Building for the “Commie Corridor”: the projects and players in the territory of NYC’s most left-leaning politicians

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The “Commie Corridor” is a place of contrasts, a tunnel of Queens and Brooklyn neighborhoods whose residents voted for Mayor Zohran Mamdani by the greatest margins and recently elected a new slate of left-leaning local politicians — and whose high rents, advantageous zoning and sense of place beckon private developers.

An analysis by *The Real Deal* of New York City Department of Planning data found that from 2010 to 2024, nearly 100,000 units of housing were brought to market in the areas that make up the corridor, which includes Astoria, Long Island City, Sunnyside, Greenpoint, Williamsburg, East Williamsburg, Fort Greene, Clinton Hill, Sunset Park, Ridgewood, Bushwick and Bedford-Stuyvesant. (Political strategist Michael Lange coined the term in the run-up to last year’s primary.)

The number of units is nearly equivalent to what was built in the rest of Brooklyn and Queens combined during the same period.

The corridor is a political framework, not a real estate one, and unraveling the socialist-development connection is like picking chicken or egg. Developers that the Mamdani-led coalition now finds anathema added so much housing stock in the Commie Corridor that it emerged as a hotspot for Democratic Socialists of America members, many of whom are younger and more affluent.

Meanwhile, their market-rate rents perhaps fostered a dose of skepticism towards developers, priming renters to find Mamdani's controversial freeze-the-rent line attractive, even though the Rent Guidelines Board likely doesn't set their increases. Still, the corridor seems focused on rhetoric, leading leftist pols like Claire Valdez to a decisive win in June's primary for a seat in Congress.

Below, *The Real Deal* traces how some of the city's most significant developments landed in the very neighborhoods that are now hotbeds of anti-development sentiment in New York City and what they are building today.

Zoning, gentrification and political influence

The hallmarks of a highly educated, upwardly mobile young professional and creative population can be found up and down the corridor: food co-ops, thin-line tattoo parlors and nightclubs like Nowadays, dubbed "Zohran's Mar-a-Lago" by Valdez.

Many of these neighborhoods managed to cling onto their “cool” factor despite gentrification. But large-scale, mostly market-rate developments, though strange bedfellows with many of the tenants’ convictions, became embedded in these neighborhoods’ DNA.

Former Mayor Michael Bloomberg’s rezonings along the Williamsburg and Greenpoint waterfronts supercharged the area’s housing production, amid local pushback. The Bloomberg administration paved the way for old warehouses and industrial sites to be turned into retail and residential space. Though officials projected the rezoning of Williamsburg and Greenpoint would add 10,000 units, the 175-acre area added almost 28,000 housing units between 2010 and 2025, roughly 16 percent of which are reserved for people making 80 percent or less of the area median income, according to analysis from the Furman Center.

Zoning and demographic changes similarly reshaped Western Queens’ Long Island City and Astoria, the districts where democratic socialists Mamdani, Valdez and Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez debuted onto the political scene. Mamdani himself decamped to Astoria from his native Morningside Heights, scoring a sweet deal on a rent-stabilized apartment and starting as a foreclosure-prevention counselor for housing nonprofit Chhaya Community Development Corporation about 2019, while the immigrant enclave was in a state of flux amid rising prices and new development.

Yet the luxury high-rises didn’t eliminate socialists arguing in church basements or canvassing door to door.

In fact, the changes may have galvanized left-leaning elected officials to embrace the YIMBY part of the mayor’s platform — the same build-it-and-they-will-come mentality that led to the surge in development.

Take Assembly member Emily Gallagher, a democratic socialist who has represented a district spanning Greenpoint and the Williamsburg waterfront since 2021. She was a housing advocate who championed tenants’ rights in those neighborhoods long before she ran for elected office.

“I fought the sale of Domino Sugar [to Two Trees], the rezoning of it from industrial to residential, because it was such an important job creator for our community and it was a place that had been intentionally excluded from the 2005 rezoning, an important place for good-wage, walk-to-work opportunities,” Gallagher said.

