What Does $1.25M Actually Buy Within a Manhattan Commute?

$1.25M doesn't buy one version of suburban North Jersey. It buys roughly six materially different ones — depending on where, and how, you commute.

A data-driven look at 616 closed sales across 38 North Jersey towns, trailing 12 months.

DeSilva Team analysis of GSMLS/NJMLS closed single-family sales, trailing 12 months, approximately September 2025–September 2026, with assessor and recorded-deed research. Representative, dated research — not a live MLS feed.

Full interactive version: **thedesilvateam.com/1-25m-nyc-commute**

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The Short Answer

1. **Direction sets the house more than the budget does.** Median size at this budget ranges from ~1,740 sf to ~3,082 sf across six commute-based groups — about 75% apart, at essentially the same price.
2. **List price is often the wrong search filter.** In several Essex rail towns, most homes that close near $1.25M were listed well below it — a $1.25M portal cap mostly shows the wrong houses.
3. **The same price carries very different taxes.** Roughly $1,060 a month separates the lowest- and highest-tax towns in this study, at the same purchase price.
4. **There is no single "$1.25M house."** The middle 80% of sales ranged from about 1,730 to 3,530 square feet on essentially the same budget.
5. **Another $250K is usually incremental.** Typically 6–19% more space inside the same direction — real, but smaller than the difference between directions.
6. **Six directions, not one market.** Premium train towns, Essex rail, the same line farther out, transfer suburbs, no-train towns, and the most-house/longest-ride tier each trade differently.

Each finding is developed with its own evidence and caveats in the pages that follow.

What Does a Typical $1.25M House Look Like?

Across 616 closed sales in the $1.15M–$1.35M band — the range that actually clears at “$1.25M” — the typical house is a 4-bedroom, 3-bath home on about a third of an acre, built around the mid-1950s, carrying roughly $17,000 a year in property tax. About three in four of these sales closed above their original asking price.

BEDS / BATHS	LIVING AREA	VINTAGE	LOT	TAX
4 / 3	~2,450–2,500 sf	~1955	~0.30 ac	~$17K

OVER ASK
~75%

That “typical” house hides a wide spread. The middle 80% of these sales ran from roughly 1,730 to 3,530 square feet, and from roughly $11,800 to $24,400 in annual tax — on essentially the same purchase price. A single median doesn’t tell you which end of that range you’ll land on. Where you search does.

Same Money, Very Different House

Group the 38 towns by how a buyer actually commutes, and the size gap by location is larger than almost anything a $250K budget change can do. The group with the smallest homes runs a median of roughly 1,740 square feet; the group with the largest runs roughly 3,080 — about 75% more house for a nearly identical price. Between individual towns the gap is wider still: Millburn/Short Hills runs roughly 1,660 square feet at the median; Denville runs roughly 3,420.

Medians and group-level figures, not a promise about any specific house. Living area is the assessor's above-grade figure, matched to the closed sale.

The Six Search Directions

Northern NJ towns that work for a daily Manhattan commute fall into six groups, organized by the trade-off they represent rather than by county line.

DIR.	TOWNS	SIZE	4+ BR	VINTAGE	LOT	TAX	OVER ASK
A	Summit, Chatham, Millburn/Short Hills	~1,740 sf	~29%	~1947	~0.21 ac	~$13.9K	~79%
B	Maplewood, South Orange, Montclair, Glen Ridge	~2,256 sf	~80%	~1926	~0.20 ac	~$21.9K	~91%
C	Madison, Morris Township	~2,517 sf	~88%	~1963	~0.41 ac	~$13.4K	~78%
D	Westfield, Cranford, New Providence, Berkeley Heights, Glen Rock, Ridgewood	~2,380 sf	~79%	~1950	~0.26 ac	~$16.9K	~82%
E	Livingston, Florham Park, East Hanover, West Orange, N. Caldwell, Verona, Springfield, Wyckoff, Paramus, Cresskill	~2,589 sf	~85%	~1965	~0.35 ac	~$16.1K	~66%
F	Scotch Plains, Basking Ridge, Wayne, Denville, Bernardsville, Mahwah, Montvale, Ramsey	~3,082 sf	~92%	~1978	~0.54 ac	~$19.0K	~61%

A — Premium train towns. One-seat ride to Penn Station, low tax for the price, walkable downtowns — in the smallest, oldest homes in this study, at the bottom of what these towns' own markets sell.

