RATING THE
T H E   S M A L L
TOWNS

By Andrew Brady & Patricia Grandjean

What do people find so appealing about small-town life in Connecticut? It's not easy to say because there are so many variables involved, not only in the towns, but in the people who live there. Some like a place within commuting distance of a city, others prefer the deeper country of woodpiles and dirt roads. Some seek the easy neighborliness that can be hard to find in a city or suburb, others just want to be away from people, period. Many enjoy things that are hard to quantify, like community spirit or the nearness of family and friends.
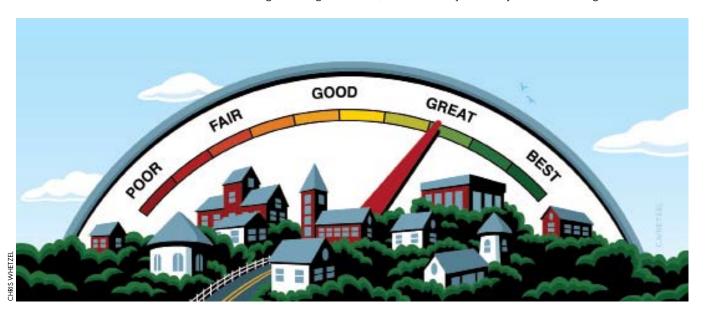
But quantify we must. This ranking of Connecticut's smallest towns, our first since 2007, compares the quality of public schools, the state of the local economy, the cost of living, the crime rate and local leisure and cultural resources. Although "Rating the Small Towns" is not meant to be the last word on a town, it can be a good place to begin your thought process if you're thinking about moving or merely seeking comparisons with like-sized places around the state.

To help make things easier, we've sorted the towns into three population groups, then collected all the data we could find in the areas that seem to be most important to most people. Finally, we crunched the numbers, and present on the pages that follow the rankings for towns in each population group.

Of course, we understand that there are lots of reasons for loving a place—or not loving it—that go beyond test scores at the local public school or how much money gets spent on the library. For that, we leave it to you to do your own due diligence.

CHRIS WHETZEL

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 2007, 2008 and 2009 and the percentage of 2007 public high school graduates who went on to two- and 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 includes the median price of a house purchased from January 2008 through June 2009, a figure that predicts many other local expenses.

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

LEISURE/CULTURE: This category includes local library expenditures per capita in 2008 (an important factor in small towns), 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.

TOWNS
6,500-10,000

EASTON'S RURAL CHARM.

LAURAA LAUNDER

Easton is part of the Fairfield County you don't hear too much about—and that's probably just the way they like it. It's a bit off the beaten path, so crime is not a problem. Its public schools (it shares a high school, Joel Barlow, with No. 4 Redding) are very good, with test scores among the best in Connecticut. Joblessness is well below the state average. And support for the library, at over $80 per capita, is second-best in this population group. Of course, if you want to live in Easton, keep in mind that it takes over $500,000 to buy a typical house.

Less rural but finishing near the head of the list, Essex, Litchfield and Old Lyme are more like self-contained towns, offering residents and visitors a fair number of admirable diversions—including shopping, dining out and sightseeing—as well as solid public schools and relatively strong local economies. In addition, house prices, while not cheap, tend to be quite a bit lower than they are in Fairfield County.

Three towns in central Connecticut—Haddam, Durham and Hebron—also fared well in the rankings, as they did three years ago. Each offers better-than-average education and crime numbers along with reasonable housing costs. For a very low crime rate, inexpensive housing and genuine old Yankee charm, you might think about Lebanon, the No. 7 finisher. You may be a fair distance from the nearest piece of sushi, but the stars are bright and there's a two-mile-long green to walk.

TOWN	EDUCATION	CRIME	ECONOMY	COST	LEISURE	TOTAL
1. EASTON	1	1	3	22	10	37
2. ESSEX	8	9	4	19.5	1	41.5
3. OLD LYME	4	15	2	19.5	2	42.5
4. REDDING	2	13	1	23	5	44
5. LITCHFIELD	7	17	5	14	3	46
6. HEBRON	6	4	13	11.5	15	49.5
7. LEBANON	16	2	12	8.5	16	54.5
8. HADDAM	11	8	16	7	13	55
9. DURHAM	10	12	15	11.5	7	55.5
10. WOODBRIDGE	3	19	7	21	6	56
11. WOODSTOCK	14	3	11	5	23	56
12. WOODBURY	12	10	14	16	4	56
13. EAST HADDAM	15	5	9	6	22	57
14. CANTON	5	21	8	15	8	57
15. BURLINGTON	9	6	6	18	18	57
16. THOMPSON	22.5	7	17	2	14	62.5
17. PORTLAND	13	18	19	10	9	69
18. THOMASTON	17	20	21	4	11	73
19. PROSPECT	18	16	18	8.5	17	77.5
20. PUTNAM	22.5	22	20	1	12	77.5
21. OXFORD	19	11	10	17	21	78
22. BROOKLYN	20	14	23	3	20	80
23. EAST WINDSOR	21	23	22	13	19	98

Ties broken by voter turnout in 2008 election.

