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In the Region/Long Island; New Houses in Nassau: Strong Market, Little Supply

By DIANA SHAMAN

WHEN Spectrum Skanska, a Valhalla, N.Y., developer, began sales on its Legend Yacht and Beach Club project in Glen Cove six months ago, it projected that it would take three years to sell the 46 houses, which had prices starting at \$749,000 for a 3,200-square-foot four-bedroom home.

To date, it has 25 houses in contract, well ahead of schedule, said Mitchell C. Hochberg, the company's president.

The pace of sales has been spurred by the waterfront development's unusual setting on a 46-acre property overlooking Hempstead Harbor and by the strength of the market in general.

But adding to the volume of sales is the rare chance to buy a new house in Nassau County in a large subdivision.

Builders complain that there are many buyers who want to live in Nassau and are looking for new construction but that available land is simply not there.

With large tracts of residentially zoned land in short supply, new construction in Nassau, for the most part, consists of spot building in existing neighborhoods, often on a lot where an existing house has been torn down. One rare exception is a 55-acre tract in Plainview to be developed by the Holiday Organization of Westbury as 370 attached and detached housing units, but sales there have not yet started.

"There is extremely high demand for new construction," said Joseph Pimenta, manager of the Century 21 Laffey real estate agency in Williston Park. "The old saying, 'location, location, location,' is still valid, but people will buy new construction regardless of where it's located."

In 1999, 1,157 permits for new housing were issued in Nassau, compared with 5,104 permits in Suffolk, said Robert A. Wieboldt, executive director of the Long Island Builders Institute. "That's very few permits for a county the size of Nassau," he said.

Michael A. Levine, commissioner of planning for the town of North Hempstead, said the town issued about 400 permits for new houses last year. Mr. Levine said that "virtually every one of them is on the site of a house that's been torn down, because there is virtually no vacant land left."

"The last subdivision we had of any size was 21 houses in Seasingtown, and that was in 1996," he

said.

The 46-acre Glen Cove property was originally an estate that at one time belonged to Marcus Loew, one of the founders of the Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer Studios, and later his son, Arthur, an MGM president, who tore down his 53-room mansion in 1968 because of the cost of its upkeep.

The 46 new houses, some already under construction, will occupy half-acre to one-acre lots with amenities that are to include a gatehouse, a clubhouse, a pool, an indoor tennis court (a remnant of the original estate), a 60-slip marina and a private beach. The house priced at \$749,000 when sales began now sells for \$849,000. The most expensive house purchased so far is a 5,000-square-foot, five-bedroom residence on a waterfront lot at \$1.9 million.

ALTHOUGH Nassau, especially in North Shore areas, has many older homes in those price ranges, builders and brokers say new houses are being snapped up, often while still in the design stages, because so many buyers want new construction.

Buyers in Nassau's estate areas either want "a charming old house or new construction because they are looking for something distinctive, not run-of-the-mill," said Steven Caronia, a broker with the New Homes division of the Daniel Gale agency in East Norwich. "But with new, the work is all done," he said.

There are several reasons people want a new house, Mr. Hochberg of Spectrum Skanska said. Older houses, he said, often lack features like high ceilings, modern kitchens, family rooms, large windows and master suites with sitting rooms off the bedroom, often with a fireplace. "Those types of things and those conveniences are much more in keeping with the way people live today," he said. "The biggest problem we have is finding land to build on at a price that makes sense."

Only a few years ago, several large estates on Nassau's North Shore were going through the subdivision process, and although some large parcels are still available for subdivision, currently there is a dearth of land, said Edward C. Vassallo, owner of the North of 25A Prime Properties brokerage firm in Brookville.

In 1988, he said, 350 land parcels were listed for sale in the estate areas of the Brookvilles and other Gold Coast areas of Nassau's North Shore. "Now we're down to about 20," he said.

In other areas of Nassau, builders are occasionally finding commercial properties that lend themselves to residential construction. In Seaford, for example, the 22.8-acre site of a former marina is being developed as 57 detached houses.