B — Essex rail. The one-seat way to a full four-bedroom house, with 1920s character — the highest tax bill and the heaviest bidding of any group.

C — Same line, farther out. Same train line as A, meaningfully more house and lower tax — the trade is more stops, and often a drive to the platform.

D — Transfer suburbs. Full-size four-bedroom homes and real downtowns, tax between B and C — the trade is a transfer on most peak trips.

E — No train in town. Newer homes, real lots, the least competitive bidding — commuting is by car or bus, and how well that works varies a great deal by town.

F — Most house, longest ride. The most space and the newest homes in this study — the trade is the longest, often most complex, ride into the city.

Two placements are judgment calls: Ridgewood sits with the transfer suburbs by transit but bids like a premium train town; Livingston has no in-town station but prices like one of the transfer suburbs.

Same Purchase Price, Very Different Tax Carry

Two houses at the identical purchase price can carry very different monthly costs once property tax is counted.

FLORHAM PARK	MORRIS TWP	SUMMIT	MAPLEWOOD	WEST ORANGE	SOUTH ORANGE
~$11.1K	~$12.5K	~$12.9K	~$21.8K	~$23.6K	~$23.9K

> Florham Park to South Orange is roughly $12,750 a year — about $1,060 a month — on essentially the same purchase price. That belongs in the same conversation as the mortgage payment when you compare two houses at the same price.

Why the List Price Is Often a Bad Search Filter

In several Essex rail towns, homes that ultimately close near $1.25M frequently start well below it. In this band, roughly 94% of Montclair sales closed above their original asking price — and the median original ask was only about $899K. Glen Ridge ran a similar pattern (about 93%, median original ask roughly $874K), as did Maplewood (about 93%, roughly $975K).

The practical consequence: a buyer with a $1.25M budget who sets a portal search max at $1.25M in these towns is mostly looking at homes that will close well above their number — and is missing the homes actually competing for their budget, often listed $250K–$350K below it.

Describes homes that closed near $1.25M in these specific towns — not a rule that applies everywhere in this study, and markets shift.

When Another $250K Helps — and When Changing Direction Matters More

Inside most of these directions, stretching another $250K tends to buy an incremental amount of additional space — commonly somewhere in the range of 6% to 19% more, direction by direction. That's real, but it's an increment, not a different kind of house.

Changing which of the six directions you search in moves the picture much further: the gap between the smallest-home and largest-home groups at the same $1.25M budget is roughly 75%, not 15%. For most buyers at this level, the question worth spending time on isn't "can I stretch $250K further" — it's "am I even searching in the right direction for what I actually want."

Want This Run for Your Commute and Budget?

This guide describes the market in aggregate. Your actual number depends on your real budget, where you actually need to be, and the one or two things you won't compromise on. The Buyer Brief runs the same kind of thinking against your specific numbers — target, stretch, and hard-stop.

Run your numbers: thedesilvateam.com/buyer-brief · **Text:** 973-542-9302 · **Email:** hello@thedesilvateam.com

Methodology and Limits

Source. DeSilva Team analysis of GSMLS and NJMLS closed single-family sales, trailing 12 months, approximately September 2025–September 2026, $1.0M–$1.8M, across 38 towns that compete for a daily-Manhattan buyer. Living area is the municipal assessor's above-grade square footage, matched to the closed sale by block and lot; town-level price distributions come from recorded deeds. Representative, dated research — not a live MLS feed, and not a guarantee about any specific house or listing.

What this doesn't cover. Commute times are not quoted anywhere in this guide — the six directions are grouped by transit structure, not timed rides, and door-to-desk time depends heavily on your actual office location. School quality is deliberately not scored or ranked. Bergen County figures rest on a smaller, deed-based sample than the rest of the study.

Not investment or lending advice. Nothing in this guide is a valuation of any specific property, a pre-approval, or a prediction about future prices or taxes.

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