

Why Do People Live in Burrillville?

A special report of Truehome, Inc. [v. 070101]

One of America's greatest offerings is the freedom of choice: the right to choose a job, what newspaper to read, and the right to choose where to live. It is a defining decision that captures the personality of each person or family. Do you crave the sophistication of New York City or long for the laid-back atmosphere of Ohio? Do you want a modern, state-of-the-art house or a centuries-old farm? Do you want easy access to stores and highways or the peace and quiet of winding roads and open fields?

When deciding where to live, people consider everything from housing styles to local school systems, from the variety of shopping to the length of commutes. One of the strongest influences is simply the unique personality of a town – drawing crowds of permanent residents and visitors to bustling cities, lively college towns, quaint seaside villages, and places of historic interest.

There is a town tucked away in the northwest corner of Rhode Island that has enchanted many throughout the centuries with its stateliness and sense of history. To some, the charm of 18th and 19th century farmhouses presiding over acres of hilly farmland and wooded ground may sound like a dream come true. Others have fallen in love with modern houses with all the added amenities; rustic log cabins overlooking a crystal clear lake, boat docks, and fishing coves; and easy to maintain apartments in historic mill villages. These people who have the same gift of freedom of choice have chosen to live in the town of Burrillville, Rhode Island.

The Bucolic Feel of Burrillville

Burrillville, a 57 square mile town of approximately 16,230 residents, was incorporated in 1806. It is located in the northwestern corner of Rhode Island and borders Massachusetts and Connecticut. Burrillville consists of several villages, including Harrisville, Pascoag, Mapleville, Oakland, Tarkiln, Glendale, Nasonville, Bridgeton, and Mohegan, with more rural areas. The town is a municipal corporation operating under the General Laws of Rhode Island, and is governed by a Home Rule Charter with a town council and manager.

Beyond the facts and statistics that define Burrillville is a town brimming with character, warmth, and history. From the tumbling waters of the Harrisville waterfall to the rambling woods of Buck Hill, there is the magic of solitude and history around every bend, painting the picturesque landscape of a town scarcely touched by time.

Burrillville was essentially a mill town. Its rocky, hilly land was unfit for serious farming but its many rivers and lakes were a tremendous source of power, making it a perfect place for mills. By 1855, there were 22 cotton factories in the town that employed the majority of citizens. Working in the mills became a defining part of Burrillville as mill housing, stores, and entertainment facilities sprang to life around them. The villages are home to historic, rambling old mansions once occupied by the mill owners, tree-lined streets of identical houses occupied by workers, and beautiful, quaint town buildings constructed during the thriving life of the mills. Although the mills are not functioning today, their remnants and the villages that sprung up around them still exist, earning two villages, Harrisville and Oakland, a place on the National Register of Historic Places.

Because so much of Burrillville is serene (being close to, but tucked well away from, the main routes of Boston and Providence), there is a feeling of peace and solitude. Burrillville can offer what big towns and cities can not...a return to nature and the simpler things in life, such as the mirrored image of colorful trees in Mill Pond, farmlands of sheep, horses, and cattle, paths that meander through acres of preserved woodlands, and the sandy beaches and fishing coves of Burrillville's lakes.

It is a town where people know one another and exchange greetings when passing. There is a small-town atmosphere, where local residents gather on Friday nights to watch high school hockey games and teenagers have hangouts at the local pizza shop. Everywhere you go there are friendly smiles, helping hands, and a family atmosphere.

“I moved to Burrillville from Warwick ten years ago, and one of the things that really struck me was how friendly the people were. In Burrillville, people I knew and didn’t know would see me in a parking lot and say ‘Hi!’ to me. It was a surprise, but it’s nice,” said a resident of Burrillville.

Another local resident and shop owner who lived in a variety of locations attributes her move to the charm of the town. In her words, she simply fell in love with her old house and the bucolic feel of Burrillville.

Having Fun, Burrillville Style

To help foster this close, small-town atmosphere, there are many town events. Every fall heralds the food, entertainment, and wares of the much-awaited Arts and Crafts festival, where residents of Burrillville and neighboring towns assemble to display their talents and to find treasures to decorate their homes. As one resident says, “It is one of the events in town I look forward to all year.” Another public event is the series of concerts held at the Burrillville Town Commons throughout the summer. Residents pack picnic lunches, bring their children, and settle on the grassy commons in the center of historic Harrisville to listen to musical bands play in the town’s gazebo. One summer, the White Mill Park was transformed into Shakespeare’s Globe Theatre as Providence’s Trinity Repertory Company performed one of the Bard’s greatest comedies, *The Taming of the Shrew*. This evening of laughter and jest was the beginning of an annual event that draws the town together.

