

ARCHITECTURE



DUO
DICKINSON

Are cities over? Not so fast

The 'burbs have new appeal to city dwellers as long as fear drives decision making

When things change, we change the way we live.

Questioning where we live, even in an era of telecommuting and Zoom education and mass transit avoidance, is a complicated and high-risk endeavor. Houses are unique. For most people where we live consumes the greatest amount of money we make, whether we rent or own.

If we own, we fret over our debt, the interest rates we pay, but mostly over what our home is worth. And rent checks hurt; they are more cost than investment.

Money, in the worth of our homes, has led every major housing boom and bust in the last few generations. Historically, we move to places of opportunity — like relocating to the West Coast to be part of the tech boom or moving to reflect our values, like embracing a walkable city like New Haven.

Now, for the first time in 100 years, huge forces of pandemic are affecting how we look at our homes. The conventional wisdom is that the prospect of another shutdown of the entire city of New York terrifies those who live there now. But a Reuters article in June noted, "New
See Cities on D3

P

NH

By Joe A

N o s
ye
20
ent world
mer versi
inventive
busy six c
Aug. 18 th

NHdoc
Documen
assemble
chard and
zyk, surv
year with
shown. Ju
shown in



Arnold G

Gorman
of NH D



Mark Lennihan / Associated Press

Joyce Lilly moves a filing cabinet as her dog Max follows, in Bronx, N.Y., this summer. She and her husband left the city for a home an hour's drive north.

CITY

From page D1

York has proven to be resilient ... defying predictions of a permanent exodus after the World Trade Center attacks in 2001 and Super Storm Sandy in 2012."

This is backed up by Susan Silverman, a broker at Brown Harris Stevens in Manhattan.

"The claim that there is a mass exodus from New York City is mostly hyperbole," says Silverman. "Some people are choosing to spend time at their second homes or temporarily renting elsewhere, but many of us are staying the course. ... Even during the pandemic, we are actively selling apartments at all price points; the demand is still there."

The pandemic has actually created an opportunity for buyers, Silverman suggests.

"In the last 30 years there have been fewer than a half-dozen buying opportunities in the city. For people who don't own, or need to upgrade, now is the time."

But a narrative has been evolving in these last months. According to WFSB and the U.S. Postal Service, between March and June over 10,000 people changed their permanent addresses to Connecticut from New York (versus 1,200 the years before). New students from New York are pursuing studies in some suburban towns. New York license plates are more often seen on suburban streets in Connecticut.

Architects, like me, in the areas outside New York City have seen a flurry of inquiries from New York City in the last few months.

Margaret Muir, a Realtor, is a waterfront specialist in the Madison office of William Pitt Sotheby's. For her, the world of real estate has changed since COVID-19 changed everything.

"I've been selling largely second and third homes here on the shoreline for 30 years. What is happening now is different. ... Buyers who have no connection to this area are discovering it for the first time based on accessibility and lifestyle. Most quietly share that they no longer want to have New York as their base, they are done with that life. We are in a changed world. The woes Connecticut real estate faced pre-pandemic are out of view at the moment."

Compared to the 8 million people living in densely packed New York City, the thousands who are moving out are a tiny shift in numbers, but is this migration a trend or a knee-jerk reaction to the terror of a plague? The national shift to urban living caused a 15 percent rise in New York City's population in the last 30 years, and no one knew that would happen 29 years ago.

Any decision made in fear has a high risk of being a mistake, especially when thinking of our homes. The delicate high-cost/high-reward life of so many who live in New York City created a way of living that demanded high density to make the cost of services affordable for those paying the incredible rents and housing costs.

There is no doubt we are in the middle of a change time. The question is whether our homes, and where we live, will be changed by it.

Duo Dickinson is a Madison-based architect and writer.



ROLEX