

### 35 Three-Family Town Houses in Melrose Commons; New Homes for South Bronx

On a vast, mostly vacant and formerly rubble-strewn expanse of the South Bronx, 35 three-family town houses, their two-tone facades set back behind modest gates and greenery, have been snatched up by eager buyers.

Franklin Delano Roosevelt apparently would have been pleased.

"It's been a long struggle within the urban renewal area called Melrose Commons," said Yolanda Garcia, director of Nos Quedamos (We Stay), a community group that has fought to retain residents in the 35-block area between East 156th Street, East 163rd Street, Brook and Park Avenues.

"It's 65 percent vacant, and it hasn't been looked after since F.D.R. came here in 1936 and made a grand speech about urban renewal," Ms. Garcia said. "Nothing happened." Until now. "This is the first project in the ground," Ms. Garcia said.

The 35 three-family homes, on Elton Avenue between 156th and 159th Streets, are called Plaza de Los Angeles. They were constructed with subsidies under the Partnership New Homes Program, a public-private initiative of the New York City Department of Housing Preservation and Development and the New York

City Housing Partnership, with further support from the New York State Affordable Housing Corporation and the Bronx borough president's office.

Thirty-one of the homes have gone to contract, with 17 of those already closed, "and more than enough people who want the other four," Ms. Garcia said. The average price was \$320,000; government subsidies provided \$94,000, and the buyers paid the rest. Buyers had to have annual household incomes between \$32,000 and \$70,950.

Carol Abrams, a spokeswoman for the housing department, said each home has an owner's duplex and two rental units. "The owner's apartment has three bedrooms and two full baths," she said. "There is a one-bedroom rental on the second floor and a two-bedroom rental on the third floor," with buyers allowed to charge market-rate rents. Each home has a yard and parking in the rear.

Magnus Magnusson of the architectural firm Larsen Shein Ginsberg + Magnusson, which designed the houses, said: "It's common to see Partnership homes where the buildings are set back 25 feet to allow a car to park in front. We felt the street should be given to people, so we



*Plaza de Los Angeles*

placed the cars in the back -- more like traditional New York town houses." The facades, he said, are part brick, part cast stone, "and the combination creates a lively front, so it's not monotonous."

Ms. Garcia said: "We ran workshops here on how people really want to live. You look at the houses and they accent everything we spoke about: light, air, quality design, color palate, trees."

One feature, aimed particularly at two-income families, she said, is country kitchens with large open counters, "so when the mother comes home from work she can keep an eye on the children, help with homework, while cooking the meal."

Other bright spots are envisioned for Melrose Commons. "The

next project is already a hole in the ground for La Puerta de Vitalidad, a 61-unit apartment building on Third Avenue at East 158th Street," Ms. Garcia said. And 33 more three-family homes, a block from Plaza de Los Angeles, are on the drawing board.

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