MARK CAPPIELLA

AN ESSEX OVERVIEW.

JEFF GOLDBERG/ESTO

FLORENCE GRISWOLD MUSEUM GARDENS, OLD LYME.

KEY TO THE NUMBERS

The numbers at right represent only a portion of all the data collected to determine the 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 2009.

The median house price is based on 2008-09 sales of houses.

The equalized mill rate determines the local tax burden by dividing the tax rate by the grand list.

Library expenditures per capita are for 2008.

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 national election.

HOW TO READ THE CHART

The chart on the opposite page represents the 23 Connecticut towns with populations between 6,500 and 10,000. The best possible rating in any category is 1 and the worst is 23. Remember: Low scores are best.

1 Easton
population	7,272
crime rate	4.86
SAT score	1725
median house	$524,000
equalized mill rate	13.45
library per capita	$80.23
PIC points	154
voter turnout	83.71%

2 Essex
population	6,505
crime rate	7.89
SAT score	1649
median house	$380,000
equalized mill rate	9.24
library per capita	$56.21
PIC points	151
voter turnout	88.24%

3 Old Lyme
population	7,406
crime rate	9.95
SAT score	1698
median house	$380,000
equalized mill rate	10.59
library per capita	$75.47
PIC points	149
voter turnout	79.64%

4 Redding
population	8,270
crime rate	9.19
SAT score	1725
median house	$558,000
equalized mill rate	11.63
library per capita	$68.54
PIC points	156
voter turnout	82.68%

5 Litchfield
population	8,316
crime rate	10.10
SAT score	1633
median house	$281,000
equalized mill rate	12.16
library per capita	$56.52
PIC points	125
voter turnout	79.85%

6 Hebron
population	8,610
crime rate	6.04
SAT score	1637
median house	$269,000
equalized mill rate	17.58
library per capita	$40.72
PIC points	77
voter turnout	82.96%

7 Lebanon
population	6,907
crime rate	5.60
SAT score	1522
median house	$238,000
equalized mill rate	13.04
library per capita	$35.52
PIC points	78
voter turnout	81.68%

8 Haddam
population	7,157
crime rate	7.73
SAT score	1555
median house	$231,000
equalized mill rate	18.15
library per capita	$43.39
PIC points	70
voter turnout	81.93%

9 Durham
population	6,627
crime rate	9.15
SAT score	1594
median house	$269,000
equalized mill rate	18.19
library per capita	$62.93
PIC points	74
voter turnout	82.18%

10 Woodbridge
population	8,983
crime rate	12.95
SAT score	1675
median house	$406,000
equalized mill rate	17.73
library per capita	$81.51
PIC points	119
voter turnout	84.99%

TOWNS
RATING THE TOWNS
3,500-6,500

Chester and Deep River are neighbors, located along the western bank of the lower Connecticut River, just as it begins to widen for its union with Long Island Sound. Both towns offer many riverine charms, as well as good schools and low crime rates. In the three years since these rankings were last done, Deep River has improved in all categories and moved from No. 16 on the list all the way up to No. 3. Indeed, when you notice that Essex

and Old Lyme finished No. 2 and No. 3 in the 6,500-plus population group and that Lyme heads the below-3,500 group, you begin to appreciate the high quality of life in that part of Connecticut.

As for No. 2 New Hartford, it finished first in this group in Mastery Test scores and second in APT results. In addition, the town generously supports its handsome library and a whopping 94.78 percent of eligible voters turned out for the 2008 presidential election.

Elsewhere, those looking for good schools and relatively inexpensive housing (a very nice combination for young families) need look no further than Harwinton and Willington. And those for whom schools are no longer an issue, or never were, will find a lot to like in Salisbury and Washington, each of which possesses a disproportionate number of restaurants, shops and other diversions (though a high cost of admission).

Joining Deep River in zooming toward the top this time are Columbia, which improved in all categories on the way from No. 19 to No. 10, and Westbrook, which saw a huge drop in the crime rate as it moved from No. 20 to No. 14.