Gallagher still believes that the government should provide housing, but she also now sees a role for developers and has changed her stance on the development. “People are quite happy with the units they get through Two Trees,” she said. “I appreciate the work that they have put in to make good places where people want to stay and live.”

Williamsburg and Greenpoint

Williamsburg has become the gentrification standard bearer after its transformation from artist enclave with longstanding Puerto Rican and Orthodox Jewish populations to hip Soho-adjacent destination. Two Trees set the tone for Williamsburg developments with its ambitious swing at the Domino Sugar Factory. The Walentas' firm bought the site for $185 million in 2012 after the previous developer defaulted on its loans.

Despite having an as-of-right plan in its "back pocket" for a 3.5 million-square-foot project, the team plunged headlong into the Uniform Land Use Review Procedure, according to Two Trees' Dave Lombino.

Two Trees' Sugar Factory in Williamsburg

"If you're going to spend that much of your life on something, you want to love it," he said.

The project's first 1,240 apartments are already fully leased and its 160 condos are 80 percent sold, with another 1,400 units expected to arrive in the next few years. Thousands of other units are also coming to market that date back to decades-old master-planned projects along the waterfront, including the Park Tower Group-led master plan site known as Greenpoint Landing that should bring 5,500 units to the market once complete, and Naftali Group and Access Industries' Williamsburg Wharf that is anticipated to deliver another 360 for-sale condo units on top of the 500 apartments and 89 condos that have already been built in the past several years just a few blocks from the Domino site.

At Greenpoint Landing, Domain Companies and LMXD teamed up with Park Tower Group last year for the project's next phase, which is expected to deliver 1,000 more of the 2,500 units still planned. Two Trees also has plans for another 1,000-plus units on the Williamsburg waterfront with its River Ring project, which was resuscitated this year when it was granted a 421a tax break after the developer raised concerns over moving forward with the project under 485x, the state's replacement for 421a.

Development north of the transit-rich swath of Williamsburg now dominated by residential towers has played out a bit more piecemeal, with Greenpoint's not-ideal G train access and environmental concerns about developments adjacent to superfund site Newtown Creek complicating the prospect of a wholesale upzoning beyond the waterfront. Even so, sizable projects have recently made it through protracted zoning battles to bring a new scale to the formerly low-rise, once solidly Polish community.

An 834-unit rental building developed by Lendlease at 18 India Street, called the Riverie, opened to residents earlier this year to the north of Transmitter Park. Two blocks south of the park, TF Cornerstone has plans for a 1,000-unit project.

A Metropolitan Transportation Authority-owned site at 40-56 Quay Street will be redeveloped by David Picket's Gotham Organization, which received City Council approval to build two towers with 1,324 apartments, including 662 affordable units. The development, called Monitor Point, survived years of pushback from Gallagher and Working Families Party-backed Council member Lincoln Restler on affordability and environmental concerns since it was proposed in 2021.

It got across the finish line in what Restler described as "the first big hairy ULURP" of the Mamdani administration.

"I want to maximize the amount of affordable units that working- and middle-class people can afford right now when we're approving projects," Restler said. The permitting process resulted in a larger project — 1,300 units — and hundreds more affordable homes than first proposed.

Amid the development, rents rose, reaching $2,610 in 2024, up from $1,290 in 2006. Demand kept up: In the same period, the vacancy rate fell to 2 percent from 3 percent, as the neighborhoods nearly doubled in population. But new supply may have kept increases down in recent years; they went up by 3.5 percent from 2017 to 2024, while the borough saw rents rise 8 percent in that time, Furman data shows.

Astoria and Long Island City

Further up the East River, the Queens waterfront similarly saw its industrial sites replaced with luxury high-rises, spurred on by a 2001 rezoning of Long Island City that allowed for a development bonanza over the last several decades. In total, roughly 45,000 units of housing were delivered to this swath of Queens, which includes Mamdani's home Assembly district, nearly all market rate, according to the Furman Center. Other planned projects, like Silverstein Properties' Innovation QNS megaproject, fell apart, sometimes due to political pushback.

