

Keeping Rockland's Rivertowns and Westchester County in the same district.

Submitted by Tomara Aldrich, Village of Nyack, Town of Orangetown

The biggest thing Westchester and Rockland have in common is the spectacular Hudson River that physically divides us but also connects us. The counties have a shared interest in the preservation of this shared waterway. On both sides of our river, we fish, kayak, wade, walk, cycle, and run its shores, and enjoy the sunset and sunrise over it. We even watch each other's fireworks from our riverside parks and hills on the fourth of July.

We have a mutual sense of responsibility for the river which has even created shared environmental organizations that care for the Hudson like the Lower Hudson Valley branch of the Sierra Club. Our rivertowns lie on the same floodplain, creating a common need for climate mitigation flood planning and improving infrastructure. The efforts needed to prepare for the continued increase in occurrence and strength of storms, like Ida, often require a coordinated effort between local stakeholders.

Above the water, on the shores of my own village, there is a physical connection, the Tappan Zee Bridge. The massive artery, Interstate 87/287, connects us. It is how Rocklanders get to Trader Joes and how Westchester folks get to the Pallasades mall. It is also how we commute, by car or the Hudson Link, to jobs, restaurants, doctors, other services and friends on the other side of the river. Many of Rockland's towns, like Westchester's, are commuter cities. Folks from Rockland and Westchester ride together on the Hudson Valley line every day, arriving either via the bridge to Tarrytown or on the ferry between Haverstraw and Ossining. The new Shared Use Path has become yet another connection. Nyack and Tarrytown share sister "Landings," that bring pedestrians and cyclists between the two counties.

Westchester also shares similar demographics in terms of race, ethnicity, and religious beliefs to that of Rockland's rivertowns. My wife and I, as a biracial queer couple, chose Nyack because it, and other rivertowns, are far more diverse and queer-friendly, than those in the western part of Rockland county. The racial makeup of the Village of Nyack, as of the 2010 census, was 63.81% White, 26.33% African American, 2.42% Asian, 8.56% LatinX, 2.66% from other races, and 4.56% from two or more races. These demographic numbers align with those of Westchester.

Rockland's rivertowns also include a large percentage of non-Orthodox Jews, comparable to Westchester, while the Jewish population in west Rockland is predominantly Orthodox. Two-thirds of the non-Orthodox community live in the rivertowns compared to the nearly 90% that live in west Rockland.

Finally, when you look at the southern river villages specifically, you will see that the elected representatives are 100% democrats. All the mayors and Village Board members from Upper Nyack, Nyack, South Nyack, Grandview and Piermont are Democrats. This is in stark contrast to town governments overall, that stretch beyond the river, which are nearly 100% Republican. The rivertowns and Westchester certainly align politically.

The sweet, artsy, quiet river villages on the west side of the river have sister villages on the east side of the river. Their little main streets, art, music, riverside parks, marshlands, piers, docks, historical homes and more create a culture that is unique. This is a culture that draws young families, looking for the diversity and shared political beliefs they experienced in the city, up from Brooklyn, Manhattan and Queens looking for the perfect commuter town to raise their kids. Nyack is to Tarrytown what Piermont is to Hastings-on-Hudson and so on.

Thank you for reading my comments. I hope you will take into consideration my thoughts on why Rockland's rivertowns should remain in the same district as Westchester.