TOWN	EDUCATION	CRIME	ECONOMY	COST	LEISURE	TOTAL
1. CHESTER	8	3	5	19	11	46
2. NEW HARTFORD	3	14.5	14	7	9	47.5
3. DEEP RIVER	10	6	13	9	13	51
4. SHERMAN	15	1	3	23	10	52
5. WASHINGTON	18	7	2	25	1	53
6. MIDDLEBURY	1	24	7	18	4	54
7. WILLINGTON	11	8	12	5	18	54
8. EAST GRANBY	9	14.5	11	12	8	54.5
9. KILLINGWORTH	14	2	6	21	12	55
10. COLUMBIA	24	9	10	8	5	56
11. HARWINTON	7	19	8	6	17	57
12. ASHFORD	13	5	22	2	15	57
13. SALISBURY	19	12	1	24	2	58
14. WESTBROOK	17	10	4	22	7	60
15. BETHANY	2	11	9	20	23	65
16. MARLBOROUGH	4	20	19	17	6	66
17. POMFRET	16	4	17	10	20	67
18. MIDDLEFIELD	12	21	18	15	3	69
19. BOLTON	5	17	24	14	14	74
20. PRESTON	21	23	15	3.5	16	78.5
21. SALEM	6	16	20	16	24	82
22. CANTERBURY	22	13	23	3.5	21	82.5
23. NORTH STONINGTON	20	18	21	11	19	89
24. LISBON	23	25	16	1	25	90
25. BEACON FALLS	25	22	25	13	22	107

Ties broken by voter turnout in 2008 election.

MARK G. CAPPITELLA
GOODSPEED OPERA HOUSE.

JEFF PRANGER
A SHERMAN FARM.

KEY TO THE NUMBERS

The numbers at right represent only a portion of all the data collected to determine the 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 2009.

The median house price is based on 2008-09 sales of houses.

The equalized mill rate determines the local tax burden by dividing the tax rate by the grand list.

Library expenditures per capita are for 2008.

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 national election.

HOW TO READ THE CHART

The chart on the opposite page represents the 25 Connecticut towns with populations between 3,500 and 6,500. The best possible rating in any category is 1 and the worst is 25. Remember: Low scores are best.

1 Chester
- population 3,743
- crime rate 5.61
- SAT score 1649
- median house . . $309,000
- equalized mill rate . . 12.13
- library per capita . $28.02
- PIC points 132
- voter turnout 85.29%

2 New Hartford
- population 6,088
- crime rate 8.71
- SAT score 1591
- median house . . $227,000
- equalized mill rate . . 14.76
- library per capita . $46.31
- PIC points 99
- voter turnout 94.78%

3 Deep River
- population 4,610
- crime rate 6.94
- SAT score 1649
- median house . . $246,000
- equalized mill rate . . 14.47
- library per capita . . $28.29
- PIC points 100
- voter turnout 82.84%

4 Sherman
- population 3,827
- crime rate 2.35
- SAT score 1572
- median house . . $413,000
- equalized mill rate . . . 8.63
- library per capita . . $48.82
- PIC points 145
- voter turnout 81.29%

5 Washington
- population 3,596
- crime rate 7.60
- SAT score 1568
- median house . . $502,000
- equalized mill rate . . . 6.26
- library per capita . $143.24
- PIC points 159
- voter turnout 93.61%

6 Middlebury
- population 6,451
- crime rate 14.36
- SAT score 1597
- median house . . $308,000
- equalized mill rate . . 14.36
- library per capita . . $56.95
- PIC points 114
- voter turnout 88.23%

7 Willington
- population 5,959
- crime rate 7.78
- SAT score 1698
- median house . . $212,000
- equalized mill rate . . 14.00
- library per capita . $23.98
- PIC points 101
- voter turnout 83.02%

8 East Granby
- population 4,745
- crime rate 8.71
- SAT score 1600
- median house . . $260,000
- equalized mill rate . . 15.59
- library per capita . . $48.56
- PIC points 102
- voter turnout 86.18%

9 Killingworth
- population 6,018
- crime rate 4.21
- SAT score 1555
- median house . . $358,000
- equalized mill rate . . 13.99
- library per capita . . $45.45
- PIC points 129
- voter turnout 84.50%

10 Columbia
- population 4,971
- crime rate 8.18
- SAT score 1463
- median house . . $230,000
- equalized mill rate . . 13.71
- library per capita . . $55.92
- PIC points 107
- voter turnout 88.40%

TOWNS

RATING THE TOWNS

BELOW 3,500

With just over 2,000 residents at large across its 34.5 square miles, Lyme is one of Connecticut's most sparsely populated towns. It's one of its most beautiful, too, with plenty of frontage on the Connecticut River, salt marshes galore, and the utterly charming Hamburg Cove right in its midst. It seems almost too good to be true that Lyme also has excellent schools, a very low crime rate and a solid local economy.

We move up to Litchfield County for the next four top finishers. Norfolk is the only town in this population group with above-average scores across the board. Bethlehem also offers some well-rounded numbers as well as a pretty good annual agricultural fair.

Way across the state in Windham County, No. 6 Eastford presents a lovely prospect to young families looking to move: good schools (or at least good test scores), a low crime rate and relatively low real estate prices.

