

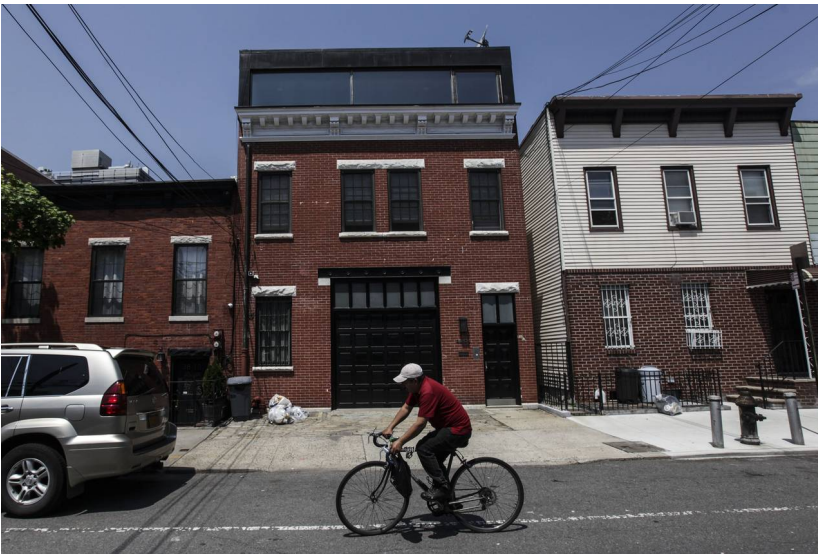
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U.S. | NEW YORK | COMMERCIAL REAL ESTATE

A Queens Firehouse Goes From White Elephant to Cash Cow

If sold for listing price of \$5.5 million, would set a record for Long Island City



The exterior of 38-06 28th Street, which was once a firehouse, in Long Island City, Queens. PHOTO: BYRON SMITH FOR THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

By Josh Barbanel

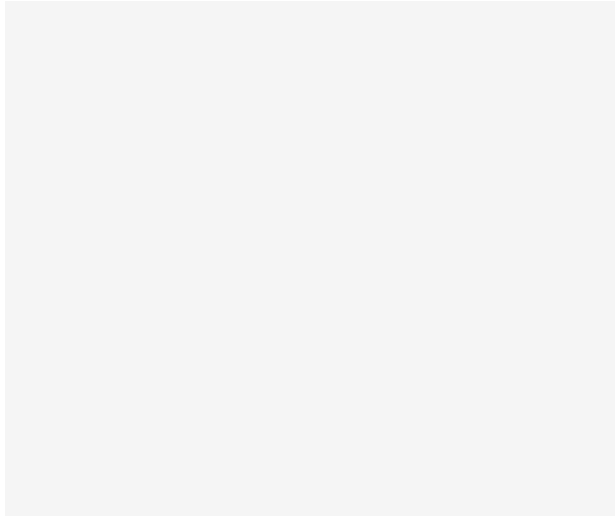
May 16, 2018 9:00 a.m. ET

Back in 1981, Megan Dees Friedman happened upon a sturdy redbrick building with marble trim that had been the local firehouse in the age of horse-drawn engines. She had to have it.

The building was across the East River from her home on the Upper East Side, in a drab working-class section of Long Island City known as Dutch Kills. The listing broker described it as a “white elephant.” They settled on a price of \$115,000.

Nearly four decades later, that part of Queens has become a destination with restaurants, bars, hotels and high apartment towers, and Ms. Friedman is putting the firehouse, with a glass-walled addition on top, on the market for \$5.5 million, an ambitious price that would set a record for Long Island City.

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An undated postcard shows what was Engine 161 in Dutch Kills. PHOTO: GARY URBANOWICZ

The listing shows how some people, through luck, vision or inertia, stand to become winners in New York's real estate marketplace as the fortunes of the city—beyond

Manhattan—have soared in recent years.

The 25-foot-wide, three-story, two-family house at 38-06 28th St. stands out in the neighborhood, a few blocks north of the approach ramps to the Ed Koch Queensboro

Bridge, where there is a mix of small wood-frame houses, mostly clapboard buildings re-clad in white aluminum or vinyl siding, along with low-rise industrial buildings, and newer hotels and apartments.

The firehouse was built in the mid-19th century in the federal style, long before the street was filled in with small houses. It was home to Engine 161, a horse-drawn steam-powered pumper in the 1890s, after the volunteer fire department in Long Island City was replaced by professional crews. The city rented the building for many years at \$600 a year, rising to \$660 a year in the 1920s. In 1932 a new bigger city-owned fire house opened on 29th Street.

Ms. Friedman, then known as Megan Dees, grew up in Manhattan and had a brief career as a model in Paris and New York City, working alongside her identical triplet sisters. When she bought the house, with her then husband, they owned several Manhattan boutiques and imported clothing and handmade crafts from Latin America and India.

They turned the basement and ground floor into warehouse and office space and moved into an upstairs apartment. They quickly discovered one of the key selling points for Long Island City: its proximity to Manhattan, especially the Upper East Side, by car and by subway.

Later, when Ms. Friedman divorced and rented out the ground floor as an apartment, she said she was able to rent it out quickly by placing a classified ad with the key phrase “two stops from Bloomingdales.”

When they moved in, the nearby homes were occupied by mainly older working-class families, often city workers whose children didn’t want to stay in the neighborhood, she said. When neighbors learned she had paid \$115,000 for the building, they said it was three times what the house was worth.

In the early 2000s, Ms. Friedman and her second husband, John Friedman, a lawyer, undertook a major renovation of the house. Working with Rick Corsini, a Los Angeles architect, they added a third story with a loft-like, open, modern design, and extended the back of the house.

A wide wall of windows out front above the original brick front created a double-height



A wall of glass opens onto a 25-foot wide limestone terrace facing Manhattan, with views of midtown skyscrapers.
PHOTO: THE CORCORAN GROUP

space, flooding the large kitchen with light. At the rear of the third floor, a large living room features a stone fireplace and a wall of glass opening onto a 25-foot wide limestone terrace facing Manhattan, with views of midtown skyscrapers. An elevator was added, too.

Prices have been rising sharply in Long Island City and nearby neighborhoods for years, with the median one-to-three-family house price jumping 67% to \$1.07 million between 2011 and 2017, according to data from Stribling & Associates. The median condo price is up 69% during the same period, to \$830,000.

The priciest home sale in Long Island City was for \$4 million in December 2015. That 20-foot wide, three-story townhouse is at 21-16 45th Ave. in a small historic district in Hunters Point.

Cary Tamura of Corcoran, who is listing Ms. Friedman's house, said the Dutch Kills firehouse has several advantages, including a cobblestone driveway, a parking garage for rare off-street parking, and a 25-foot-wide footprint. He is listing the house with two other Corcoran brokers, Frans Preidel and Rajan Khanna.



The kitchen PHOTO: THE CORCORAN GROUP

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Patrick Smith, a broker at Stribling & Associates, said the firehouse has a number of advantages, including the garage space and a wide rear garden, but is much farther from the river than the houses in the historic district.

“The price would set a record,” he said. “It is aspirational.”



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