

# THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

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## Locals Reach Truce With City Renters in the Hamptons, as Coronavirus Spreads

As New York City asked residents to stay home, wealthy New Yorkers descended on the Hamptons to shelter in place, disrupting life of local year-round residents



People walking along the beach in East Hampton. The towns of East Hampton and Southampton have among the lowest rates of confirmed cases of Covid-19 in Suffolk County.

*By Josh Barbanel*

April 13, 2020 7:39 am ET

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Weeks after thousands of affluent New Yorkers fled the city and descended on the Hamptons [to shelter in place](#) in comfort, disrupting life of local year-round residents, both sides are hunkering down in an uneasy truce.

In mid-March, as New York City [asked residents to stay home](#) because of [the novel coronavirus](#), wealthy New Yorkers moved en masse [to their summer homes](#), while others rented houses during what is usually the sleepy off-season.

The population in the Hamptons soared to peak summer levels, and local stores, unprepared for the influx, were quickly stripped of supplies. There were worries that the New Yorkers would bring the virus with them and overwhelm local hospitals.

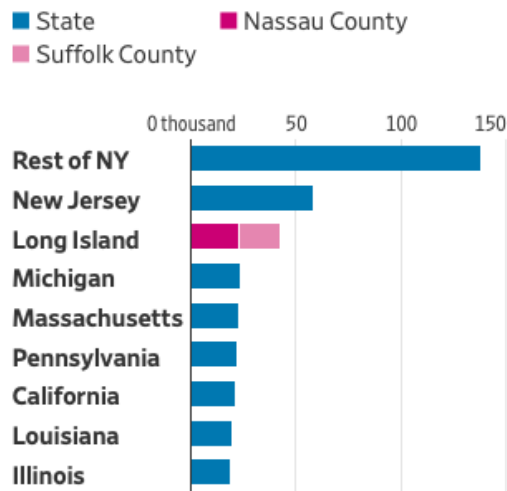
Since that early alarm, things seem to have calmed down. Grocery stores have added staff to restock shelves. The local hospital, Stony Brook Southampton Hospital, has expanded its staff and increased the number of beds, and said it is keeping ahead of the demands for medical services.

A sign of the easing of the fear was a joint letter on March 27 by town and village officials, as well as representatives of the Shinnecock Indian Nation, urging New York Gov. Andrew Cuomo to restrict short-term travel to the Hamptons, because of limited medical resources.

### No Escape

As New Yorkers moved to summer homes in the Hamptons, Long Island was becoming a virus hot spot.

#### Confirmed coronavirus cases



Note: Through April 11  
Source: Johns Hopkins University

But the joint letter specifically excluded restrictions on seasonal residents, and focused instead on limits on day tourists and short-term visitors. By then, the spring visitors had been sheltering in place for about two weeks.

“As a group, we are not looking to restrict seasonal residents from using their properties for residential purposes,” the letter said, “but we hope that they will adhere to the federal recommendation of self-quarantine, and we hope they will understand the limitations of our local health-care system and infrastructure.”



A grocery store on Main Street in East Hampton last week.  
PHOTO: PETER FOLEY/SHUTTERSTOCK

Asked at a press briefing last week about the health impact of the influx of New Yorkers, Suffolk County Executive Steve Bellone said; “We do not have any data that suggests there has been an impact from that. By and large everybody is complying with the guidelines.”

Mr. Bellone said that since Covid-19 cases began rising in New York City in early March, county health officials realized that the epidemic had already spread throughout the suburbs. They concluded that the virus had likely been lurking in the county but had been undetected because of limited testing, long before the first confirmed case of the virus was reported in the county on March 8.

Now, Long Island is itself a center of the virus. As of April 11, there were nearly 43,000 Covid-19 cases reported in Nassau and Suffolk, more than in any entire state, except for New York and New Jersey, according to data gathered by Johns Hopkins University. If it were a state it would rank fourth in deaths, after New York, New Jersey and Michigan, with about 1,250 reported deaths.

The Hamptons may be the safest place for both New Yorkers and local people. The towns of East Hampton and Southampton have among the lowest rates of confirmed cases of Covid-19 in Suffolk County, with 4 to 5 cases for each 1000 residents, compared with more than 15 cases per thousand in the town of Islip in western Suffolk, according to county health data.

There has always been some tension between the locals and wealthy New Yorkers, since the wealthy began building homes on or near potato fields in the late 19th century, and provided employment to many local laborers and craftsmen.

Gavin Menu, the co-publisher of a network of weekly newspapers, websites, and a quarterly magazine on the East End of Long Island, said this tension is nothing new. “It’s always been the same dynamic, and it’s the same today. It’s just that the health crisis brings an element of fear to the equation.”

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Jay Schneiderman, Southampton town supervisor, said there were plenty of supplies coming into the Hamptons now, but the out-of-season influx caught everyone by surprise, including the town government, which wasn’t prepared for example, for the amount of trash coming in.

He said the Hamptons have always been divided, but that many locals “depend on our second homeowners to support our local economy” as well as millions in donations to

local charities each year. He said he was counting on these second-home owners to participate in an emergency fundraising drive for food pantries across the Hamptons, which have seen demand soar in the past month because of job losses.



Adam Miller, a lawyer at the Adam Miller Group in Bridgehampton who has lived full time in the Hamptons for 18 years, said he has seen little signs of conflict. He said the part-time residents were now supporting restaurants by ordering meals for curbside pickups, local farms that are offering boxed vegetables and have been very generous with local charities.

“I have been using this as an opportunity to message my clients, 80% of whom are New York City residents, to help provide funding for the local hospital,” he said. “Within minutes of sending out this blast, I had over a dozen contributions to the hospital.”

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Many of the New Yorkers who moved east say they spend most of their time at home with their families, waiting for deliveries or dashing out occasionally to buy groceries. Some say they have hired local people to do some repairs around the house, while maintaining social distancing.



Mauro Porcini, a corporate design officer, fled his apartment in New York City's financial district for his summer house in East Hampton.

Bryan Fedner, a co-founder of vacation-rental company StayMarquis, said that demand for spring rentals had eased, but that many of the people who rented last month, are now looking to extend their Hamptons stay for the entire summer season. He said many renters have opted for a “concierge service” where Mr. Fedner’s staff shops for them and delivers to the door.

Mauro Porcini, a corporate design officer, fled his apartment in New York City's financial district for his summer house in East Hampton. He has been spending his work time on Zoom meetings. In the evenings he has been ensconced with his fiancée in the living room. Sometimes he kicks around a soccer ball, alone outside.

He is worried, he said, about his family in the Milan area and about people who lost their jobs.

Asked about some of the anger in the Hamptons, he said that at a time like this, some people want to be connected, while others want to protect their territory. "What we need right now is love and unity more than ever," he said.

Link to Coverage: <https://on.wsj.com/34yp5sO>