

Work begins on Ridgewood, Queens' biggest project

Essex Capital's 90-unit residential building is designed to offer creative-type tenants a cheaper alternative to Williamsburg, much less Manhattan.



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A developer that has long focused on emerging markets in Manhattan and the outer boroughs released renderings Tuesday of its latest endeavor—the largest residential project underway in Ridgewood, Queens. The project, being built by Essex Capital, will be tailored to creative-class New Yorkers priced out of Brooklyn and Manhattan.

The firm has already begun construction on the 90-unit building at 16-14 and 16-26 Madison St., between Myrtle and Wyckoff avenues. Construction will run through summer of 2016. The property will include a WeWork-style business center designed for renters who work from home (and are largely associated with trendy neighborhoods like Williamsburg), but Essex Capital founder Mitchell Rutter does not want to jump on the Queens-is-the-new-Brooklyn bandwagon. "We view Ridgewood as having an separate identity and a separate desirability from whatever places like Bushwick are offering," said Mr. Rutter, a 1996 *Crain's* 40 Under 40.

Though it is undeniably undergoing gentrification, Ridgewood has a more established working-class residential and retail community than do the gritty former industrial areas of Williamsburg and northern Bushwick that have seen a wave of new residential development. In addition, large swaths of Ridgewood are landmarked, meaning opportunities for new development are limited.

One of those opportunities came knocking in the fall of 2013, when Essex Capital purchased the pair of warehouse buildings a block from the Myrtle-Wyckoff subway station, where both the L and M trains stop. The company paid a reported \$4.7 million—about half the price of what similar development sites are now trading for in the neighborhood.

"This was not a one-off deal for us," Mr. Rutter said, noting that his firm has a practice of buying up small walk-up rentals in markets all over Brooklyn and Queens in order to gather information about the market and inform development-site purchases such as the Ridgewood acquisition.

Because of the relatively low land cost and the fact that they will save on construction costs by building the parking above-grade, Essex Capital hopes to rent the mostly one- and two-bedroom units well below prices in Manhattan and Williamsburg, though exact dollar figures were not available. The building, which will also feature a unique street-level façade to be designed by yet-undecided local artists, was designed by **KSQ Architects**.

During the past two decades, Essex Capital has acquired a number of large development sites in emerging corners of the city, including a full-block parcel in Hudson Yards, and has purchased and repositioned significant commercial assets.

Correction: The L and M trains stop at the Myrtle-Wyckoff stop in Ridgewood, Queens. This fact was misstated in an earlier version of this article, published online Jan. 27, 2015.