



This copy is for your personal, noncommercial use only. You can order presentation-ready copies for distribution to your colleagues, clients or customers, please [click here](#) or use the "Reprints" tool that appears next to any article. Visit www.nytreprints.com for samples and additional information. [Order a reprint of this article now.](#) »

November 6, 2005

IN THE REGION/Long Island; Demand for Homes Close to the Train

By VALERIE COTSALAS

GWENDOLYN HAYNES never starts her car on a weekday morning on her way to work in Manhattan. Instead, she walks out the front door of her town house in the Highview co-op development in Huntington Station, past her S.U.V. in the driveway, around the corner, then across the street to the Long Island Rail Road platform.

She boards the 7:12 express train to Pennsylvania Station, she said, arriving at her job as a court officer in downtown Manhattan by 8:30.

"I wasn't a driver when I moved here," Ms. Haynes said recently. "I couldn't have moved somewhere where I had to drive."

Ms. Haynes bought the three-bedroom town house and moved in with her two sons in 2001 just after Highview, built by the Klar Organization, was completed.

Today, people are waiting in line to buy a town house when it is put up for sale, Ms. Haynes said. "I get notes in my mailbox every week asking if I'm selling or if anyone I know is selling," she said.

Not long ago, a house opposite a Long Island Rail Road station, within earshot of train whistles, parking garage traffic and commercial buildings, was considered less than a dream home. But with land for residential development on Long Island slowly disappearing and the demand for homes rising, developers are building attractive residential communities close to the tracks.

Robert Wieboldt, executive vice president of the Long Island Builders Institute, can quickly rattle off a list of projects already built or planned near rail stations: a town house development in downtown Patchogue, a community for older people in Farmingdale, a Suffolk County plan to build housing for workers on county land in Yaphank. All are within walking distance of trains. "There are others, and there will probably be more," Mr. Wieboldt said.

Many of these developments mix homes sold at market rates with others that are priced lower, using federal and state housing funds. Highview has 100 two- and three-bedroom attached homes, sold as co-ops. Fifty-one percent are earmarked for buyers who earn up to 80 percent of the median income on Long Island; a family of four with an income of \$71,100 or less, for instance, would be eligible. The rest of the units are sold to those with higher incomes.

The buyers of subsidized units are screened and then selected through a lottery system by the Long Island Housing Partnership, a nonprofit organization that administers state and federal funds to make lower-priced housing cost-effective for developers to build.

In addition, towns and villages are more willing to allow buildings with higher density -- more homes on a single lot than local zoning codes permit -- near train stations. "The key to make it work is that the local communities have to accept density to make the project fly," said Lee E. Koppelman, director of the Long Island Regional Planning Board.

In return for the higher density, towns often gain attractive new communities near train stations that replace former eyesores -- abandoned, rusting industrial buildings or vacant office buildings.

Steven Klar, president of the Klar Organization, the builder of Highview, said that site, at the corner of Broadway and New York Avenue, was an unsightly vacant lot, but during construction an underground vault was found, indicating a bank had once stood there.

It is still true, he said, that homes directly beside the train tracks will not fetch the highest prices, but higher-density zoning -- Highview has 10 units per acre -- is "a way for us to provide good quality housing at an affordable price."

In Patchogue, the mayor, Paul Pontieri, hopes that a \$26 million development near the train station of 45 attached town houses that would be affordable to people whose incomes are below or not far above the county median will also help downtown businesses.

As in Patchogue, commuter stations are generally in downtown areas, many with tumbledown storefronts that have lost business to shopping malls and big-box stores.

Near Highview, Ms. Haynes said, she often walks to the small stores and a C-Town supermarket south of the Huntington train station, even though she has a car.

High-end developers are also building near train stations. In downtown Freeport, a Manhattan-based developer, Time Equities, is building a mixed retail and market-rate rental apartment building, called Plaza West, beside a stairway leading to the Freeport railroad station.

"It's an ideal transit-oriented development project, because within the perimeter of the site you can walk out the door of the project, up to the station platform and onto the train without ever getting your hair wet," said Ellen Kelly, director of the Freeport community development agency.

In Great Neck, many former office buildings on Great Neck Road and on North and South Station Plaza, which border the central Great Neck station, have been converted to condominiums or assisted-living rentals for the elderly, according to Marc Spector, of the Spector Group architecture firm.

"It started around five years ago," Mr. Spector said, "and now it's becoming rampant."

The company recently designed a new glass-walled four-story condominium to replace a former office building on Great Neck Road. The building, which is still awaiting village approvals, would cater to affluent Great Neck residents, Mr. Spector said. Many want to stay in Great Neck, with its 24-minute

train commute to Manhattan, but are tired of keeping up a house.

Transit-oriented developments best serve Long Islanders who commute to New York City and use subways and buses to reach their final destinations. But on Long Island, where a transportation study in 2000 reported that 80 percent of residents work in Nassau or Suffolk County, there is no extensive bus or light rail system that allows travel from one town to another in anything but a car.

"I think everybody likes the concept," Mr. Wieboldt said of developing communities near train stations to cut down on car use. "But we need more intermodal transportation before this really works."

Suffolk County is in the earliest stages of planning a combined retail and residential community with affordably priced housing on 300 acres that the county owns in Yaphank, centered on the Long Island Rail Road station there.

"The worst thing you could do would be to put condos and co-ops in the middle of nowhere," said Thomas Isles, the county's director of planning. "Here, you're building around a fundamental structure of community design -- the transit station."

Even if train station developments do not alleviate traffic congestion right now, public transportation should be a basic component of future community planning, he said.

"The Long Island Rail Road is the largest commuter railroad in North America," Mr. Isles said. "We have this great asset. Here it is, and the question is, how can we use it to our maximum advantage?"

Photo: WELL PLACED -- Gwendolyn Haynes and her sons, Scott and William, holding Winnie. Their town house is close to the train in Huntington Station. (Photo by Kirk Condyles for The New York Times)