

Reinventing the Brooklyn Navy Yard

By C. J. HUGHES OCT. 30, 2015



The 300-acre Navy Yard has 7,000 people employed in 330 companies tucked away in structures amid rusting cranes and cannons. Pablo Enriquez for The New York Times

The area by the [Brooklyn Navy Yard](#) can seem forbidding. Hulking warehouses line Flushing Avenue, a wide and busy street that hugs the yard for 16 blocks, while the yard, a massive former military complex turned manufacturing center, is almost totally enclosed by tall fences and walls.

“It’s literally like working in a federal prison,” said Chris Terrell, a wine importer who stores his bottles at the yard and must venture past its security checkpoints.

But the vibe will be less harsh going forward, as major steps are being taken to reinvent the area, part of the [Wallabout neighborhood](#).

Across from the yard, developers are putting the finishing touches on [Navy Green](#), a \$146 million housing complex with market-rate and affordable apartments being built on the site of a former Navy brig.

Meanwhile, the Brooklyn Navy Yard Development Corporation, the nonprofit entity that manages the city-owned facility, is removing some of the walls that have isolated the Navy Yard from the community, while adding a supermarket, a food hall and a park that the public can use.



The new Navy Green housing complex will have market-rate and affordable apartments. Pablo Enriquez for The New York Times

“It’s to send a message that we’re not turning our backs on the community,” said David Ehrenberg, the development corporation’s president and chief executive.

From the 1940s until 1966, the Naval brig locked up unruly drunken sailors, according to historic accounts. And from 1984 to 1994, over the objections of neighbors, the site served as a 1,300-bed prison, before finally being razed in 2005.

Construction on Navy Green started in 2010 and is scheduled to be completed next year. When finished, it will include four multifamily high-rises and 23 single-family townhouses across a nearly full-block site ringed by Vanderbilt, Flushing and Clermont Avenues.



Pablo Enriquez for
The New York Times

The [Dunn Development Corporation](#), [L and M Development Partners](#) and the [Pratt Area Community Council](#) played various roles in developing the project, which has market-rate condominiums and townhouses and affordable condos and rentals. The final pieces of the project under construction include a condo tower and rows of townhouses.

The townhouses, faced in brick, come with three or four bedrooms, along with two full and two half-baths. The townhouses have open layouts on their ground floors; kitchens with Caesarstone counters, Bertazzoni ranges and Bosch dishwashers; and laundry rooms with sinks and side-by-side washers and dryers.

As of late October, six of the 10 houses put up for sale in June were in contract, a project spokeswoman said. A three-bedroom was listed last month at \$1.995 million, or \$689 a square foot.



Construction at the Navy Green housing complex. Pablo Enriquez for The New York Times

Most of the units at the 12-story, 99-unit condo tower, at 8 Vanderbilt, carry income restrictions: a maximum of \$99,830 for a single buyer and \$175,350 for a family of six, said Martin Dunn, Dunn Development's president. Prices for these apartments range from \$230,000 to \$440,000.

The condo is also offering 24 market-rate units without income limitations, 14 of which have sold since September, including a one-bedroom to Mr. Terrell, the wine dealer. Prices for the market-rate condos start at \$625,000 for one-bedrooms, or about \$900 a square foot, according to Stephen G. Kliegerman, the president of Halstead Property Development Marketing, which is handling sales.

In the third quarter, condos in an area that includes Wallabout and nearby Vinegar Hill, Fort Greene and Clinton Hill, traded at an average of \$1,088 a square foot, according to Halstead sales data.



The Sands Street gate, one of the entrances to the Navy Yard. Pablo Enriquez for The New York Times

The three other towers, at Nos. 7 and 45 Clermont and 40 Vanderbilt, were built over the last five years and are made up of affordable rentals. All buildings surround a signature amenity: a long private lawn running down the center of the block framed by cherry, oak and other trees.

Though the complex does not have a doorman, the bike room was made extra-large. Because the nearest subway stops, on the F and G lines, are long, bleak walks away, residents are expected to take advantage of Flushing Avenue's popular bike lane to ride to [Manhattan](#). "There is always going to be somebody who's going to say it's too far from the train," Mr. Kliegerman said. "But I think this is part of the beauty of the area, that it's not so congested."