Both Long Island City and the Astoria waterfront have remained prime development locations, but a 2010 rezoning of 238 blocks in Astoria prevented developers from going big on some of the neighborhood's best blocks, leaving Long Island City to absorb developers' grandest ambitions for the area.

In Long Island City, which occupies a community board district lumped in with the Woodside and Sunnyside neighborhoods, rents rose to $2,310 from $1,670 from 2006 to 2025, and in Astoria, rents rose to $2,160 from $1,600, according to Furman Center data. Both areas have become significantly wealthier: in Astoria, the median household income rose to $93,000 from $66,000 in the same period, and in Long Island City to $100,000 from $70,000.

The new demographics attracted Rockrose, Silverstein Properties and TF Cornerstone, Property Markets Group and L+M Development Partners among others. They started buying up lots along the East River and near transit hub Court Square.

"Pretty much the Who's Who of the development community is in the area and very active," one commercial broker told *The Real Deal* in 2015, about Long Island City. The area has remained a draw for huge buildings and sprawling projects since then, including BLDG Management's 69-story, 824-unit The Orchard, Queens' tallest building, and Carmel Partners' 66-story, 938-unit tower, the Lumen LIC. In 2024, TF Cornerstone launched leasing at its 1,400-unit, two-building project on Malt Drive at a site it picked up for $285 million in 2018, still the priciest development site buy in the neighborhood.

BLDG Management’s The Orchard in Long Island City

Last year, Long Island City scored a major developmental coup when the City Council voted to rezone 46 blocks of Long Island City, the final neighborhood rezoning under the Adams Administration. The plan is projected to bring another 15,000 homes to the area and received the go-ahead from local Council member Julie Won, after City Hall pledged several billion dollars in infrastructure upgrades.

Local officials have continued to try to strike a balance between demanding concessions from developers and supporting the developers trying to invest in the area.

Last month, the city selected Slate Property Group, Hudson Companies and Volunteers of America – Greater New York to bring 1,000 units to Hunters Point, in the district of democratic socialist State Sen. Kristen Gonzalez, who said that local officials still needed to “set a clear standard for what this development should look like.”

Major upcoming projects include a 600-unit condo project from Tavros Capital and Charney Companies that received $525 million in June 2025 in construction from a group led by Madison Realty Capital and, in Astoria, an emerging Plan B from the remnants of Innovation QNS, a megaproject that would have delivered 3,200 units in housing but fell apart last year after lead developer Silverstein Properties pulled out.

Individual firms from that project have soldiered forward: BedRock Real Estate Partners and an affiliate of L+M Development are working on a 560-unit development at 35-19 Steinway Street which secured funding this month, Domain Companies has a 330-unit building at 35-45 41st Street and a 99-unit building at 35-42 41st Street, and The Hakimian Organization and Cheskie Weisz's CW Realty put forward plans for 234 units across three buildings.

Other large projects have moved forward in fits and starts. The Durst Organization's Hallett's Point project was initially expected to produce 2,400 units across seven buildings when the firm broke ground in 2016, but has yielded just over 1,000 units across three towers as the remaining plans stalled out over a 2018 feud with then-mayor Bill de Blasio and later, a claim that the remaining construction would not work under 485x.

Just around the corner, another massive — and massively delayed — project has shown signs of life. Last year, Newark-based KS Group landed $300 million in construction financing in an effort to resurrect Astoria Cove, which dates back to 2014, when Alma Realty proposed more than 1,700 units at the site. The project fell apart over financing issues and fights over affordable housing numbers, but KS now plans to deliver 2,800 units across three phases of the project.

Despite developers' skirmishes with progressive Council members like Tiffany Cabán and Julie Won in recent years, the area has benefitted from a broader shift in attitude about the need for more housing at all price levels.

