

Now It's an Exodus From the Suburbs

By ROBERTA B. GRATZ

A young attorney and his wife put their Riverside Drive co-op on the market and head for Chappaqua seeking green grass, a roomy house and "the better life." That was in September. Three months later, they instruct the New York agent: "Take the apartment off the market, we're not leaving this town."

A New Jersey couple who commute together to mid-Manhattan offices, leaving their two-year-old son to romp on the lawn with a housekeeper, call a city real estate office. "Find me a

co-op," the husband instructs the agent. "I've put my house on the market and I'm coming back."

A Brooklyn apartment dweller goes house hunting in northern Westchester. The agent keeps showing her houses being sold by one-time cityphiles who joined the suburban exodus in recent years and are now desperate to return.

For years, urban loyalists have been predicting that sooner or later those fresh air and free school seekers would return. Well, it's happening, although slowly for now. But if there's one new

factor ready to turn the current trickle into a full-fledged trend it's fuel.

In short, the energy crisis is stemming the exodus from the city and bringing suburban residents back. The two-car family with the roomy oil-heat dream house, the shopping center five miles away and children with distant friends and schools is "going bananas," reports one former Bronx resident seeking to return from Long Island.

"We've been getting the returning suburbanites for years," says a Brooklyn agent

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Sandra Goldstein, who had mixed emotions about moving to suburbia, and decided to stay in the city, walks near her Riverside Dr. apartment with sons Michael, 5, and Richard, 18 months, and pet, Porky.

Post Photo by Arthur Pomerantz

Now, the Suburban Exodus

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specializing in selling houses along the flourishing Brownstone Belt bordering Prospect Park. "But now the lookers seem a little more pressured. They've been re-examining for awhile the strains of commuting and their unhappiness with the one-dimensional existence but now the fuel shortage is an added pain."

"It's the insult added to the injury," says a bitter returnee.

Most real estate agents informally polled by The Post said that they are eagerly anticipating this energy crisis fallout. "But there's a time lag between the thinking and the decision," noted one, "so it's really too soon because the crisis is still new."

West Side agent Linda Luxemburg, who handles co-op sales in the office of Austin Haldenstein, says she has had co-op owners remove their apartments from the listings expressly because the fuel crisis has scared people into staying where they are.

Sandra and Robert Goldstein are one West Side couple. Both New Jersey-born, they moved to the city in the early '60s where he wanted to establish residence to qualify for the bar. They have a 7-room Riverside Drive apartment overlooking the river, and are the parents of two boys, 5 and 2.

"It's plenty of space," says Mrs. Goldstein, "but no backyard and the schools are a problem. We were first planning to stay, send our kids to public schools for the early grades and then move

out when the schools became more of a problem at the upper levels.

"Then we decided in September," she continues, "why wait any longer, get them started in non-city schools early, so we put the apartment on the market and went looking for a house in Chappaqua."

They listed the apartment for \$62,000 and looked for a house in the \$70,000 range but were shocked to find nothing for that price with the kind of space they enjoy in the apartment. And strange things began to happen. A Great Neck couple came to look at the apartment. They had moved out of Manhattan not too long ago and the wife was eager to return. The fuel crisis gave her an excuse to pressure her husband.

And then they met Chappaqua homeowners seeking to sell and return. "I preferred staying all along," says Mrs. Goldstein. "My husband wanted to leave but then he started reconsidering commuting and how convenient it is being 15 minutes from the office. And I started thinking more of how my life would depend on a car for every little thing and we might have trouble getting fuel for the house. So, it just seemed we ought to wait."

A New Jersey couple who left the city two years ago have since discovered "we are not suburban people," says the husband. "And my wife, who doesn't work, is definitely not the kaffeeklatch type. We had this terrific house, two cars, fresh air

and headaches. Then we couldn't get gas and I had to stand on Rt. 17 in the morning flagging the bus with a flashlight because it was dark. Now everything in my life is for sale except my wife and kids and I'm looking for a co-op."

Of course, he adds, he'll pay more taxes and he'll be looking into private schools but there won't be a car, its insurance, or commutation "And my son," he adds with emphasis, "will have more opportunity to meet kids his age and my wife won't have to chauffeur him."

Some people still remain in the city but continue to waver back and forth. For some of them the energy crisis is causing a decision postponement.

"There are a number of lovely suburbs we wouldn't mind living in," one says, "but it's really a matter of choice of lifestyles. We have three kids but we are convinced now, especially with the fuel shortage, that the economic differences have leveled off. I don't know which way we'll finally go but at least for now, we'll stay."