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Long Island City: From Locomotives to Living Rooms



James Estrin/The New York Times

NEAR THE WATERFRONT The 12-story Gantry Park Landing rental building is one of the more recent arrivals to Hunters Point in Long Island City. About two months since leasing began, about 60 percent of the 199 units have been rented.

By C. J. HUGHES

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Many of the rail yard conversion projects championed by Mayor Michael R. Bloomberg over the last decade have taken time to come to fruition.

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Years after first being proposed, office towers are just now being built at Hudson Yards, on [Manhattan's](#) West Side, and apartment buildings are finally going up at [Atlantic Yards](#) in [Brooklyn](#).

But the efforts to remake Hunters Point, a waterfront section of Long Island City, [Queens](#), where rail cars once rolled onto barges, are closer to schedule. Most of the dozen or so residential buildings envisioned years ago as part of the area's locomotives-to-living rooms transformation have gone up, as promised.

Among the recent arrivals is [Gantry Park Landing](#), at the corner of 50th Avenue and Second Street. Developed by the [Lightstone Group](#) and a revival of an earlier plan for the site, the stylish 12-story rental can seem tiny when compared with its neighbors. It has just 199 units, from studios to three-bedrooms, which is about a quarter of the size of some of the glassy towers lining nearby Center Boulevard. And because it sits slightly inland, and will also have a 37-story tower of affordable rentals next door, Gantry Park won't be able to guarantee the sweeping East River views of many of its peers.

But what it may lack in loftiness it has tried to make up for with flair.

Channeling the background of the Lightstone president, Mitchell C. Hochberg, who used to work for Ian Schrager, the boutique hotel pioneer, the building will feature elements of

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outré design, including a large clock face, reclaimed wood siding and dangling metal lamps in the lobby. Upstairs, some of the shower walls will include sections of mirror.

Designed by [Mark Zeff](#), whose credits include the Night Hotel in Times Square, Gantry Park will have a second-floor amenity space with pool and Ping-Pong tables and a biofuel fireplace.

“If we built something that was a little more mature, a little more sophisticated, we thought we could differentiate ourselves from all of the larger projects,” Mr. Hochberg said.

And the strategy may be working. Despite prices that are on a par with nearby buildings — studios start at \$2,000 a month while three-bedrooms max out at \$5,300 — Gantry Park, which cost \$75 million to develop, is reporting brisk leasing.

As of early September, about two months since leasing began, about 60 percent of the units, or 120, have rented, according to [aptsandlofts.com](#), which is marketing the building and offering a free month of rent to sweeten deals.

“We don’t have the height that a lot of other buildings have,” said David J. Maundrell III, the president of aptsandlofts. “But people are telling us that they prefer a more intimate building than those other Goliaths.”

And Mr. Maundrell knows one of those giants firsthand. In the early 2000s, he lived for a few years in a one-bedroom at Citylights, a 42-story co-op that was completed in 1997 and for years stood alone, waiting for company.

It got some in 2002, when [Avalon Riverview](#), a 372-unit rental, opened. Other high-rises followed in quick succession, most of them developed by the Elghanayan family; [472Q Center](#) came first, in 2005.

A new building, the 820-unit [4545 Center Boulevard](#), developed by TF Cornerstone, started leasing apartments this summer. Its studios start at \$2,200 a month, without any concessions.

The amenities there include a 50,000-square-foot outdoor deck on the seventh floor that will feature two tennis courts, a playground and a sand volleyball court.



Another building, at [4610 Center Boulevard](#), is also now under construction; when unveiled next year, it will have 580 units. It also looms above the red cursive Pepsi sign that’s a familiar sight from Manhattan’s East Side — and yet another symbol of the area’s industrial past. Near it are surviving gantries — the cranes that moved those trains on to barges and that are now centerpieces of a well-kept waterfront park.

Though 4545 Center may be competing directly with Gantry Park, its promoters seem less concerned with jockeying for position than establishing a sense of place.

“We believe in establishing critical mass, so any development is good,” said Kevin P. Singleton, an executive vice president of TF Cornerstone, the firm headed by K. Thomas and Frederick Elghanayan and that owns most of the buildings that the family developed there.

Mr. Singleton also noted that new restaurants and stores have greatly improved the streetscape in recent years. “This district was written off by a lot of people, said to be too challenging,” he said. “But we have been validated by the marketplace.”

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