

Thanks to an ill-timed building boom, the town now has deals to spare. A custom-built Autumn Lane home on 14 acres, for example, went under contract this spring for 25 percent off its assessed value.

INLAND NORTH

If the Irish migrated decades ago from Southie to Scituate and beyond, the Italians went from the North End to, well, the north, where they brought the same amenities that make the North End so appealing: great, affordable restaurants, grocery stores that supply fresh pasta, *salumi*, and herbs. There's a lot going on in the area's historic town centers, too, from the lively restaurant scene in Malden to the myriad recreation opportunities in Wakefield. As a whole, these communities are family-oriented rather than flashy. Close enough to commute to almost any job in the city, they offer solid value. And unlike every other region, hardly any of these northern suburbs had median single-family home price drops of more than 10 percent last year.



> GOLD STANDARD

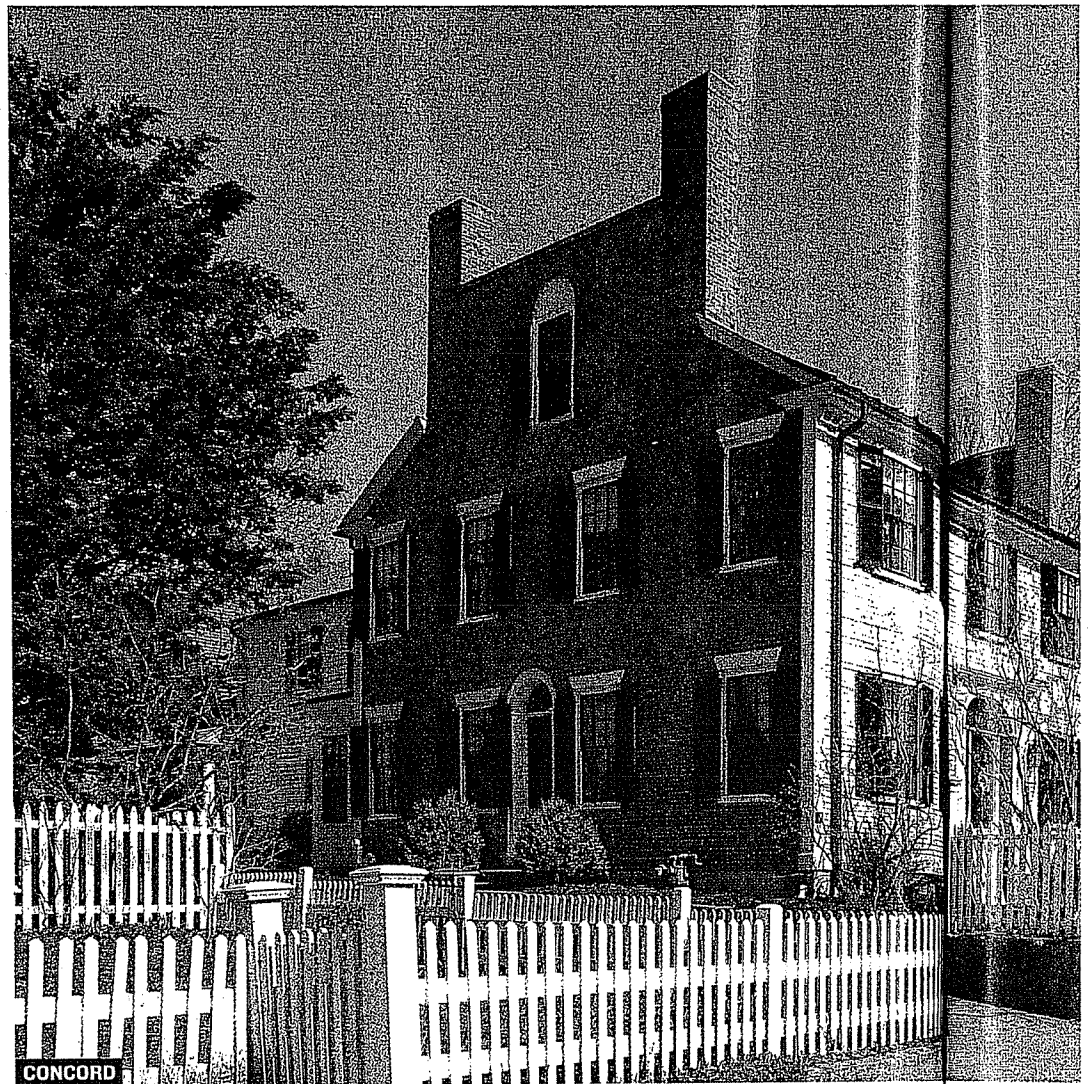
WINCHESTER

MEDIAN HOME PRICE **\$710,000**

ONE-YEAR CHANGE **-2.2%**

SINCE MARKET PEAK **-3.5%**

Winchester is blessed with an easy commute (via car or train), top-drawer schools, and a pretty town center filled with Ugg-booted preteens clutching Starbucks lattes. The town also has sky-high housing prices that have barely budged in the downturn. A more-affordable option is Reading, which has similarly strong schools but a less-stratospheric median home price (\$400,000). Houses there leap off the market in 81 days, on average. And though prices are off by



almost 9 percent since the market's peak, the fact that the needle didn't move during last year's crunch suggests values in Reading are poised to rise.

> BEST VALUE

BURLINGTON

MEDIAN HOME PRICE **\$368,000**

ONE-YEAR CHANGE **+0.1%**

SINCE MARKET PEAK **-10.8%**

Drive by the jammed Burlington Mall parking lot and you might think: *What recession?* A thriving commercial base means Burlington residents pay one of the lowest tax rates in the commonwealth, yet still get unheard-of extras like free (yes, *free*) summer programs for kids at local parks. High schoolers, meanwhile, can take classes that count toward an associate's degree—which can potentially shave off a year's worth (or more) of college tuition. By nature, Burlington is a pragmatic, rather than

picturesque, place, with lots of remodeled ranch homes. But they're working on the charm part, with a downtown revitalization initiative planned for Route 3A.

> OPPORTUNITY KNOCKS

MELROSE

MEDIAN HOME PRICE **\$380,000**

ONE-YEAR CHANGE **-5.4%**

SINCE MARKET PEAK **-11.4%**

This winter, "For Sale" signs were so scarce around Melrose that Realtors stopped being shy about knocking on doors on behalf of would-be buyers. This is a city that's all about neighborhoods, sidewalks, playgrounds, and an easy commute (it's 25 minutes to Logan). Melrose's downtown is proof that the town is on the rise, with new restaurants, boutiques, and—a toast to a no-longer-dry town—the first suburban outpost of Beacon Hill Wine & Gourmet.



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