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# ***IF YOU'RE THINKING OF LIVING IN REGO PARK***

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**By Diana Shaman**

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AQUEENS apartment-house developer once wooed prospective tenants with the slogan, "If you lived here, you would be home by now." Residents of Rego Park quote that line sometimes to explain why they chose to move to a neighborhood that seems to lack some of the suburban flavor found in other communities in the borough.

Midtown Manhattan is a 20-minute ride away on the N train of the IND line. Express buses operated by Green Bus Lines and the Triboro Coach Corporation whisk passengers, for a \$3 one-way fare, to midtown or Wall Street in less than 45 minutes. And motorists can be in Manhattan in 15 minutes when traffic is light.

Moreover, Rego Park has public schools that are among the best in the city, a diverse housing stock ranging from studio apartments to large private houses, and neighborhood cultural and social centers that provide services ranging from meals-on-wheels for the frail elderly to sports programs for young people. It is a community that newcomers pay a premium to join.

"Good housing, very good public transportation, good schools, good stores, a good place to live," summed up one committed resident, Anthony H. Atlas. He is chairman of Community Board 6, which serves the Forest Hills-Rego Park area.

Older residents who have seen open fields give way to apartment houses, office buildings and shopping malls say their affection for their community has never wavered.

"If you offered a great many of us any amount of money for our homes, what good would it do, because we don't want to move to another spot," said Helen Downing who lives with

her husband, Warren, in a three-bedroom house her parents and grandparents purchased in 1925. "Not that our homes are so fancy, but everyone is happy here."

Mrs. Downing, who has two children, one of whom is about to be married, is perturbed, as are many of her friends, that high prices are shutting their children out of the local housing market.

Dennis Liu, owner of Golden Star Realty on Booth Street, has seen those prices almost double in the three years since he has been in business.

The most common types of houses are three-bedroom, frame colonials on small lots and attached single-family and two-family brick town houses. Larger houses can be found south of Queens Boulevard in a section known as the Crescents. High-rise apartment houses were built primarily to the north of the boulevard. Older, six-story buildings predominate to the south of it.

The smaller colonials now start at around \$180,000 and pay about \$800 in taxes, according to Mr. Liu, with the more spacious Tudors and brick colonials in the Crescents fetching prices in the \$300,000 range and paying about \$1,500 in taxes. Two-family houses range from \$200,000 to \$325,000 and pay from \$1,000 to \$1,500 a year in taxes.

Although houses may be beyond the means of many, prices for co-op apartments are lower. One-bedrooms are available starting at \$70,000 in older buildings, and two-bedroom units can be found starting at around \$100,000, said Gerard Morley, broker for the **H. K. Benjamin agency in Forest Hills**. Monthly maintenance costs range from \$315 to \$475. Renters must expect to pay \$650 to \$725 a month for one-bedroom units and \$850 to \$900 for two-bedrooms, Mr. Morley said.

About 55,000 people live in the community, which is bounded by Woodhaven Boulevard to the west, the Long Island Expressway to the north, 102d Street to the east and 67th Avenue, Alderton Street and Yellowstone Boulevard to the south.

It has a polyglot ethnic mix of Irish-, German- and Italian-Americans, as well as immigrants from the Soviet Union who settled in Rego Park some years ago. Among the newcomers are a great many Asians.

"We are a United Nations," said Domenick Uzzi, principal of the Stephen A. Halsey Junior High School on 102d Street.

His 1,300 pupils speak 34 different languages, Mr. Uzzi said, but the school's English-as-a-second-language program quickly helps children overcome their language difficulties.

Even with 80 youngsters enrolled who have no knowledge of English, 78 percent of pupils read at or above grade level last year.

Students at the community's four elementary schools also score consistently well in citywide exams. Public School 139, for example, was ranked 33d out of 621 elementary schools in the city last year, with 84.1 percent of pupils reading at or above grade level, and with 90 percent working at or above grade in math.

