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LIC: "The next Williamsburg"

Proximity, price a draw in Queens



View59 is one of the many projects filling up with future tenants. (Lane Johnson / October 18, 2007)

By Lana Bortolot | Special to amNew York
October 18, 2007

Once off the map, Long Island City is now off the charts with a residential building boom that's brought Manhattan-style living to this graffiti-topped neighborhood. Developers have long been bullish on the area, but now renters are traversing the bridge and trading in over-priced shoeboxes for home ownership that's affordable and luxurious.

"Long Island City is no longer a consolation neighborhood, but a destination neighborhood," says Roberta Benzilio, senior director of sales at Halstead, which is handling the Fifth Street loft condominiums. The project's pre-development marketing campaign pulled in 1,800 early responders; typically, she said, 500 and 700 people inquire.

Proximity to Midtown, good subway service and city views are drawing people to this gritty-cum-arty neighborhood. But it's also the opportunity to own a chunk of luxury at an attractive price -- as low as \$725 per square foot in some projects.

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"People have bigger concerns about infrastructure like Starbucks and movie theaters, but once they see buildings going up, it opens up their minds to Long Island City as a viable neighborhood," he said. Marketing Long Island City has long been a challenge, but certain language -- "authentic locale," "industrial chic" and avoiding references to Queens -- goes a long way in qualifying the neighborhood.

But marketing-speak can't remove realities such as the visual tangle of tracks and the Sunnyside railyards -- and the noise. "It's a challenge in terms of the streetscape," says Amanda McKoy, a marketing manager at Corcoran Sunshine, representing Arris Lofts, a luxury building in LIC. "But we flipped our messaging and emphasized how lucky people were to be so close."

One of the more challenging streetscapes is the backdrop for View59, directly across the street from Queensboro Plaza subway station. The elevated station slices views of Midtown and the 59th Street bridge, but Sarah Burke, vice president of The Developers Group, which is handling the project, says 77 percent of the building was sold off the floor plans in the sales office across the street from the site.

"People who were looking here had done their homework and knew what to expect," says Burke. "They're

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looking at it as the next Williamsburg." "It's industrial in nature," Benzillo said, "but you know New Yorkers -- that doesn't seem to matter. There's a built-in confidence here and what's happened previously in New York has taught us how to watch the neighborhoods."

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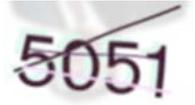
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