

The Assessor

SPACES | By Anton Troianovski

Tidal Shift On Waterfront

From the East River, two new residential projects on the Williamsburg waterfront look like towering glass edifices. On the other side, they meet the neighborhood as six-story brick apartment buildings.

The two-faced design is an outcome of the city's ambitious plan, approved in 2005, to turn the industrial waterfront of the Williamsburg and Greenpoint neighborhoods of Brooklyn into a dense residential area. At the time, planners and local advocates were concerned about how high-rise, high-priced condos would fit with the largely low-rise, mixed-income community that's inland from the waterfront.

City officials responded by calling on developers to use design to connect inland neighborhoods to the waterfront. The tallest buildings, the city said, should be close to the water where they would "frame new open spaces." Shorter buildings would be built at the neighborhood's edge to create "a smooth transition in building scale and form." The city also allowed developers to build taller if they created more affordable-housing units.

The two new projects, Northside Piers and the Williamsburg Edge, both near the intersection of North Fifth Street and Kent Avenue, are early signs of how the rezoning could change part of the Brooklyn waterfront. The Edge consists of two high rises, with

565 market-rate apartments, 299 feet and 150 feet tall, that tower over the river with a facade of oversize windows, translucent blue balconies, and cream-colored stone—a sharp contrast with the aging storage tanks and rusty piers a few hundred feet away. Behind the towers, the Edge also includes two lower-rise apartment buildings, which include 347 affordable units and face Kent Avenue with a façade of light and dark brick that echoes older brick buildings nearby.

"What we were trying to do was to create a project that sort of melds into the urban context," says Stephen B. Jacobs, architect of the Edge.

To critics, however, the new towers are a portent of a future barrier of high-rises stretching along the western edge of north Brooklyn. "These bland towers marching all the way along—it's going to wall off the entire water," said William Menking, an architecture professor at the Pratt Institute in Brooklyn.



Two new residential projects on the Williamsburg waterfront meet the East River.

Noah Rabinowitz for The Wall Street Journal