In 2022, developer Boris Aronov of Astoria Owners received approval from left-wing Council member Tiffany Cabán for a 1,400-unit project that will bring three towers and an esplanade to a rapidly developing peninsula just north of Astoria. Cabán's support ended a nearly decade-long journey for Aronov, who faced pushback over scope and affordability.

Cabán fought for deeper affordability on the project while also admitting that the rezoning was a better alternative than a "'last mile' facility where some massive corporation like Amazon would pay our neighbors garbage wages for nonstop, back-breaking work," as she wrote in a social media post at the time.

Won, who proclaimed that the planned Astoria megadevelopment Innovation QNS had "no political support" after the team behind the project broke up last year, now touts the latest neighborhood rezoning taking place in Long Island City on her website.

"Julie led the fight for the OneLIC Neighborhood Plan, the largest rezoning in New York City in 25 years, securing $2 billion in community investments and historic levels of new housing", her website reads.

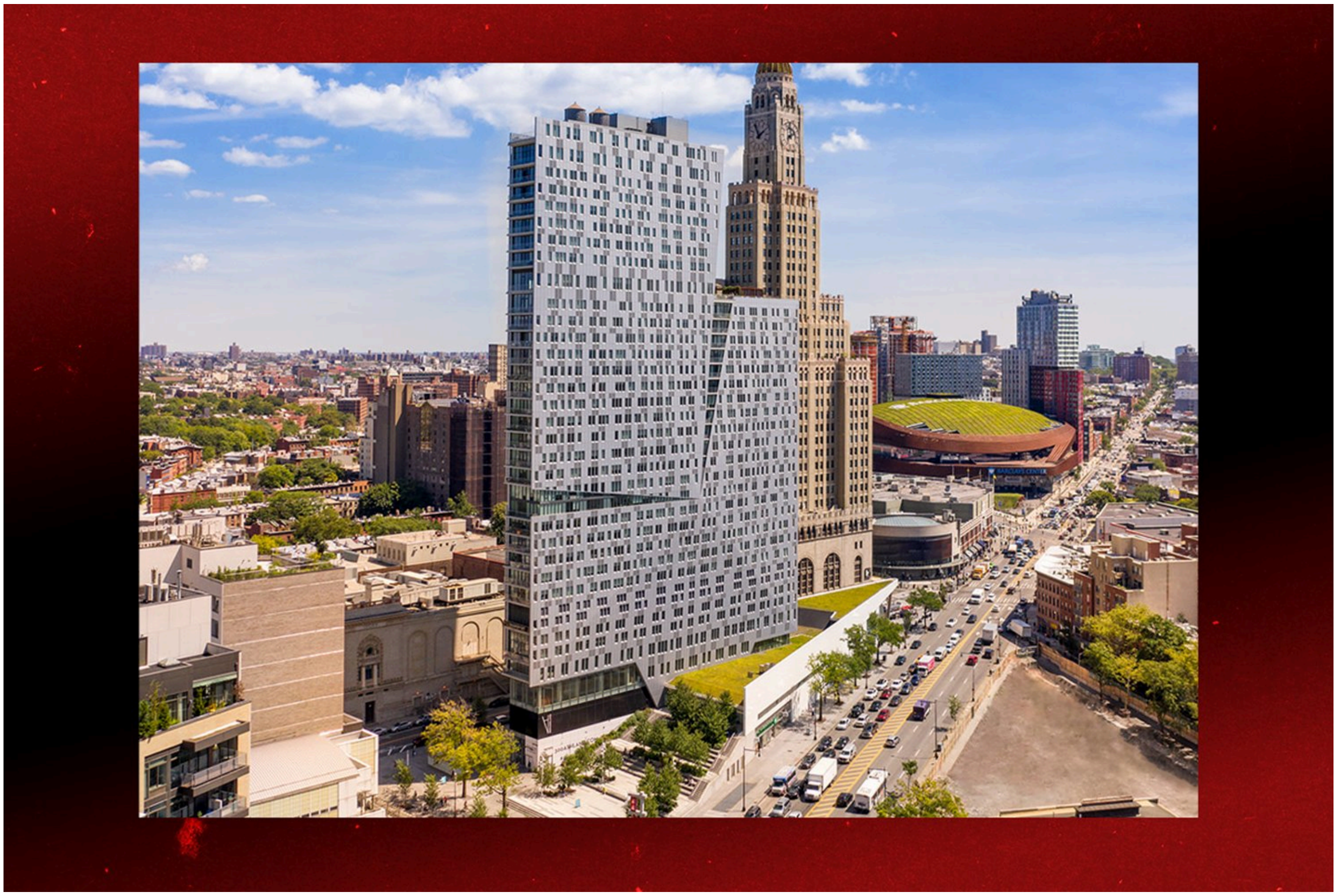
Central Brooklyn

Fort Greene and Clinton Hill, along with parts of Bedford-Stuyvesant and Crown Heights, comprise the Central Brooklyn tranche of Lange's leftist strongholds.

Though commonly classified as part of Brownstone Brooklyn, this patch of the borough has market-rate rentals alongside NYCHA public housing complexes, plus a smattering of new and in-progress developments, mostly along its perimeter. These neighborhoods have long been a focal point in the gentrification story, as well-heeled newcomers displace largely middle-class Black and Caribbean-American residents, accentuated by the area's largely low-rise housing stock ripe for renovation by affluent families looking for a stoop and backyard to call their own. Unlike industrial stretches of Williamsburg or LIC, the bulk of these Central Brooklyn neighborhoods have long been solidly residential.

Deed theft has become a political lightning rod in the area, indicating that even homeowners who have held onto brownstones for generations feel the threat of displacement alongside their renter neighbors facing rapid rent increases over the past two decades.

