

REAL ESTATE | LIVING IN

Murray Hill for Family Living

By ALISON GREGOR AUG. 13, 2014

A decade ago, when people asked Eve Moskowitz Parness where she lived, the Murray Hill resident frequently put them off with the vague answer “Midtown East.” Though she liked her Manhattan neighborhood, Ms. Parness said that, as a student, she was embarrassed to be associated with Murray Hill, particularly the bar scene on Third Avenue, with its reputation as a postgraduate playground.

However, in the past few years, many more families with young children have been moving to Murray Hill.

“I walk around, and all I see are people with baby strollers,” said Ms. Parness, who has a toddler and lives in a two-bedroom apartment she bought with her husband in 2012.

The change has not gone unnoticed by longtime residents, said Diane G. Bartow, the president of the Murray Hill Neighborhood Association, who has lived there for more than 30 years.

“For about the last three years, there’s been a big change in the demographics of the area,” she said. In addition to the young college graduates, “it was a population that skewed older, but now we’re seeing a lot of families with little children moving to the area, staying in the area.”

Murray Hill runs from 40th Street down to about 27th Street, and from Fifth Avenue over to the East River, according to the neighborhood association. The small Murray Hill Historic District between Lexington and Park Avenues is largely 19th-century brownstones and rowhouses, while Park Avenue has towers with co-ops and high-end rental apartments. Third Avenue, with shops, restaurants and bars, is a bit of a divider. Housing to the east trends toward large rental and condo

buildings, some of which attract recent college graduates and young professionals. Around 41,500 residents live in a roughly 85-block area, according to the 2010 census.

Ms. Parness had misgivings about buying a home in the neighborhood with her husband. “I was a little concerned the area was too young for families,” she said. But the price they paid for their 1,250-square-foot co-op with lots of closet space, which Ms. Parness would not reveal, was hard to beat in other Manhattan neighborhoods, she said. (Two-bedroom co-ops now typically sell for \$1.2 million to \$1.8 million in Murray Hill, brokers said.) Initially, Ms. Parness worried that she would have to travel with her baby to the Upper East Side or TriBeCa for children’s programs, so she was glad to learn the popular Music for Aardvarks and Other Mammals program was offered in Murray Hill. Children’s activities are also provided by Kidville and Gymboree Play and Music center.

Such amenities, along with Ms. Parness’s discovery of the 2.8-acre St. Vartan Park, with its big playground that is “busy all day long,” convinced her that she had made the right decision to stay in Murray Hill. Whether she and her husband remain in the neighborhood long term will depend upon the schools, she said. Education is another evolving facet of Murray Hill, which last year opened its second elementary, Public School 281, the River School.

Ms. Parness said she no longer glosses over the name of her neighborhood when asked. “Now I’m very proud to say I live in Murray Hill, because it’s thriving and developing and growing,” she said.

What You’ll Find

Tucked between Midtown Manhattan on the north and Kips Bay on the south, Murray Hill is ideal for those seeking a pedestrian commute. Lois Peltz, a resident for almost two years, said she and her husband bought a one-bedroom apartment on Park Avenue because it was a five-minute walk from where they work. “I really love Murray Hill, much more than I expected,” Ms. Peltz said. “It’s like a quiet oasis,” she said.

Having the Queens-Midtown Tunnel in the neighborhood is both a blessing and a curse. Ms. Peltz said she loved having the tunnel for the

ease of traveling to her weekend home on Long Island. However, the tunnel, as the entry to Manhattan for many visitors arriving at New York City's airports, also creates a huge amount of traffic; dealing with that is a continuing battle, said Ms. Bartow of the neighborhood association.

Several development projects have recently compounded the traffic problem, including two rental towers with a total of 800 units being built at 626 First Avenue and new water mains being installed on 34th Street, she said.

The Bloomberg administration's plan for rezoning Midtown East, which would have allowed the building of towers twice the size of those currently permitted in parts of the area, was opposed by many residents, who cited a lack of adequate infrastructure to support that kind of growth, Ms. Bartow said. Noting that rezoning is still under consideration, she said, "We're keeping an eye on it."

What You'll Pay

After languishing in the wake of the recession of 2008 and 2009, home prices in the neighborhood have increased in the past 18 months, brokers said. "New development pricing is trending upward, and 325 Lexington is an example of a new condo where prices will start at \$2,000 per square foot," said Julie Perlin, a broker with Stribling and Associates who has lived in Murray Hill for 30 years.

Condos in the neighborhood generally start around \$700,000 to \$800,000 for studios and run up to \$2.9 million or more for three-bedrooms, she said. Most housing in Murray Hill is made up of co-ops, with studios running from \$400,000 to \$500,000; one-bedrooms from \$600,000 to \$1.1 million; two-bedrooms from \$1.2 million to \$1.8 million; and three-bedrooms from \$1.9 million and up, Ms. Perlin said.

The historic district includes prewar co-ops and elegant townhouses. In early August, active townhouse listings in the Murray Hill-Kips Bay area ranged from \$3.5 million to \$8.2 million, according to data from Town Residential.

Rental apartments in Murray Hill range from about \$2,200 to \$2,400 a month for a renovated studio to about \$4,400 a month for a two-bedroom, said Mattie Weiser, a Town Residential broker.

The Commute

With major employers, including law firms, hedge funds, banks and medical facilities like the NYU Langone Medical Center, in or near Murray Hill, many residents walk to work. The 4, 5 and 6 subway lines run along Park Avenue, and the 7 train along 42nd Street. Grand Central Terminal is on the edge of Murray Hill, providing access to the Times Square shuttle as well as to Metro-North regional trains. The express bus service that began a few years ago along First and Second Avenues has been popular, Ms. Bartow said.

What to Do

Several new hotels have opened recently in Murray Hill and nearby, adding vitality to the neighborhood as well as new services, said Susan Rubell, a neighborhood resident and a broker with RP Miller & Associates. The Archer Hotel on West 38th Street has the chef David Burke's Spyglass Rooftop Bar and views of the Empire State Building. The Langham Place, Fifth Avenue has a spa, and the extended-stay hotel the William on East 39th Street recently opened a restaurant called the Peacock that serves British fare, she said. Scandinavia House on Park Avenue, with a restaurant, shop, films, exhibitions and a children's play area, attracts residents, as does the Morgan Library and Museum.

The Schools

So many families with young children have moved into Murray Hill recently that the day care facilities in the area, only a handful, are spread thin, Ms. Bartow said. Public School 281, the River School, which will eventually teach prekindergarten through Grade 5, opened in 2013 and currently has 78 students enrolled. Public School 116, Mary Lindley Murray School, which is prekindergarten through Grade 5, received an A on its most recent student progress report.

The History

The name Murray Hill comes from Mary and Robert Murray, Pennsylvania Quakers who built a large home and farm between 33rd and 39th Streets in the 18th century. While the Murrays named their home Belmont, it was popularly called "Murray Hill" as it was built on a hill, which no longer exists, at what is now Park Avenue and 36th Street.

Correction: August 24, 2014

The Living In column last Sunday, about Murray Hill in Manhattan, misstated the highest grade at Public School 116, Mary Lindley Murray School. It is Grade 5, not Grade 6.

A version of this article appears in print on August 17, 2014, on page RE9 of the New York edition with the headline: Becoming Family-Friendlier.

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