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In Brooklyn, Blurring the Wealth Boundary

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WHEN the developers of Atlantic Terrace, an 80-unit co-op in Fort Greene, began planning, they envisioned occupants reflecting the populace on the sidewalks of [Brooklyn](#) — that is, diverse in all ways, but especially economically.



That meant even the wealthiest buyers would be living side by side with those of moderate and low incomes. The developers, a partnership of the nonprofit Fifth Avenue Committee Inc., the architecture firm Magnusson Architecture and Planning, and the builder Mega Contracting, said they knew they had a challenge when it came to selling the market-rate apartments, because in many developments, lower-income apartments are physically segregated.

“Really, [New York City](#) is one of the most segregated cities in the United States,” while also being one of the most diverse, said Michelle de la Uz, the executive director of Fifth Avenue Committee.

When for-profit developers create affordable housing without public subsidies, they typically receive benefits like less restrictive zoning regulations or height limitations. But often those affordable apartments end up isolated, either in the nether regions of the building, with a separate entrance and elevator, or in a different building altogether.

Atlantic Terrace, however, is on land provided by the city, and a significant portion of its \$38 million budget was publicly subsidized. The city requires developers who accept subsidies to be more inclusive with their affordable units than developers who don't, and at Atlantic Terrace, at 212 South Oxford Street and Atlantic Avenue, the developers created 20 market-rate apartments that are mixed in among 60 affordable ones.

They “went above and beyond,” said Joan Tally, the executive vice president for real estate and the chief of staff at the New York City Housing Development Corporation, which provided a \$3.7 million construction loan and a \$6.7 million mortgage for Atlantic Terrace.

“The unique thing about Atlantic Terrace is that they’ve used their market-rate units to get more affordability in the affordable units,” Ms. Tally said, meaning that the apartments are affordable to people of the lowest income, not just middle-income buyers as in many subsidized developments.

Of the affordable units, 31 were sold to people earning 80 percent of the area median income (\$79,200 for a household of four), and 19 were sold to those earning 130 percent of it. The nine apartments in the lowest income tier were reserved for those earning 65 percent of the area median.

Affordable apartments are scattered throughout the building, on the same floors as market-rate units, and even have some of the better views. Layouts are identical, and while some finishes in the affordable apartments are a bit less expensive, some are identical, like the IceStone countertops that were made in the nearby Brooklyn Navy Yard.

“The key to making this project successful was selling the market-rate units,” said Magnus Magnusson, a principal at Magnusson Architecture and Planning, “so we

needed to design the whole look of the building, from the outside to the lobby to the hallways, to look like a market-rate building.”

Almost all of the 60 affordable apartments sold quickly in a city lottery, while nine market-rate apartments have sold or are in contract, four of them two-bedroom penthouses, since they went on the market last October, said Heather Gershen, the director of housing development for Fifth Avenue Committee. The three remaining penthouses range in price from \$950,000 to \$1.1 million, and the remaining one-, two- and three-bedroom units range from \$385,000 to \$775,000.

Mike Leslie, a transplant from San Francisco who bought the original model penthouse unit with his partner, Michael Richardson, said the fact that there were low-income owners in Atlantic Terrace had not given them pause. The looming issue for the couple was the construction of the arena for the New Jersey Nets going on across the avenue at the [Atlantic Yards](#) site, but after determining that construction noise was minimal, they were won over by the 463-square-foot terrace with their penthouse, Mr. Richardson said.

Both he and Mr. Leslie noted that, while not actively seeking “diversity” in their home search, they both appreciated some of the results brought about by that goal in Atlantic Terrace. For example, all the cabinetwork in the affordable apartments, along with the bathroom cabinets in market-rate units, was done by Brooklyn Woods, a work-force development program.

“That kind of gives you a good feeling about it,” Mr. Richardson said. “But it’s also beautifully done.”