A brief word about crime statistics and these very small towns: The "safest" town is Hartland, which averages about five crimes a year, but even the town with the highest crime rate, Union, reports only one crime a month. Crime probably shouldn't be a factor when comparing these towns.

It should be pointed out that a good score in the "Leisure" category among these smallest of towns generally indicates an active and well-supported library. Only a handful of towns, such as Cornwall and Kent, offer shopping, galleries and restaurants. For the most part these are towns in which historical societies hold sway and crickets provide the nightlife.

TOWN	EDUCATION	CRIME	ECONOMY	COST	LEISURE	TOTAL
1. LYME	1	8	2	26	4	41
2. NORFOLK	2	13	12	9	5	41
3. BRIDGEWATER	7.5	2	5	25	6	45.5
4. SHARON	19	10	4	18	3	54
5. BETHLEHEM	10	6	13	17	9	55
6. EASTFORD	9	4	18	7	19	57
7. ANDOVER	3	7	20	12	16	58
8. WARREN	12.5	5	7	19	15	58.5
9. ROXBURY	7.5	21	1	27	8	64.5
10. GOSHEN	12.5	11	8	23	10	64.5
11. HARTLAND	18	1	15	8	24	66
12. KENT	16	20	6	24	1	67
13. CANAAN	12.5	18	10	20	7	67.5
14. CORNWALL	17	24	3	22	2	68
15. COLEBROOK	4	15	9	15	26	69
16. UNION	6	27	11	14	12	70
17. SCOTLAND	25	9	19	3	18	74
18. VOLUNTOWN	24	12	23	2	14	75
19. MORRIS	12.5	17	14	21	11	75.5
20. HAMPTON	21	3	24	11	22	81
21. NORTH CANAAN	20	22	22	5	13	82
22. BARKHAMSTED	5	16	21	16	25	83
23. FRANKLIN	15	26	16	13	17	87
24. STERLING	27	14	26	4	21	92
25. CHAPLIN	26	19	25	6	20	96
26. SPRAGUE	23	25	27	1	23	99
27. BOZRAH	22	23	17	10	27	99

Ties broken by voter turnout in 2008 election.

HAMBURG COVE IN LYME.

ROBERT BENSON

NORFOLK'S LOVELY LIBRARY SERVES A MERE 1,660 RESIDENTS.

CHRISTOPHER LITTLE

KEY TO THE NUMBERS

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SAT score is the average combined verbal, math and writing scores in 2009.

The median house price is based on 2008-09 sales of houses.

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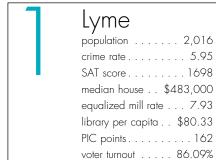
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Voter turnout reflects those voting in the November 2008 national election.

HOW TO READ THE CHART

The chart on the opposite page represents the 27 Connecticut towns with populations below 3,500. The best possible rating in any category is 1 and the worst is 27. Remember: Low scores are best.

1 Lyme

population	2,016
crime rate	5.95
SAT score	1698
median house	$483,000
equalized mill rate	7.93
library per capita	$80.33
PIC points	162
voter turnout	86.09%

2 Norfolk

population	1,660
crime rate	8.63
SAT score	1591
median house	$207,000
equalized mill rate	12.57
library per capita	$232.39
PIC points	126
voter turnout	75.43%

3 Bridgewater

population	1,824
crime rate	4.20
SAT score	1568
median house	$478,000
equalized mill rate	9.71
library per capita	$52.76
PIC points	155
voter turnout	86.63%

4 Sharon

population	2,968
crime rate	6.74
SAT score	1574
median house	$294,000
equalized mill rate	8.06
library per capita	$59.59
PIC points	158
voter turnout	81.66%

5 Bethlehem

population	3,422
crime rate	5.36
SAT score	1569
median house	$276,000
equalized mill rate	12.02
library per capita	$27.84
PIC points	118
voter turnout	81.64%

6 Eastford

population	1,618
crime rate	4.94
SAT score	1564
median house	$204,000
equalized mill rate	14.24
library per capita	$26.31
PIC points	82
voter turnout	85.24%

7 Andover

population	3,036
crime rate	5.93
SAT score	1637
median house	$228,000
equalized mill rate	18.38
library per capita	$30.78
PIC points	71
voter turnout	77.68%

8 Warren

population	1,254
crime rate	5.05
SAT score	1562
median house	$295,000
equalized mill rate	8.52
library per capita	$29.32
PIC points	152
voter turnout	85.89%

9 Roxbury

population	2,136
crime rate	10.77
SAT score	1568
median house	$516,000
equalized mill rate	7.84
library per capita	$62.77
PIC points	164
voter turnout	86.31%

10 Goshen

population	2,697
crime rate	7.79
SAT score	1562
median house	$351,000
equalized mill rate	9.99
library per capita	$42.37
PIC points	143
voter turnout	83.88%