.

First, we sorted the cities and towns into four population groups: 50,000 and above, 25,000 to 50,000, 15,000 to 25,000 and 10,000 to 15,000 (the towns with populations below 10,000 will have their own ranking next March). Then we collected all the data we could find in the areas that are most important to most people: public schools, crime, cost of living, local economy and leisure and cultural outlets. Finally, we crunched all the numbers, and present on the pages that follow the rankings for towns in each group.

Whether you're thinking of relocating to Connecticut, moving to a new town or just curious to see how your town rates among its neighbors, these rankings can be a useful starting point. Many people do use them in making their decisions. As always, we understand that there are many reasons for loving a place—or not loving it—that can go far beyond the results you see here.

THE NUMBERS WE USED

EDUCATION: This category combines five elements: the 2007, 2008 and 2009 Mastery Test results for 4th, 6th and 7th grades; results of the 2007, 2008 and 2009 Connecticut Academic Performance Test (CAPT); local SAT scores

for 2006, 2007 and 2008 and the percentage of 2007 public high school graduates who went on to two- or four-year colleges. Test scores are weighted more heavily.

ECONOMY: The strength of the local economy was determined by the 2009 Public Investment Community score, compiled by the Office of Policy

and Management, which rates all Connecticut towns under a formula based on population, per capita income, the adjusted equalized grand list per capita, the unemployment rate, the equalized mill rate and per capita aid to children.

COST OF LIVING: This category weighs most heavily the median price of a single-family house purchased in

2008 and the first half of 2009, a figure that predicts many other local expenses; it also includes the local property tax burden based on the 2007 equalized mill rate.

CRIME: This category is based on major crimes (murder, rape, robbery, aggravated assault, burglary, motor-vehicle theft) committed in 2004, 2005 and 2006 per 1,000 population.

LEISURE/CULTURE:

Includes local library expenditures per capita, the number of theaters, museums, festivals, concert venues, historic sites, colleges and universities, golf courses, local newspapers, radio stations, state parks and forests, voter turnout in the 2008 election and good local restaurants.



RATING THE TOWNS

10,000 - 15,000

Where is the good life in Connecticut? It's just about everywhere if you go by the results seen in this population group, where towns from six different counties (Old Saybrook/Middlesex, Weston/Fairfield, Granby/Hartford, Tolland/Tolland, Orange/New Haven, Ledyard/New London) finished in the top eight spots.

Old Saybrook holds on to its No. 1 position by virtue of its good schools, low crime rate, sturdy local economy and leisure activi-

ties that are unusually numerous for a town of its size (to which they've just added a new performing arts center).

Second-place finisher Weston would be very hard to beat were it not for that median house price of \$830,000—even though that figure represents a drop of \$135,000 from the last time we conducted this survey.

Speaking of which, it is almost shocking to see how far house prices have fallen since 2006 in some of these towns. Old Saybrook's

median dropped from \$390,000 to \$289,000, New Fairfield went from \$396,000 to \$307,000 and Ledyard sank to \$225,000 from \$266,000, to name a few examples.

Elsewhere, Colchester improved in every category, but especially Crime, to move up from No. 18 to No. 12; conversely, Ellington had worse numbers across the board as it dropped from No. 5 last time to No. 14; neighboring Tolland, meanwhile, made a nice move from No. 8 up to No. 4.

HOW TO READ THE CHART The chart below shows the 23 Connecticut towns with populations between 10,000 and 15,000. The best possible rating in any category is 1 and the worst is 23. Remember: Low scores are good.

TOWN	EDUCATION	CRIME	ECONOMY	COST	LEISURE	TOTAL
1. OLD SAYBROOK	6	5	2	19	1	33
2. WESTON	1	1	1	23	8	34
3. GRANBY	2	6	6	18	6	38
4. TOLLAND	9	4	10	14	10	47
5. NEW FAIRFIELD	5	2	3	21	17	48
6. ORANGE	3	18	4	22	3	50
7. SUFFIELD	4	17	5	13	13	52
8. LEDYARD	13.5	7	16	10	7	53.5
9. SOMERS	8	9	9	20	9	55
10. CLINTON	13.5	16	7	17	2	55.5
11. CROMWELL	12	19	12	9	5	57
12. COLCHESTER	15	10	13	11	11	60
13. NORTH BRANFORD	16	8	11	15	12	62
*14. EAST HAMPTON	10	3	18	12	20	63
*14. ELLINGTON	7	11	15	16	14	63
16. STAFFORD	11	12	19	5	19	66
*17. COVENTRY	17	13	14	8	16	68
*17. WINDSOR LOCKS	21	21	8	3	15	68
19. DERBY	23	23	22	6	4	78
20. PLAINFIELD	22	14	20	1	23	80
21. GRISWOLD	20	15	17	7	22	81
*22. PLYMOUTH	19	20	23	4	18	84
*22. WINCHESTER	18	22	21	2	21	84

*TIE

The

HOW

The chart shows the population of each town. The best possible rating in any category is 1 and the worst is 23. Remember: Low scores are good.

