



Alan Zale for The New York Times

REHABBED RENTALS Peekskill may widen eligibility criteria for artists' housing.

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Glenn Markley, who restored the house above, says tenants are scarce.

WITH Westchester County's real estate market a challenge these days, Peekskill is doing its part by rethinking the criteria for eligibility for its artists' housing.

The city's live-work rentals were developed over the last two decades in the downtown historic district. Peekskill created an artists' zone in this eight-block area by allowing the conversion of empty space over storefronts as part of a revitalization project. In all, 49 rental units have been built on the upper floors of commercial buildings, along with 28 units in a co-op built with city, county and state funds.

But in the current climate, tenants are scarce, said Mayor Mary F. Foster, and city officials are reviewing the definition of "artist."

From the beginning, Peekskill, a city of about 24,400, had a broad understanding of the term artist. Over time, the category came to include not only painters and sculptors, but writers, musicians, graphic designers, digital artists, and even, as of last year, culinary artists.

Now the list is again being studied and may grow longer by a few more creative types.

"We keep re-examining what we call an artist," she said. "We're changing from a blue-collar industrial city to one that makes different kinds of things now, with an economy increasingly based on craftspeople and artists and those in the green industries."

Along with a plan to broaden its advertising for artist-tenants, Peekskill's redefinition of terms can only help developers of this kind of housing, like Glenn Markley, who points out that "however competitive the market is for other landlords, it's that much harder for us."

Mr. Markley recently fashioned two lofts from the second and third floors of a late-Victorian house in the artists' district. As a landlord, he has been hampered by "a very limited pool to draw on," he explained.

The economy has also dealt Peekskill a blow by creating new purchase opportunities elsewhere for normally cash-strapped artists. One potential tenant backed out of a deal in favor of using federal incentives to buy a first home instead.

Another, according to Mr. Markley, was checking out some of the good deals offered by the owners of condominiums and single-family homes who are holding off selling and instead putting their properties up for rent.

Edward Burke, another Peekskill developer, has held steady on his asking price, \$1,600 a month, for a 1,400-square-foot loft in a former clothing factory in the artists' district, despite the fact that the unit is taking awhile to rent. "In the past," Mr. Burke said, "one tenant would move out and another move in. That's not the case anymore."

Problems like this have also nudged Peekskill forward on the advertising front, said Christopher Marra, an economic development specialist hired by the city last year.

Conceding that "the universe is indeed limited" for residential developers downtown, officials are now pursuing various publicity measures, including posting ads on [Craigslist](#) and joining a marketing effort called Art Along the Hudson, which also focuses on Beacon, Catskill, Kingston, New Paltz, Newburgh and [Poughkeepsie](#).

Mr. Marra is also accompanying prospective tenants on walking tours through the historic district to highlight its charms.

Its live-work spaces make Peekskill a rarity in [Westchester](#), several artists said. Trix Rosen, a photographer in Jersey City, searched for a loft in the [Bronx](#) and [Manhattan](#), but said she ruled out those high-rent locations. Now she's looking in Peekskill, as well as in Cold Spring in [Putnam County](#) and in Beacon in Dutchess.

Another artist, Szilvia Revesz, a paper maker and printer in Suffern, looked for a loft in Jersey City, Montclair and Hoboken but could not find one she could afford. She briefly considered Nyack because of its "European flavor and artistic social scene," she said, but rents there were high too. She is now looking in Peekskill, where rents for lofts range from \$1,100 to \$1,800.

Judith Solomon, a painter and sculptor, moved to Peekskill in June after years of shuttling between her home in [Fishkill](#), a job as an administrative assistant in Midtown and a studio in Long Island City.

Ms. Solomon and her husband, Stephen Spiegel, an animal behaviorist, scoured Lower Manhattan and [Brooklyn](#), where the prices, she said, were “astronomical.” They are now paying about \$1,700 a month for a 1,700-square-foot live-work loft in Peekskill.

“We looked everywhere for this kind of space,” she said, “but it’s hard to find, at least in our price range.”

Meanwhile, because government subsidies for development of artists’ housing are still available, some work on new lofts is moving ahead despite the down market.

Mohammed Amin, who has owned a pharmacy in Peekskill for 30 years, is renovating a 135-year-old three-story building downtown — applying for a \$35,000 grant from the city to upgrade the building’s facade and \$60,000 in state funds for the lofts.

“Even in this economy, I’m optimistic,” he said. “There’s just not a lot of this kind of space around.”