

HARTFORD'S WEST END

By Stephanie Woodlock

In the years before I moved to Hartford's West End, I considered moving to the city on a couple of occasions, but didn't. Still, I always felt its pull even when the reasons not to move here seemed compelling.

When I first moved from Philadelphia to work in Hartford, I was staying in an East Hartford motel. My first thought was I'd like to live in the West End. None of my colleagues lived in the city at that time. Furthermore, none of them advised living in the city. In fact, they all adamantly recommended against it. Did they advise me from personal experience? I think not. Most of them never came to the city and were happy to tell you so. But I was swayed by the strength of their convictions, unfounded or not. And so, I took their advice and moved to Manchester.

In my free time, I drove around a lot trying to become familiar with the Hartford area. I can remember driving up Farmington Avenue and admiring the beautiful 1920's apartment buildings. I discovered Kenyon Street, which to my eye is still one of the prettiest streets in the metro area.

After a year living in Manchester, I moved to an apartment near Hartford's West End in West Hartford. I chose West

Hartford largely on prices. While apartments were more expensive in West Hartford than in Hartford, the high auto insurance rates in the city made living in the suburbs more affordable for renters at that time. High auto insurance rates remain a problem for city residents today.

While I lived in West Hartford, I often shopped in Hartford's West End, attracted by the eclectic mix of shops and restaurants. In the early 90's, the West End had a thriving little commercial district that included independent businesses – like Cheese & Stuff, The Reader's Feast bookstore and restaurant – which were different than the usual suburban chains. Unfortunately since then many of these businesses have moved or closed. In the last couple of years, this trend has begun to reverse itself, though the West End still has no replacement for Cheese and Stuff.

Walking home from my forays to the West End, I would choose various routes that let me admire the houses on many different streets. For those like me who are enamored of the architectural styles of the later 19th and early 20th centuries, there really is not a bad street in the neighborhood.

But, it wasn't until 1998 that I finally moved to the West End. With trepidation,

I decided to buy a small house, south of Farmington Avenue. I was worried about crime, resale and how much it would cost to repair an old house.

Four years after I moved in, I still love my house and the neighborhood. These days, I am less worried about crime (not any worse than in many suburbs) and more worried about the school system. I have learned to live with a house that from time to time offers up new challenges to the non-adept handy person. I find I have stopped listening so hard to the real estate market.

There are many reasons to live in Hartford's West End: proximity to arts and culture, walkable neighborhoods, beautiful architecture, shopping adventures and, of course, the people. There's a sense here in the city that we are all in it together – a sense of community that I found largely missing in the suburbs. And that's one of the main reasons I plan to stay. ★

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