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Rating the Towns 2004-05: Cities Over 50,000



Although its out-of-sight real estate prices threaten to turn it into the Monaco of Connecticut, Greenwich sits once again at its customary spot at the top of this population group. The once quiet suburb now has a population of over 60,000, but it nonetheless finishes first in the performance of its public schools, its minuscule crime rate and a local economy that at times seems immune to the pressures of the outside world.

Close on Greenwich's heels comes Fairfield, which enjoys many of the same highly evolved benefits, but where housing is more reasonably priced. More affordable still are the prices in third-place West Hartford, a lively half-city/half-suburb with a healthily diverse population and a commitment to education.

Hamden rode good schools and a very low crime rate to a No. 5 finish, and Milford might have finished in the Top 5 itself except that local support for its library is by far the worst among all 17 cities on the list. Similarly, Bristol does well in all categories save Leisure/Culture, which is brought low in part because of a dearth of local restaurants. In fact, the city is now running a "Downtown Restaurant Attraction Program" that offers a cash grant of up to \$60,000 to any qualified soul willing to open a new sit-down dining spot in downtown Bristol.

The state's big cities as always struggle with poor schools, high crime (compare Hartford's annual rate of 42.5 major crimes per 1,000 residents, or Bridgeport's of 37.5 crimes, with 5.98 in Fairfield or even 7.6 in Hamden) and shaky local economies. However, the major cities are where to head if you want to buy a lot of house (often a very nice house) for not a great deal of money. Cost-of-living leader Waterbury's average house and condo price in 2003 was barely \$100,000, which may not be enough to redo your kitchen if you live in Greenwich.

Overall Rank	Town	<u>Education</u>	<u>Crime</u>	<u>Economy</u>	<u>Cost</u>	<u>Leisure</u>	Total Score
1	Greenwich	1	1	1	17	6	26
2	Fairfield	2	2	2	16	5	27
3	West Hartford	3	6	6	12.5	8	35.5
4	Stamford	12	4	3	15	3	37
5	Hamden	6	3	8	9.5	13	39.5
6	Norwalk	9	10	4	14	4	41
7	Danbury	8	5	5	12.5	11	41.5
7	Milford	4	7	7	9.5	14	41.5
9	Bristol	5	8	10	5	17	45

10	Manchester	7	11	9	7	12	46
11	New Haven	14	15	13	3	2	47
12	Meriden	11	9	12	4	15	51
13	New Britain	13	13	14	2	10	52
14	Waterbury	15	14	16	1	9	55
15	West Haven	10	12	11	8	16	57
16	Hartford	17	17	17	6	1	58
17	Bridgeport	16	16	15	11	7	65

HOW TO READ THE CHART

The chart above represents the 17 Connecticut cities with population over 50,000. The comparisons are made only with other towns in this group. The best possible rating in any category is 1 and the worst is 17. Remember: Low scores are good, high ones are bad.