

Sitting Pretty by the Sea

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QUEENS has suffered a greater drop in home sales over the last year than the other boroughs. Significantly more people are losing their houses to foreclosure there than in the rest of the city, data show — particularly in the southern section.

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Rebecca McAlpin for The New York Times
AGAINST THE TIDE The Breakers, like the rest of Arverne by the Sea in Queens, seems healthy.

But there is a bright spot, at least in Arverne: a 117-acre mixed-use development of houses, condominiums and stores called Arverne by the Sea, on the Rockaway Peninsula along the Atlantic, between Beach 62nd and 80th Streets.

The \$1 billion project already has four of six planned microneighborhoods: the Sands, Ocean Breeze, Palmers Landing and the Breakers. It has continued to post strong sales and low foreclosure rates, even as similar nearby developments have struggled, according to brokers and community leaders, as well as its [Long Island](#)-based developer, Benjamin-Beechwood, a partnership between the Benjamin Development Company and the Beechwood Organization.

Those successes seem ready to be repeated with the fifth neighborhood, the Dunes — given its brisk sales pace.

Since June, when marketing began for the 100 homes that will make up the first phase in the Dunes, more than 50 have sold, said Gerry Ronski, project manager for Benjamin-Beechwood.

Like all the houses in Arverne, those at the Dunes are attached two-families. Therein lies one factor in their popularity, said Mr. Ronski: rental income can offset mortgage costs. Also, buyers of the buildings, which list for \$569,000 to \$995,000, receive 20-year property-tax abatements, because Arverne is in an urban-renewal area.

Mr. Ronski described the homes as fancier than many in Queens, with 2,800 to 3,400 square feet across three stories, and details like central air-conditioning.

“These aren’t the kind with air-conditioners built into the outside walls,” he said, adding that the houses, now under construction, would be ready in a year.

Outdoors, the unusual mix of suburban and urban motifs — velvety picket-fenced lawns line compact, walkable blocks — may make it more appealing than the competition in the area.

Still, there is no escaping the large, barren tracts a few blocks away, cleared since the 1970s.

Benjamin-Beechwood vows that these are about to morph. Construction starts on a retail plaza at the A train stop at Beach 67th Street next month, and 50 percent of the 11 retail spaces are leased, Mr. Ronski said — although he did not provide specifics.

Next year the plaza, which was a city requirement, is to be joined across the street by a 55,000-square-foot Super Stop and Shop grocery store. Benjamin-Beechwood was also required to put up the Peninsula Preparatory Academy charter school, which opened last week.

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Its final phase — the Tides, with 886 luxury condos — is planned for 2010.

For some community leaders, Arverne by the Sea's steady progress is a welcome improvement for the area, which is lined with empty tracts.

Part of that extra space had been earmarked for Arverne East, a proposal for 1,650 homes, most market-rate, along a windswept 92-acre stretch from Beach 32nd Street to 56th Streets. The project, which included restaurants, theaters and a nature preserve, was to have broken ground this summer

But in April, a spokeswoman for the developers — the Bluestone Organization; Triangle Equities; and L & M Equities — announced that the deteriorating housing market had necessitated at least a yearlong delay.

In a recent telephone interview, Eric Bluestone, one partner, cited city bureaucracy in the snags besetting Arverne East.

"This is a complicated project that requires a myriad of approvals," he said. "We are comfortable knowing that Arverne by the Sea was successful."