Rego Park children attend Forest Hills High School, which has 3,000 students and offers special programs, combined with internships, in such areas as law and humanities, math and science. About 90 percent of graduates go on to college.

Religious groups and nonprofit agencies offer a rich variety of cultural and recreational activities to neighborhood residents. The Rego Park Jewish Center, at 97-30 Queens Boulevard, has social programs for people over 65 twice a week. The center also runs a Hebrew school, has a gym and puts on concerts and plays.

The Forest Hills Community House at 108-25 62d Drive, a private, nonprofit organization, has activities available for all age groups. It offers after-school and outreach programs for teen-agers, a gym for sports activities and adult education classes at night. Programs for the elderly include an innovative experiment in recruiting local youths to help old people with shopping and transportation.

Centrally situated on 63d Drive is the Rego Park Library, one of the most heavily used in the Queens library system. The branch is open seven days a week, and among its 100,000 volumes is one of the largest foreign-language collections in the city. English-as-a-second-language courses are taught twice a week, and free lectures in the auditorium range from investment advice to health topics.

Another popular facility is the Lost Battalion Hall at 93-29 Queens Boulevard. The building, which is operated by the Department of Parks and Recreation, is open 13 hours a day and offers sports and social programs, a center for the elderly, a gym and an exercise room.

Most stores are concentrated along 63d Drive and Queens Boulevard, and residents can shop for food in one of several supermarkets, fruit-and-vegetable stores, health food stores and delicatessen. Small specialty shops sell everything from shoes to used books.

Several major department stores are within walking distance. Alexander's is at Queens Boulevard and 63d Drive, and Abraham & Straus, Ohrbach's and Macy's are close by in neighboring Elmhurst.

Several Chinese restaurants have opened. A favorite is the Tung Shing House at 97-45 Queens Boulevard, which serves Sichuan and Mandarin specialties. REGO PARK developed in the early 1920's when a German-born entrepreneur, Henry Schloh, and several partners purchased land south of Queens Boulevard, formed the Real Good Construction Company and began building six-room houses that sold for \$7,500.

Out of Real Good, they coined the name Rego, and added the word "park" to give the new community an attractive identity.

Developers are still building wherever they can find land. The Queens Boulevard Tower, a 16-story, 112-unit residential condominium, is under construction at the corner of the boulevard and the Long Island Expressway by the Queens Construction Management Corporation of Flushing.

A major shopping mall has been proposed for a 12.5-acre site now occupied by Alexander's and parking lots. Many residents are concerned over the added congestion that will bring, but others view it as a positive development.

Another concern is the conversion of rental apartments to co-ops. "We don't want to see anyone evicted," said John Chartier, assistant on housing for the local State Assemblyman, Alan G. Hevesi. Even under a noneviction plan, older people get worried, he said. "You are talking about their homes."

But others see conversions as a positive sign. "If you have a vested interest, you have a commitment to where you live," said Alvin Kargan, a homeowner. ALEXANDER'S OFFERS ITS THIRD MALL PROPOSAL For the third time in 10 years, Alexander's Inc. is proposing to develop its 12.5-acre site just east of the intersection of Queens Boulevard and the Long Island Expressway.

The two previous proposals were withdrawn - one because of a lack of financing, the other because Donald R. Manes, the Queens Borough President, voiced concern over traffic problems. The latest proposal is for a \$150 million, 900,000-square-foot shopping mall, with three floors of retail space, to be called the Mall at Rego Park. If approved, it would be built by Kravco, commercial developers in King of Prussia, Pa. The project would encompass two city blocks between Junction Boulevard and 97th Street.

Two bridges across 62d Drive would link two buildings that would include a refurbished Alexander's store, a Sears store, space for 160 other establishments, and a 55-foot-high, 7,000-square-foot atrium. Parking would be available for 2,300 cars. Three acres of enclosed and landscaped promenades would become the site for concerts, theater, and

other entertainment. Among its other amenities there would be 25 restaurants, as many as 10 movie theaters and a health spa.

Completion is targeted for the fall of 1988. Public hearings are still to be held.