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October 24, 2011

Brownstone Brooklyn Between 2 Projects

By DIANE CARDWELL

Warren Street between Bond and Nevins offers many of the things well-off buyers seek in brownstone Brooklyn: a pastoral, leafy feel; long rows of 19th-century town houses; proximity to transportation and charming little restaurants; young families on the block.

But the block also has something that those buyers have traditionally seemed to avoid: two large public housing projects that stand tall at either end, to many New Yorkers enduring symbols of danger, social dysfunction and blight. The map showing the neighborhood on the Web site of the [Boerum Hill Association](#) — a group dedicated to preserving and enhancing “the unique qualities of our neighborhood” — includes Warren Street but runs up and around to Wyckoff at points to cut the projects out.

And as one commenter on the blog [Brownstoner](#), responding to an item about price cuts at a condominium development on the block, wrote in 2008: “This might as well be part of the projects. Worst possible location. I would not move my family there.”

Yet, this being Brooklyn — which GQ recently named the “coolest city on the planet,” despite its being a borough — the presence of the Gowanus Houses, a 1,134-unit development on the west end of the block, and Wyckoff Gardens, 528 apartments on the east end, does not seem to put much of a damper on values. Properties on the block, which do not turn over frequently, may sit awhile before selling, but on a per-square-foot basis, buyers no longer seem to be getting deep discounts.

At the condo development, for instance, sales fell from a high of \$588 per square foot in 2008 to a low of \$305 per square foot in 2009, but rose to \$639 per square foot last year for a four-bedroom apartment that went into contract at \$1.15 million, according to [Streeteasy.com](#). On a stretch of Bergen Street two blocks away, farther from the projects, sales prices for single- and multifamily homes generally ranged from a low of \$374 per square foot in 2007 to \$694 this year, having reached a high of \$1,079 at the end of last year, for a fully renovated single-family town house that retained many of its original details, according to available data from Streeteasy.

Now, a local property owner, John Grant, who developed the Grant Mews, an 18-unit condo complex completed in 1990, is looking to take advantage of the rise in values and retire. He has listed a [four-family town house at 486 Warren](#) with exposed brick, wood-burning fireplaces and an annual rent roll of \$87,600 for \$2.5 million, or \$658 per square foot — about \$35 less than two

multifamily houses that sold this year on Bergen Street. There is also a 2,400-square-foot duplex at the Grant Mews on the market for \$1.7 million, or \$708 per square foot.

Joan Joseph-Alexander, who is marketing the town house through her company Ambassador Realty, said she arrived at the price after looking at sales in the ZIP code and factoring in the appeal of living within walking distance of the Barclays Center, the arena under construction at Atlantic Yards, but shielded from the traffic and noise it is expected to bring.

“We were down; now we are up,” Ms. Joseph-Alexander said of the Brooklyn market as she waited on Sunday for prospective buyers at an open house. (They never showed up.)

She added that the influx of a professional class had increased the police presence in the area. “When the market is down, the projects are a factor,” she said. “When it is up, the projects aren’t a factor.”

A recent study from the Furman Center for Real Estate and Urban Policy at New York University suggests this is true, finding that higher-income households, particularly renters and first-time homebuyers, are more likely to move into relatively low-income neighborhoods in cities where house values are climbing rapidly. Another study from the center found that federally subsidized housing in New York did not typically depress values within a roughly four-block radius.

“In New York City I think we’ve seen upward pressure on property values in a much broader variety of neighborhoods than we had 20 years ago, including many neighborhoods that are abutting and surrounding public housing,” said Ingrid Gould Ellen, co-director of the center and a co-author of both papers. She named Chelsea, Boerum Hill and Red Hook as among the many neighborhoods with large public housing developments and “very, very high property values.”

On Warren Street, that juxtaposition has some of the longtime residents concerned.

“I bought this house for \$17,000 in 1972,” said Charlie Soule, a retired administrator with the Education Department, shaking her head in disbelief at the \$2.5 million asking price for 486 Warren. Back then, she said, the block felt safer because she knew all her neighbors — something that is no longer true. “I feel like I’ve sort of outlived my time on the block,” she said.

Mike Rodriguez, who grew up in the house a few doors down and still lives there with his family, had a similar take.

“You got too much ‘ippity’ folks around here,” he said. “They’re uppity, but I call them ‘ippity,’” he added, laughing and brushing his hand under his chin. “They look at you like you don’t belong here.”

Residents say that they do not worry so much about the presence of public housing as about what they see as a lack of police enforcement in driving away drug traffic. Dealers hang out at the corner

of Bond, where a 16-year-old girl was shot to death last year, said Steven Turner Hart, a writer who has lived on the block since 1998. At Nevins, an abandoned building plays frequent host to crack addicts, he said.

Still, he loves it there. "I have learned a lot from my neighbors about the ebb and flow and invisible current of this neighborhood," he said, referring to how it has evolved over the years.

Then too, he added, there was the sense of connection he found when his first wife died in 2009 after a long bout with cancer. They barely left the house, he said, and he thought the block had forgotten about them.

"But that wasn't true at all: they were quite cognizant" of his situation, he said. "People are not nosy but they are friendly and very helpful and good hearted."

He paused, and laughed, adding, "Except for when they're shooting at you."