KEY

The right report shows a small number of all the data collected for each town rating.

Crime: average of major crimes in 2004, 2005, 2006 per 1,000 population.

SAT: average verbal, math, writing scores in 2008 (per 1,000 population is 2400).

The number of house prices based on 2009 sales.

The 2007-2008 index of the burden of the tax rate.

SOURCE: Economic Policy and Group's the Office of the Department of Annual Report, 2007 and the State of Connecticut's Vacation of Culture.



Stone walls are a Weston signature.



The sea beckons often in Old Saybrook.

1	Old Saybrook
	population 10,367
	crime rate 2.67
	SAT score 1534
	median house . . . \$289,900
	equalized mill rate . . . 8.58
	library per capita . . \$60.50
	PIC points 146
voter turnout 83.60%	

2	Weston
	population 10,037
	crime rate 1.46
	SAT score 1787
	median house . . . \$830,000
	equalized mill rate . . 13.30
	library per capita . . \$36.51
	PIC points 165
voter turnout 90.84%	

3	Granby
	population 10,347
	crime rate 3.12
	SAT score 1617
	median house . . . \$315,000
	equalized mill rate . . 18.46
	library per capita . . \$39.81
	PIC points 93
voter turnout 87.84%	

4	Tolland
	population 13,146
	crime rate 2.61
	SAT score 1638
	median house . . . \$275,000
	equalized mill rate . . 17.65
	library per capita . . \$26.07
	PIC points 67
voter turnout 84.89%	

5	New Fairfield
	population 13,953
	crime rate 1.67
	SAT score 1570
	median house . . . \$307,000
	equalized mill rate . . 12.08
	library per capita . . \$31.78
	PIC points 137
voter turnout 73.75%	

6	Orange
	population 13,233
	crime rate 5.59
	SAT score 1575
	median house . . . \$355,000
	equalized mill rate . . 14.54
	library per capita . . \$41.78
	PIC points 136
voter turnout 81.94%	

7	Suffield
	population 13,552
	crime rate 5.49
	SAT score 1585
	median house . . . \$218,000
	equalized mill rate . . 14.15
	library per capita . . \$27.01
	PIC points 104
voter turnout 86.99%	

8	Ledyard
	population 14,687
	crime rate 3.36
	SAT score 1542
	median house . . . \$225,000
	equalized mill rate . . 17.44
	library per capita . . \$37.31
	PIC points 46
voter turnout 83.72%	

9	Somers
	population 10,417
	crime rate 3.87
	SAT score 1551
	median house . . . \$313,000
	equalized mill rate . . 12.65
	library per capita . . \$35.34
	PIC points 58
voter turnout 74.39%	

10	Clinton
	population 13,094
	crime rate 5.47
	SAT score 1572
	median house . . . \$292,000
	equalized mill rate . . 13.59
	library per capita . . \$46.12
	PIC points 91
voter turnout 77.78%	

HOW TO READ THE CHART

The chart on the opposite page shows the 23 Connecticut towns with populations between 10,000 and 15,000. The best possible rating in any category is 1 and the worst is 23. Remember: Low scores are good.

KEY TO THE NUMBERS

The numbers at right represent only a small portion of all the data collected to determine town rankings.

Crime rate is the average number of major crimes in 2004, 2005 and 2006 per 1,000 population.

SAT score is the average combined verbal, math and writing scores in 2008 (perfect score is 2400).

The median house price is based on first-half 2009 sales.

The 2007 equalized mill rate determines the local tax burden by dividing the tax rate by the

grand list. Library expenditures per capita are for 2007-08.

PIC points take into account per-capita income, equalized mill rate, adjusted equalized grand list per capita and aid to children. It is an indicator of wealth and need—the number shows where the town ranks among all 169 cities and towns in the state; the greater the number, the less need in the community.

Voter turnout reflects those voting in the November 2008 presidential election.

SOURCES: Education: Department of Education. Economy: Department of Labor; Department of Economic and Community Development; Office of Policy and Management. Cost of Living: The Warren Group's "Statistics Annual" for 2008 and 2009; the Office of Policy and Management. Crime: The Department of Public Safety's "Crime in Connecticut Annual Report" for 2004, 2005 and 2006. Leisure: Commission on the Arts; Connecticut State Library's 2007 and 2008 "Public Library Statistical Report;" the State Register and Manual 2009; "Connecticut Vacation Guide," 2009 published by the Department of Culture and Tourism; Connecticut Magazine.

to \$289,000, \$396,000 to \$225,000 from

ered in every to move up edly, Ellington board as it ce to No. 14; hile, made a o. 4.

ed 15,000.

TOTAL

33

34

38

47

48

50

52

53.5

55

55.5

57

60

62

63

63

66

68

68

78

80

81

84

84

*TIE