

Tribune's Newsday (6+ months) (United States), Section: Local

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Llars like living here, but not what it costs

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Most Long Islanders love that they live near beaches and downtowns, well-maintained parks and top-notch schools and hospitals. But these amenities come at a cost.

In a recent Newsday/Siena survey, three-quarters of respondents highly rated their quality of life on Long Island, but just as many expressed worry about the growing affordability crisis in the region, and nearly half said the quality of life has been getting worse.

"People like Long Island. They think that the overall quality of life is excellent or good. But they are struggling to afford it," said Siena pollster Don Levy.

Between May 27 and June 16, pollsters for Siena College, in conjunction with Newsday, contacted 802 respondents across Nassau and Suffolk. Answers have a margin of error of 4.3 points, which means their percentages could veer that much higher or lower.

While Long Islanders described a higher quality of life than respondents elsewhere in the state, "the sense that things were getting better was markedly lower" across demographics, Levy said. "A noteworthy 42% said things are getting somewhat or much worse on Long Island."

One top concern for Long Islanders was the increasing cost of living, especially when it comes to housing. The overall affordability of life on Long Island has grown worse, 77% of respondents said.

"Only 8% think of Long Island's cost of living as better, more affordable than other places," Levy said. "Clearly the respondents in the survey are telling us that there is a cost associated with living on Long Island, and that cost shows up in the overall cost of living being worse or being higher than in other places they are familiar with."

Increasing living costs, especially for housing, have driven thousands of Long Islanders to flee to other states, including Valerie Pazmino's two children, who moved to Florida.

"So many people, especially that age group between 28 and 40, are leaving because they can't afford anything here," the Bellmore resident said. Some of her children's friends have left for other states, or they're renting apartments with roommates.

The affordability crisis facing the region prompted more than 434,000 people to move away from Long Island between 2017 and 2021, according to a 2024 report from the Long Island Association's Research Institute. The LIA is the region's leading business group.

Tight markets for homebuyers and renters haven't gone unnoticed by Long Islanders. Most survey respondents,

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85%, said there was low availability of affordable housing in the region, and 60% said they're unlikely to be able to afford quality housing.

The concern about housing costs was far more pronounced on Long Island than from respondents to similar polls near Albany and on a national level, Levy said.

In June, the median price for a home hit \$700,000 in Suffolk and \$850,000 in Nassau - records for both counties, Newsday has reported.

It seems everything is "much more expensive" and taxes are high, said Pazmino, 61, who participated in the survey.

Similar feelings are more pronounced for minorities than white people, according to survey results. Compared with 79% of white respondents, 61% of Black Long Islanders and 59% of Hispanic Long Islanders described a positive quality of life in the region.

Positives to life on Long Island include living near parks and beaches and being just a train ride away from Manhattan, Pazmino said, features praised by other respondents as well, including Massapequa resident Jennifer Bova.

As an educator, Bova also believes the schools on Long Island are better than in other parts of the country.

But it's expensive to live here, and it's not getting cheaper, she said. Besides a rising cost of living, her property taxes are "overwhelming" at \$16,000 per year.

That's in line with median property taxes on Long Island, which surpass \$10,000 per year and are among the highest in the country, Newsday has reported. Twelve percent of respondents to the Newsday/Siena survey listed taxation as the worst thing about life on Long Island.

"I have one son who is disabled and another one who is unemployed right now, so I am supporting all three of us on a fixed income," Bova said. "I work part time, and it still never seems to be enough."

The region also seems more crowded since the pandemic, Pazmino said, with more traffic congestion. Nearly a third of respondents to the Newsday/Siena survey listed overdevelopment, congestion and infrastructure strain as the worst part of living on Long Island.

Demand for homes on Long Island exploded post-pandemic, driven by interest in the suburbs surrounding New York City, experts have said. Limited by strict zoning that restricts density, supply has struggled to keep up, Newsday has reported.

And, according to Long Islanders themselves, the Island offers many amenities and resources, including proximity to nature, a sense of community, jobs that offer advancement and a livable wage, and food that is affordable and high quality.

Paul Gianelli, 80, of South Jamesport, loves his life on the North Fork. He likes easy access to the Peconic Bay and

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farm stands, although traffic issues seem to be on a rapid rise.

"I own our house, and affordability is not a factor in remaining here and enjoying it, although the taxes are high," said Gianelli, who rated his quality of life in the survey as excellent and remaining steady. Optimistic about LI, but, expensive as it may be to live on Long Island, nearly three-quarters, or 71%, of survey respondents said it was likely they'd be employed at a job that provides a living wage, and 75% said there's good access to affordable adult education, including job training.

"There is a sense that if you want a job that pays a wage at which people can successfully live, that's available on Long Island in general," Levy said. But, among renters on Long Island, just 54% felt it was likely that a person seeking a living wage could obtain it, indicating "a pronounced economic struggle for folks who rent."

Anthony Perrone, 25, a recent college graduate working to launch his career, has had to consider whether he'll be able to afford to stay on Long Island.

"The area is nice," said the West Islip resident, who graduated from Farmingdale State College in December with a degree in sports management.

But, he added, "the cost of living is high."

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