The ABC’s of a Burrillville Education

One of the key characteristics that sells many new families on a town is the quality of the education system. In a recent survey of 1,600 voters by the research firm Public Opinion Strategies (May-June 1999), the second most important factor in choosing where to live was the quality of the school system, next only to the safety and security of an area. Burrillville’s three elementary schools, middle school, and high school comprise an excellent school system. They are making steady progress in improving test scores and academic programs and can boast of exemplary statistics in aiding needy students and reducing drop out rates. In terms of student attendance, graduation rates, and SAT scores, Burrillville students performed better than the district and state averages.

In 2000, the high school undertook a \$13.5 million renovation project to add more classroom space, a larger media center, and handicap accessibility, demonstrating the school and the community’s commitment to creating an environment conducive to providing high quality education. Burrillville High School has also instituted many innovative programs, such as the Biotechnology class, which formed an alliance with Brown University Medical School, the University of Massachusetts Medical School, and Landmark Hospital. The class is a model to other schools looking to develop biotechnology courses. The school received the National Science Foundation Grant to develop and implement an IMP mathematics program, the English Department is incorporating a new literature sequence introducing students to more world literature, and the school newspaper annually wins awards from the Providence Journal’s Scholastic Journalism Competition. Burrillville’s three elementary schools are also top-notch. The Austin T. Levy Elementary School was recently honored with a national award for excellence in education.

Burrillville is also concerned with the individual student and has quite an impressive record for two important school policy programs: Head Start and the School Breakfast Program. Recently, 96% of eligible three and four year-olds were enrolled in Head Start and 100% of low-income students attended schools offering the School Breakfast Program, statistics both dramatically better than state averages.

Students at all Burrillville schools have a wide variety of extra-curricular activities available to them, including theater and music, clubs in numerous areas, newspaper and yearbook staffs, athletics, and more. Burrillville High School’s hockey team is well known for the quality of its players, who often begin playing as early as age four in Burrillville’s own rink. The school’s other athletic teams can boast of impressive feats and outstanding records, as evidenced by the many championship banners hanging in their gymnasium. For older students, there are adult education classes offered through the town of Burrillville. Burrillville schools have

definitely made a commitment to providing students with the best opportunities available in all areas, and have prepared students to meet the challenging, constantly evolving world that awaits them.

Modern Convenience in a Rural Setting

Too often new residents of rural, rustic towns find themselves overwhelmed with not only the upkeep of their property, but taking care of all the utilities they took for granted in the city, such as water, sewers, and trash pickup. Burrillville can offer something for those who want the true rural experience and those who want modern conveniences in a rural setting. Many areas of the town have public water, public sewer and public trash collection, but there is also the option of living where these services are not offered.

Burrillville is home to two public libraries, post offices in all the major villages, 12 churches, and a variety of medical services, including the Northwest Health Center. Burrillville also has a variety of conveniences in the centers of the villages, such as a large supermarket, general stores, hair salons, banks, arts and crafts stores, a pharmacy, tanning salons, florists, and more. There are also services for the elderly, such as independent elderly housing developments, nursing homes, and the Department of Public Work's Senior Van that provides transportation for senior citizens.

Satisfy Your Hunger for Adventure and Culture

Although not quite to the scale of Providence or New York City, Burrillville does have a number of recreational and cultural activities within its boundaries. For example, there is the Assembly, a colonial style building with antique charm that is home to the Theater Company of Rhode Island and other local productions.

For those who enjoy in the outdoors, there are campgrounds, lakes, and marked paths that would excite the most avid mountain biker or cross-country skier. The paths are preserved as part of the Black Hut, the Buck Hill, and George Washington Management Areas, three state-owned woodland areas open to the public. Spring Lake, a natural 96-acre freshwater lake, is a favorite for locals and residents of neighboring towns alike in the warm summer months. The town-owned recreational facility at the lake is home to 750 feet of beach, volleyball areas, shaded picnic groves, boat rentals, concession stands, an antique penny arcade, and a recreational hall.