Across the way, the Navy Yard may seem a bit more crowded. The 300-acre facility, which wraps around Wallabout Bay, has 7,000 people employed in 330 companies, which are tucked into new and old structures amid rusting cranes, Belgian block lanes and cannons. This head count is a far cry from the 70,000 employed during World War II constructing ships like the U.S.S. Missouri, on whose deck Japanese officials would later surrender.



Most of the decrepit houses along Admiral's Row will be razed to make way for a supermarket. Pablo Enriquez for The New York Times

When the base closed, in 1966, [Brooklyn](#)'s economy quickly declined, historians say, despite efforts by the city to reinvigorate the yard. By the early 1980s, just 100 people worked there, said Mr. Ehrenberg, 39, who was raised in Brooklyn and remembers going to the yard to pick up a car that had been towed. A police tow pound is still there, off Navy Street; the yard also is home to a cement company and a dry dock, which was repairing Weddell Sea, a tugboat, on a recent afternoon.

According to its stated mission, the yard tries to lease only to tenants that make things. Smaller, less-industrial occupants are welcome, like Kings County Distillery, which makes whiskey in a Romanesque former Paymaster's Building. On Saturdays, it offers tastings, which, in the spirit of the more welcoming yard, are open to the public, though visitors must show

I.D. at a gate. Similarly, Building 92, which opened in 2011, offers an informative museum and organizes tours.

Next, the city is investing \$143 million remodeling Building 77, an 18-story, concrete-walled hulk across from Navy Green that once stored supplies like powdered milk. To add offices to the lower floors, workers are removing three million pounds of concrete and installing 393 windows, yard officials said. More important for those who live in the area, the bottom floor will be turned into the Yard Commons, a food hall resembling Philadelphia's [Reading Terminal Market](#), Mr. Ehrenberg said. And after a wrought-iron fence is removed, the public will be able to walk in from the sidewalk of Flushing Avenue; the food hall is scheduled to open in 2017.

Another piece of the yard, at Flushing Avenue and Navy Street, will be carved out for a 74,000-square-foot Wegmans supermarket, in an area known as Admiral's Row, which is lined with sagging 19th-century houses overgrown with vines. Most of the decrepit houses will be razed, despite efforts to preserve them, and in the process graffiti-marked walls barricading this corner will also come down.

The project, expected to be completed in 2018, will also feature storefronts that could be filled with "quirky, weird mom-and-pop Brooklyn shops," and national chains, said [Douglas C. Steiner](#), the chairman of Steiner NYC, the developer. His related business, [Steiner Studios](#), a production facility, controls 30 acres at the yard and is poised to redevelop another 20 acres on the Williamsburg side that now include an overgrown and ghostly hospital complex, Mr. Steiner said. It will be made into offices for Steiner Studios.

Nearby, on Williamsburg Street West, another piece of the yard will be liberated from its fences. The 1.7-acre Naval Cemetery Landscape, with wood walkways and wildflower meadows, is set to open next spring. There are other signs of change along Flushing Avenue. JJ's Navy Yard Cocktail Lounge, a longtime strip club at Washington Avenue that was shuttered in 2010, has been remade as an outpost of the Brooklyn Roasting Company, whose headquarters is inside the Navy Yard.

Not everyone is rejoicing just yet. Some neighbors say [grocery stores have been promised before](#), never to materialize. And a farmer's market run by Brooklyn Grange in the courtyard of Building 92 didn't last long. However, the grange, which grows kale and other vegetables on a rooftop farm inside the yard, does offer a community-supported agriculture program, with pickups on-site.

Efforts at outreach are still appreciated, said Mary Andrews, president of the tenants association at Farragut Houses, one of three nearby public housing developments. In the last year, the Navy Yard has stepped up recruitment of local labor, said Ms. Andrews, who moved to the area in 1970. Once a month, yard officials come to Farragut with ads for jobs like lift operators and truck drivers. "It's a good thing to have in the community," she said.

Correction: November 3, 2015

An earlier version of this article misstated one of the avenues surrounding the Navy Green housing complex. It is Clermont Avenue, not Clinton Avenue.