

# How Havertown became hot with old-fashioned charm, and without big development

by [Erin McCarthy](#), Updated: September 30, 2019



**YONG KIM / STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER**

Decades ago, folks sometimes derided Havertown as “Have-no-town.”

When Jill Cioll bought a townhouse there as a single 30-year-old in 2011, she said, her friends thought she was crazy.

“No one understood why I wanted to be in Havertown,” said Cioll, now 38 and living there with her husband and their two children.

Glen Macnow, a 94.1 WIP host, is a partner in Conshohocken Brewing Co., which opened Town Tap last year on Benedict Avenue. When Macnow, 64, moved to Havertown more than 30 years ago, he said, the “town” part was lacking. “If you wanted to go out to dinner, you were going into Center City or Lower Merion,” he said.



### **YONG KIM / STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER**

A cyclist rides by Town Tap by Conshohocken Brewing Company on 13 W Benedict Ave in Havertown.

But that's no longer the case, residents, business owners, and officials say. With a growing number of restaurants and bars, upgraded parks and recreation facilities, and a younger demographic trickling in, there's new energy in a town once known for being one in name only.

As nearby suburbs such as [Ardmore rapidly develop](#), and the faux main streets of [town centers](#) pop up around the Main Line, many people said they were attracted to the old-fashioned charm of Havertown.

Gerard Hart, a Haverford Township commissioner who's lived in Havertown since 1990, called it "a real place. ... It's kind of a throwback to what you imagine small towns were like years ago, but you're sitting right next to the city."

Havertown is a section of Haverford Township, which is home to 39,000 people and has a median household income of about \$103,000, according to census data. However, locals often note a distinction between the Havertown and Haverford sections of the township. Haverford, for example, is part of the Main Line, while Havertown sits just off of it, surrounded by Broomall, Upper Darby, Ardmore, and Wynnewood.



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Pedestrians walk along Brookline Blvd at the Brookline Shopping District in Havertown.

While there's no main drag in Havertown like [Media's State Street](#), restaurants and bars are nestled in different neighborhoods, sometimes by themselves, other times within eye sight of other establishments. Along Brookline Boulevard, there's a cluster of spots, including the sports bar [JD McGillicuddy's](#); a recently renovated Japanese restaurant, Sampan Inn; and a long-standing bar where patrons can still smoke, [the Ivy Inn](#).

Farther down Darby Road toward Eagle Road, you'll find a vegan-friendly coffee shop, [Oakmont Roots Cafe](#), as well as popular bar-restaurants [Town Tap](#), the [Crossbar](#), and [Brick & Brew](#), which will soon move a couple of blocks to a more spacious building formerly home to the Oakmont Pub. All three have opened in the last seven years.

Closer to West Chester Pike, there's a local mainstay, the [Manoa Tavern](#), which reopened this spring after renovations, and [Barnaby's Havertown](#), which has been rebuilt since a 2017 fire. Nearby, the [Italian BYOB Pepperoncini](#) opened in 2012, and recently expanded.

When Bill Ruane, 44, was growing up in Springfield — and only venturing to Havertown to go to the [Skatium ice rink](#) — he said he never imagined people would one day be excited to go out to eat or drink in Havertown. Now, he’s owned the Mexican BYOB [Vida](#) on Brookline Boulevard for two years. “I see a standard coming to the business community,” Ruane said. “There’s a real buzz about Havertown.”



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Flags on display from a home along Pembroke Road in Havertown.

It makes sense, he said, that in such a fast-paced time people would gravitate to a place that still looks, at least on the outside, as it did decades ago.

Chrissy Breen Keffer, 44, originally of Potomac, Md., was drawn to the close-knit nature of the town when she moved here from Center City in 2003.

“It’s like the best of the 1950s,” she said. Kids still set up play dates by knocking on neighbors’ doors, she said, and their parents all know one another well.

While some neighborhoods have gotten younger, more diverse, and more transplant-heavy, Hart said it’s still common for residents to move into their parents’ house or to ask “Where are you from?” and really mean “What parish are you from in Havertown?”

Food and family aren't the only reasons people move here, said Commissioner Daniel Siegel. When he first ran for the board 21 years ago, Siegel said, he posed the question: "What are we going to do when they close Haverford State Hospital? And what about the old bubblegum factory?"



**YONG KIM / STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER**  
The YMCA on North Eagle Road.

Both those locations are now beautiful recreation spaces. The former Swell bubblegum factory on Eagle Road was [torn down in 2011](#) and is now a shiny new YMCA with [nearly 30,000 members](#). The land once occupied by Haverford State Hospital, a state psychiatric hospital, has transformed into the [Haverford Reserve](#), a complex of parks, fields, hiking trails, and [an indoor fitness center with basketball courts](#). (The Reserve is outside the bounds of Havertown, for the record, but many residents said they frequent it.) This isn't to say *everything* is hunky-dory in Havertown.

Some residents noted its lack of racial diversity. Haverford Township is 90 percent white, according to 2017 census data, which is down from 93 percent in 2010.

Earlier this month, [officials shut down](#), and [then reinstated](#), a local fire company that had refused to accept the resignation of a volunteer who tried to join an organization classified as a hate group. But overall, residents say, the town has become more open and accepting in recent years.

From a socioeconomic perspective, Stacy Bartels, 50, said she likes that Havertown attracts a wide range of professionals, from blue-collar workers to doctors and lawyers.

Macnow said he often sees this cross-section sitting at the bar in Town Tap. "It's a very Havertown crowd," he said. "Though whenever I'm in there, I find people from other suburbs."



#### **YONG KIM / STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER**

A man walks a dog along Brookline Blvd in Havertown last week.

So what's next for the town that's become cool, ironically, for being laid-back and not traditionally trendy? What will it be like in 10 years?

"I don't think it's going to look a lot different," Hart said. "We are for the most part fully developed," Siegel said. "I don't know how much we can change the footprint."

They have to better manage parking, Hart said, especially around the new restaurants. Siegel hopes officials can make use of all of the commercial areas, he said, and make the town even more of a niche destination. But, he added, don't expect that to come in the form of a big box store or town center. And, residents say, that's the way they like it.

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