A 2004 Downtown Brooklyn rezoning allowed for higher-density residential development in parts of Fort Greene, leading to major projects like Two Trees' 379-unit rental building at 300 Ashland Place and Gotham's 500-plus-unit building at 250 Ashland Place. Unlike the mega-projects along the Brooklyn and Queens waterfronts, other top developments here are typically no more than a few hundred units. Passed in 2025, the Atlantic Avenue Mixed Use Plan, which upzones an industrial corridor for up to 4,600 new units on a formerly industrial stretch of Atlantic Avenue that spans Clinton Hill, Bed-Stuy and Crown Heights, could herald a development boom.



Two Trees' Ashland Place in Fort Greene

Rents have roughly doubled in neighborhoods like Bed-Stuy in the last two decades, while vacancy rates have plummeted.

The Allure Group finished construction on a 320-unit building at 270 Nostrand Avenue last year, among the neighborhood's largest new residential developments. Rockrose recently launched leasing at its 600-unit mixed-use tower at 98 Dekalb Avenue, which it bought for $81 million in 2020.

Large projects awaiting construction near Fort Greene include the long-delayed Pacific Park megadevelopment's second phase slated to deck over the Atlantic Terminal railyards.

Concern about displacement of longtime residents still pervades development planning.

"We are living in a capitalist world, but how can we make sure that we democratize this process of housing development?" local democratic socialist Assembly member Phara Souffrant Forrest has said, referring to her push with local democratic socialist State Sen. Jabari Brisport to redevelop a vacant state-owned site at 1024 Fulton Street.

Fellow DSA-aligned politicians looking to build new housing in the area include social media-savvy Council member Chi Ossé and Eon Huntley, the recent state legislative primary winner who beat an incumbent favored by big real estate donors.

L+M Development Partners, SMJ Development and the city's Department of Housing Preservation and Development kicked off a ULURP process earlier this year for a 12-building, 2,035-unit mixed-use project called Fulton Park, one of the largest new developments in central Brooklyn in years. Ossé, who represents the neighborhood, has yet to take a position on the development, but a spokesperson for the Council member previously told *TRD* that he would be "advocating for a resident vote to ensure current residents have a voice throughout this process.

