

The Second Great Migration



Brought to you by
Mark Siwiec

*"What did you
just say?"*

*"I said that I simply keep a bucket
in my shower in order to abide by
municipal mandates to conserve
water. It's really not a problem."*

These words, uttered by Margaret, a new client contemplating a move from San Francisco to Rochester, were a bit shocking. I immediately thought of the proverbial frog becoming so inured to its surroundings that it no longer realizes the danger that it's in. Thankfully, Margaret understood that a life which included a spectacular view of the Golden Gate Bridge was becoming more and more untenable. It's one of the many reasons that she's thinking of moving back East to the city in which she was born.

Margaret's story was reminiscent of a conversation that I had with another client a few weeks ago. Rob is moving here from Southern California and was anxious to close on his new house in Brighton. He was alarmed by the forest fires which had come within a mile and a half of his current residence and hoped to close before disaster struck. Obviously, the siren song of a more climatically-stable urban environment is attractive to both of these besieged West-Coasters.

Increasingly, I've been confronted with references to and the realities of climate change and climate migration. Two weeks ago, Abrahm Lustgarten wrote a fascinating cover story for the New York Times Magazine in which he describes some of the dystopian phenomena currently devastating or predicted to destroy parts of our country.



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He forecasts that **13 million Americans** will be displaced from coastal cities in the near future as a result of rising seawaters. Hurricanes will take a more devastating toll on Florida and other Southern States. Those Southerners who aren't impacted by hurricanes may find themselves unable to withstand rising temperatures. Phoenix serves as a good example. It has endured 53 days of 110-degree heat this summer- 20 days more than the previous record.

Americans are quickly understanding that the place that they currently call home may, in the near future, no longer be habitable. They are waking to the realization that, unfathomably, they may need to move. More temperate, Northern cities with plenty of fresh water are predicted to be Edenic destinations. As Lustgarten states, "Cities like Detroit, Rochester, Buffalo and Milwaukee will see a renaissance, with their excess capacity infrastructure, water supplies and highways once again put to good use."

East Coast Migration

While the first climate migrants are beginning to make their pilgrimage to Rochester and other cities, another form of migration is suddenly being felt locally. In the past three and a half months, my real estate team and I have moved four families to Rochester from New York City. One of my colleagues, Todd Enright, recently sold a house in which four buyers, all of them from Brooklyn, were vying to purchase the same property. NYC is, obviously, a vibrant and exciting place to live. However, a city of eight million residents

can also be a difficult place to reside. This past spring, those difficulties were conjoined with the worries imposed by COVID and the concomitant stresses of sheltering in place. The resultant tension began to take its toll and, for some, the draw of an easier life began to set in. What these refugees have in common is a desire to escape densely populated New York and find a bit more green space in which to relax, a larger home in which to stretch out and, perhaps, a greater amount of fresh air to breathe. Their migration upstate is made more desirable as a result of employment portability and the financial realities of earning a big-city salary while living in Rochester. One can easily understand the lure of selling your two-bedroom condo for \$1.5 million, trading it in for a 3,000 square foot home in Brighton, and still having plenty of cash to purchase a nice weekend getaway in the Finger Lakes.

So, Why Rochester?

Sure, the past few months have been difficult ones for our city. We have a lot of work to do in order to create a more equitable community. However, I believe in our long term viability as a thriving and harmonious midsize city. We have great colleges and universities and an educated workforce. Both Lake Ontario and the Finger Lakes provide us with an abundant amount of an increasingly precious national commodity- namely, fresh water. Health care is terrific and, when we're not precluded from gathering in large numbers, we have a vibrant cultural scene. Our winters are more temperate and the other seasons of the year are oftentimes spectacular. Our farms are fertile and productive, Wegmans offers interesting and exotic options and our restaurants will rise once again. Best of all, we have a kind and loving community genuinely concerned about the welfare of their neighbors. It's only a matter of time before others realize all that we have to offer and decide to make this their new home. Who knows? Perhaps the Second Great American Migration has already begun.

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