

Court vision

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At the intersection of Flatbush and Atlantic avenues, the hulking steel skeleton of the Barclays Center, future home to the NBA's Brooklyn Nets, looms large.

This summer saw the glass façade start to go up, traffic patterns on the site's perimeter rerouted and signage featuring Nets part-owner Jay-Z splashed all over the construction site. Last month, Jay-Z announced that the grand opening of the venue would include at least one performance by him. All of which is to say that after about eight years of planning and of protest galore, this arena is happening (NBA labor dispute notwithstanding). And fast. Just under a year, say those in charge.



CHRISTIAN JOHNSTON

Michael Leslie owns an Atlantic Terrace co-op right across from the Barclays Center site.



CHRISTIAN JOHNSTON

Michael Richardson and Michael Leslie purchased an apartment in Atlantic Terrace. The unit's terrace and reasonable price spurred their decision. The mixed-income building is working on filling 11,200 square feet of retail space.

"The Nets will be there for the 2012-2013 season," says Brett Yormark, CEO of both the Barclays Center and the Nets. "We're opening in September 2012." (For those marking calendars, tickets to Jay-Z will go on sale in the spring, Yormark says.)

As the stadium, which will seat 18,000 during basketball games and 19,000 for concerts and contain eight clubs and restaurants, makes its bold way into Brooklyn, the neighborhoods that surround it -- Park Slope, Fort Greene, Clinton Hill, Prospect Heights, Boerum Hill -- are busy figuring out how to react.

“When the arena opens, you’ll see a new city center in New York, with culture, art, entertainment,” says Marty Markowitz, Brooklyn’s borough president. “There will be many people who’ll want to live downtown because it’s bustling, exciting.”

Markowitz might be right, but, meanwhile, uncertainty surrounds almost every aspect of the project.

“No one knows exactly what will change yet,” says Ofer Cohen, president of TerraCRG, a commercial realty group whose office is in the shadow of the arena. “The one aspect of development that will come earlier will be in terms of retail on Atlantic and Flatbush surrounding the arena.”

According to Cohen, landlords in the area have been patiently awaiting the opening of the stadium, allowing leases to lapse and their spaces to sit vacant in anticipation of attaining higher rents. Asking retail rents on Flatbush across from the stadium go from \$85 per square foot up to \$175 per square foot, the high end of Brooklyn pricing, notes Geoffrey Bailey, vice president of retail services at TerraCRG.

“Now that it’s clear that [the stadium] will be finished and finished soon, you’re going to start seeing these spaces fill up,” Cohen says.

Even on the eastern edge of the Atlantic Yards footprint, where nothing but 1,100 parking spaces are slated for the short term, there is interest.

In 2009, Ross Greenberg signed a 15-year lease and opened Woodwork, a bar on Vanderbilt Avenue at Dean Street that serves food.

“I watched the site. I knew what would happen and what was coming,” he says.

Now, he wants to lease the space next door too so he can open up a burger joint.

“I hope people will grab a burger and then go to the stadium,” says Greenberg, who grew up in the area and now lives on Carlton Avenue just south of the footprint.

But while retailers salivate, the state of residential development in the area is more uncertain.

“I haven’t seen developers trying to buy close to the stadium,” says Brendan Aguayo, an agent at the Aguayo and Huebener residential firm.

Most of the area’s new residential product was conceived of before anyone knew what would become of Atlantic Yards.

Aguayo, for one, is selling both 499 Dean St., an eight-unit condo steps away from one of the proposed Atlantic Yards residential buildings, and 659 Bergen St., a 13-unit condo building a couple blocks from the site.

At 499 Dean, which has been on sale for a year, only two units remain on the market, a 1,000-square-foot two-bedroom priced at \$639,000 and a 1,965-square-foot duplex with a garden for \$987,000. At 659 Bergen, on sale since last spring, seven units are in contract, with one-bedrooms going from \$389,000 to \$429,000.

Aguayo says he had one buyer who was interested in purchasing three units in the building, thinking they'd appreciate because of their proximity to Atlantic Yards, but the offer wasn't accepted. Mostly, people are buying because they like the housing stock, but remain concerned and unsure about what Atlantic Yards will bring.

"[It's] always something that people are concerned about. How is the noise going to be? Is there going to be dust? Issues with traffic? But it didn't cause anyone not to close," Aguayo says.

At Atlantic Terrace, a new mixed-income co-op building directly across the street from Barclays Center, the 59 affordable units have all been purchased, as have nine of the 20 market-rate apartments. The one-, two- and three-bedrooms are around \$550 per square foot.

"We're seeing more construction-specific fears as opposed to arena-specific fears," says Heather Gershen, director of housing development at Fifth Avenue Committee, which developed the project. "It is a major construction project, but construction is a reality of living in New York."

The fear of living on top of a construction site kept Michael Richardson and Michael Leslie from buying in Atlantic Terrace ... for a while.

"Mike had come and seen it first without me. He liked it immediately," Leslie says. "But when he told me it was across from the stadium, I rejected it site unseen."

"We dragged our feet for a while and continued looking over the next few months," Richardson says. "But when we didn't find anything else, we decided that maybe it wasn't that bad."

They now live in a two-bedroom duplex with a terrace that overlooks Atlantic Avenue.

"I just thought the space and the finishes and the terrace were all beyond my expectations," Richardson says. "It was an amazing deal."

"When the doors are closed, we can't really hear the construction," Richardson adds. "I don't drive, and every train imaginable comes through within two blocks of where I live, so the traffic doesn't bother me ... We're now curious about what will happen on the adjacent lots."

There is a lot of skepticism about what will happen. Plans call for 16 Atlantic Yards residential buildings, five to be included with the stadium in phase one of the project and then 11 in phase two. But ground has yet to be broken on even the first residential building.

Developer Forest City Ratner filed a permit with the Department of Buildings for the construction of the first building, which is to include 368 rentals (half of which are to be affordable), and a spokesperson says that it will "hopefully" break ground before the year is out. But even in the best-case scenario, with groundbreaking of each of the subsequent residential buildings coming nine months to a year after the groundbreaking of the building before it, the last phase one building could just be getting started in 2015. And, of course, there's then phase two.

“They haven’t decided whether the [first residential tower] is going to be prefab or not,” says Daniel Goldstein, one of the founders of Develop Don’t Destroy Brooklyn, which unsuccessfully fought the construction at Atlantic Yards.

Goldstein did help win a lawsuit requiring a new environmental impact study be done on the second phase of the project.

“If they don’t know [whether it will be prefab or not] today, how can they break ground in the next few months?” Goldstein adds.

This raises another big question: the creation of jobs. Construction jobs was one of the big promises made by Forest City Ratner, and prefab construction requires less work.

“The big question is, what will the real community benefits be? We were promised affordable housing and construction jobs. They’ve announced modular construction,” Gershen says. “Jay-Z is not an amenity.”

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