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Downsizers fuel Westchester's condominium sales, proposals for new developments

Ernie Garcia

Morton and Lillian Fine pose for a portrait in the living room of their condo apartment at the Riverview Club on Warburton Avenue in Yonkers. They downsized to an apartment after living in a house in the northeast section of the city.

Mark Vergari/The Journal News



Lillian Fine loved her Yonkers English tudor home, but yard work, her husband Morton's knee surgery and many stairs prompted the couple to consider downsizing.

"I had realized for at least five years that we had to seriously think about moving to one level," said Fine, 81, who spent several years looking for suitable apartments before moving into the Riverview Club in Yonkers a year and a half ago. "I started out thinking we needed a two-bedroom and I realized we needed three bedrooms."

Like many empty-nesters seeking to give up single-family homes and stay local, the Fines didn't want to feel cramped in a small apartment and they didn't want to sacrifice cherished possessions like a piano.

It's a desire for upscale, elderly-compatible living spaces that operators say is driving recent sales at the Riverview Club and also behind the pitch for new condominium proposals in Armonk and Yorktown.

The developers behind the Brynwood Golf & Country Club in Armonk are proposing to build an empty-nester development with two- and three-bedroom apartments ranging from 1,500 to 3,000 square feet with guest suites in a club house for visiting children and their families.

The proposal is still in the early stages, and the development team is waiting for election season to end before resubmitting a revised proposal for the former Canyon Club.

"We think it's probably the strongest area of the housing market today and we think there's increasing demand. The numbers are compelling," said Jeffrey B. Mendell, a partner in the Brynwood's development team.

The proposed age-restricted Croton Overlook condominiums in Yorktown will also offer residences up to around 3,000 square-foot with master bedrooms on the units' main floor.

"We are really trying to appeal to people who are in our area who are at the first stage of empty-nesters," said developer Kim Calandriello, who is targeting active adults that can still climb some stairs.

In Westchester County, the 2010 Census counted 169,716 people 62 and over, a 12 percent increase from the 150,974 people 62 and older in 2000.

In the same period, Westchester's total population grew 3 percent from 923,459 to 949,113.

At the Riverview Club, a 262-unit condominium conversion project at 1155 Warburton Ave. in northwest Yonkers, about 35 percent of sales have been to empty-nesters like the Fines, who solved their space needs by converting two apartments.

"Most of our downsizers have come from Westchester County and they are people who have roots and families in the Westchester market," said Randi Kahn, managing member of River Hill Residential LLC, the company that has converted close to 60 percent of the building's units into condominiums. "We had a lot of flexibility in our floor plans to create custom apartments that were very appealing to downsizers."

The phenomenon of downsizers desiring larger apartments is not limited to higher incomes, either. The Municipal Housing Authority for the City of Yonkers has received complaints in the past from older adults about the size of the authority's rent-subsidized studio apartments in senior buildings.

"Even single persons want the one bedrooms and when empty-nesters are forced to smaller units, they do protest and want the biggest possible, because of their accumulation of stuff," the authority's executive director Joseph Shuldiner wrote in an email.