Alloy, GFP and the NYC Educational Construction Fund also kicked off a ULURP process in July on a 1,500-unit development at 240 Nassau Street in Forrest and progressive Council member Crystal Hudson's district with approximately 300 affordable homes, among the first to make use of new high-density residential districts created by City of Yes zoning amendments.

Forrest acknowledged Alloy's community outreach efforts, but added, "so far the community's only getting 20 percent affordability, the promise of neighborhood seats at a new school and a new community center."

Bushwick and Ridgewood

Bushwick, Ridgewood and parts of East Williamsburg, despite their outsized cultural footprint and rapidly increasing rents, haven't seen the same pace of large-scale housing production as neighboring parts of the corridor.

These neighborhoods, which Lange has characterized as "left for dead half a century ago, yet now boasting higher median rents than parts of the Upper East Side," are situated in the middle of New York's Seventh Congressional District and contain the highest concentration of millennials and renters of any district in the nation.

Median rent in Bushwick increased from $1,290 in 2006 to $2,500 in 2024, a 93.8 percent increase, while the rental vacancy rate dropped from 5.2 percent in 2010 to 3.1 percent in 2024. The neighborhood added 7,418 new housing units from 2010 to 2025 across buildings with four or more units, with 13 percent of those new units targeted for households earning between 80 and 165 percent AMI.

Bushwick's largest developments have taken place on the former location of the Rheingold Brewery, with just two projects developed respectively by All Year Living and The Rabsky Group delivering more than 500 units since 2010.

Rent in lower-rise Ridgewood and largely industrial Maspeth saw less of an increase over the same period, rising 25 percent between 2006 and 2024. The area added just 975 new units in buildings with four or more units, with just seven percent set aside for those making between 80 and 165 percent AMI, according to Furman Center data.

In just the year-long period ended June 2026, however, Ridgewood saw rents climb by 4.2 percent, according to an MNS Real Estate report that doesn't include Maspeth in the average.

Hundreds of those young, affluent renters likely live in developments like The Rabsky Group's 500-unit rental building at 10 Monteith Street or the mammoth 900-unit project at 54 Noll Street and 123 Melrose Street known as the Denizen that was developed by Yoel Goldman's All Year Living and later sold after the development firm went bankrupt. Both projects were built on the former brewery site.

The Rabsky Group's 10 Monteith Street (ODA Architecture)

Attempts at a major rezoning across a 300-block expanse of Bushwick stalled during the Bill de Blasio administration, while spot rezonings of industrial sites just across the Queens border in Ridgewood have been sporadic, even as newcomers have flocked there

Still, Hudson Companies is planning a 311-unit mixed-use building at 89 Maspeth Avenue in East Williamsburg that will be 100 percent affordable as part of the Greenpoint Hospital redevelopment now known as Cooper Park Commons.

“It was a very smooth ULURP,” said Hudson Companies’ Ernesto Padron of the project, which is the second phase of a city-led RFP that included a 200-bed homeless shelter that was completed earlier this year. “I think in large part to it being 100 percent affordable [and] I think it’s also activating a site that had previously been essentially kind of fenced off from the neighborhood.”

Democratic socialist Samantha Kattan won the primary for New York State Assembly here, in the district formerly held by Valdez that includes parts of Ridgewood, along with Sunnyside and a chunk of Long Island City. Like others in the movement, she has a background in co-op and tenant organizing for the Urban Homesteading Assistance Board.

Housing scarcity and rising costs are primary concerns for Kattan, with public development and more widespread rent stabilization offering potential solutions that appeal directly to the leftist bloc that helped her win by a decisive 50-point margin over both primary challengers.

“I knew that we needed more tenant advocates, organizers in the legislature, that was definitely part of my motivation for running,” she said the week of her primary win. “I think there’s a lot that we can do at the state level to expand different ownership models of housing, like social housing.”