Since sales at the subdivision, called Crescent Cove, began a year ago, 36 of the 57 colonial-style houses have gone to contract, said Barbara Adamo, vice president and director of sales at Realty Group Marketing in Smithtown. Realty Group is in charge of sales for Cove Partners of Smithtown, the development group.

Prices for the dwellings, some of which are on the water with their own boat slip, range from \$439,000 for a 3,000-square-foot house on a lot with deeded rights to a dock, to \$590,000 for a waterfront residence with its own dock. The houses have three or four bedrooms; each has a two-car

garage.

Realty Group Marketing is also the selling broker for another partnership, Harbor View at Roslyn, which is building a 10-house development called Harbor View at Roslyn on the 4.5-acre site of a former elementary school. Four of the 10 colonials, priced from \$779,000 for a 3,300-square-foot four-bedroom to \$819,000 for a five-bedroom with 4,800 square feet, have gone to contract since sales began six months ago, Ms. Adamo said.

Robert Preston, owner of Westwood Homes in Roslyn and a builder for 20 years, was able to buy a former pool club in East Hills on which, he said, he intends to build two houses that will sell for over \$1 million each. But for the most part, Mr. Preston said, he is creating building lots by taking down older homes.

He said he recently bought, to tear down, a small three-bedroom split-level in East Hills that was built in the 1950's on a half acre. "To rehabilitate the house does not make sense," he said. "The value is in the land." The house he is building to replace it -- already sold to a neighborhood family that wanted new construction -- is a five-bedroom, 4,700-square-foot residence priced at \$1.2 million.

"Until you live in a new home, you don't realize the convenience of having new construction," Mr. Preston said. "People want the room sizes, the layout, the closet space, the large eat-in kitchens and the walk-in showers that you usually don't find in an older house. In some cases, we're putting four to five bathrooms into a house."

Philip Fusco, president of Vincent Management, a development company in Franklin Square, said that many people realized that buying an existing house and renovating it sometimes was as expensive as buying new construction, "because you have to demolish what's there and rebuild," he said. "So people realize they might as well buy a new house."

ONE area especially in demand by buyers is the Roslyn Country Club, a community built by Levitt & Sons in the 1950's where houses, originally costing \$17,000, now sell in the mid-\$400,000 range.

Builders are buying them, knocking them down and replacing the modest 2,200-square-foot houses, which have no basements, with four- and five-bedroom homes with basements and up to 4,000 square feet that sell for \$925,000 to \$1.3 million, said Roy M. Sobel, owner of the Coldwell Banker/ Claire Sobel real estate agency in Roslyn.

The Country Club enclave, which has about 500 homes, is especially desirable, Mr. Sobel said, because families can belong to a private country club, with a pool and tennis, paying only a \$200 annual membership fee. The local East Williston school district is one of the most highly regarded on Long Island, he said.

The Great Neck area also has many older houses that do not meet the needs of today's buyers because they lack the space, bathrooms and room sizes that people want, said Hildy Sanders, an owner of Trylon Realty in Great Neck. "Years ago, people didn't want big houses," Ms. Sanders said, "and now they want them to be very big."

Older 2,000-square-foot houses that might sell for \$350,000 to \$400,000 are being leveled by builders

who replace them with 3,000-square-foot to 4,000-square-foot homes that sell for \$850,000 and up, she said.

"Old communities rebuild themselves, and Nassau is in the throes of doing that," said Mr. Wieboldt of the Long Island Builders Institute.

Some municipalities, concerned that so many new houses in existing neighborhoods will change the character of their older communities, are changing zoning codes. The town of North Hempstead revised its zoning code effective Jan. 1 to regulate the bulk of new houses, including stepping back roof lines to avoid a boxy overwhelming shape. "It was a reaction to the jarring juxtaposition of new and old," said Mr. Levine, the planning commissioner.

Photos: At the Legend Yacht and Beach Club development in Glen Cove, 46 houses are being built on what was once the Marcus Loew estate. (Photographs by Kevin P. Coughlin for The New York Times)