Expert casters or those who just like to tell the story of "the one that got away" can enjoy winter and summer fishing at Burrillville's more than 10 freshwater fishing lakes, ponds, and rivers. The fishing areas are populated with a mix of sunfish, largemouth and small mouth bass, pickerel, perch, salmonids, brown bullhead, and banded killifish.

Those who enjoy cooking their dinner instead of catching it can try their hand at gourmet-dining workshops in a 1730s home at the Aaron Smith Farm, preparing historically inspired meals.

Boys and girls can take part in the Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts, 4H clubs, and athletic organizations. Adults can join organized athletic leagues, the Lion's Club, the Historical and Preservation Society, Knights of Columbus, the Arts Association, political party organizations, veterans' organizations, and others.

After a busy day, you'll have surely worked up an appetite and Burrillville has a number of fine dining establishments to satisfy your palate. There is the Western Hotel, an old stagecoach stop on the Douglas Turnpike, which is now a cozy restaurant and bar. Bella Restaurant is renowned for its fine Italian dishes and hearty portions. Wright's Farm, an award-winning Rhode Island tradition that draws diners from all over New England, serves all-you-can-eat chicken family style dinners in their large, banquet-style halls.

Affordable Housing

In spite of its attractiveness, Burrillville land and housing prices have remained surprisingly affordable compared with other parts of Rhode Island and other more industrialized parts of New England.

Stepping Into the 21st Century

Going beyond the facade of Burrillville's historic charm and character is a town that has kept its foot in history while looking ahead to the 21st century. From local stores to home businesses, more and more people are connecting to the Internet and businesses with an Internet presence are on the rise.

Yet, Burrillville is not a fairyland and as it transitions into the 21st century it has had to confront its share of growing pains. More and more suburbanites and city-dwellers are trading in convenience and accessibility for a taste of country life, causing the population of Burrillville to grow by 7 percent since 1995 according to the 2000 census, while the population of other Rhode Island cities such as Cranston, Providence, and Warwick has decreased. Burrillville's road system was not made to handle this new influx. Although approximately 60 percent of the town is zoned in minimum five-acre lots, many residents still feel that the development of land is surpassing the town's ability to handle it.

Like many other rural towns around the country, Burrillville is struggling to maintain the vitality of its main business district. Pascoag Main Street, once home to a thriving community of shopkeepers, has now been underutilized for years. A local woman who spent all of her 83 years in Burrillville recalls how inviting downtown Pascoag was when she was growing up and when she was raising a family. She and her husband used to go to Pascoag Main Street to buy necessities as much as to socialize with neighbors and friends. She says that now, because of its appearance and atmosphere, people don't visit it like they once did. She, like most other residents, thinks that a renewed Main Street would boost the vitality of the town.

In all actuality, a revived downtown Pascoag may not be that far away. A local committee has developed a plan of action to restore the District. Quite a bit of progress has already been made, according to a member of the committee. It shouldn't be long until Main Street becomes a hub of commercial and social life again.

One of the most inviting parts of Burrillville, its sense of solitude and quiet, can occasionally pose a problem to some residents as life is getting more and more fast-paced and people want quick access to places and things. A resident who lives on Buck Hill loves her house's location for its peace and beauty but admits that she has to drive for 20 minutes to get to a store. The town does offer many activities but if you want to browse in a good bookstore, shop at a mall, take in a movie, or bowl a few strings at an alley, it is a 25-minute drive out of Burrillville.

However, in relation to what Burrillville does have to offer, this has been a small sacrifice for many. In the Public Opinion Strategies survey, 97 percent felt that convenient access to stores was not the most important factor in choosing where to live. The many residents of Burrillville have easily adapted to the town's location.

The Sum of Burrillville

While not perfect, as no place truly is, Burrillville has a lot to offer its residents and those looking to move there. From its historic beauty to its vision of the future, Burrillville has attracted many to its riverbanks, farmlands, and mill villages. As one resident put it, "You don't move to Burrillville because of the promise of its future business and economy. You move here to escape the stress of business and the economy. It's a rural town and that's why people love it."

It's for those who want a place where their home is not off a highway exit, a place where crickets serenade you to sleep, a place where the drive home means views of century old farmlands and stoic remnants of mills long past, a place...very much like Burrillville.