#### Emily Myers (00:01):

I'm Emily Myers, and this is the Brick Underground Podcast, covering everything you need to know about New York city real estate, whether you're buying, selling, renting, or renovating. In this episode, we are putting the spotlight on Queens and specifically buying and selling there. It's true that Manhattan and Brooklyn hogs a lot of the real estate headlines, but Queens is the largest borough in terms of area and second to Brooklyn in population with 2.3 million people. So what's the story in Queens? Where are the deals? What should you be paying? To get into the narrative of Queens I'm joined by Bianca Colasuonno a broker with Compass who has been representing buyers and sellers in the borough for 17 years. Bianca. Hi.

Bianca Colasuonno (<u>00:41</u>):

Hi, Emily. Thank you so much for having me.

### Emily Myers (00:43):

It's great to have you on the podcast. So looking at some of the most recent numbers, it seems that the real estate trends in Queens are in many ways, quite similar to Brooklyn. There's a low inventory, but lots of sales and rising prices. Although of course, even though those trends are playing out similarly, you're dealing with different price points in the two boroughs. So, so what are you seeing on the ground at the moment?

#### Bianca Colasuonno (<u>01:05</u>):

I mean, we are seeing a lot of buyer activity and it's certainly picked up. Of course, of course, what we saw in 2020 was a changing market and a market that was, there was a lot of uncertainty, but now we're seeing prices really going up in all parts of Queens. And we're seeing inventory drop. And what's really interesting is we're seeing areas further out from the city, actually more desirable for people. In, in many ways before people want us to be closer to Manhattan. And now areas that aren't serviced by public transportation as well are seeing a huge revitalization and a lot of interest.

#### Emily Myers (01:35):

And that is being pushed by sort of shifts in work culture, people working from home is it? I mean, are you still going to need a car? You're still gonna need to get around.

### Bianca Colasuonno (<u>01:44</u>):

Hmm. It's interesting. I think people may want a car, right? And it could be that people are looking to, to kind of acquire a car, maybe people in New York city thought, well, we didn't need a car and we're going to be subway dependent. And in Queens you can really have a car. It's not so much like other parts of the city where having a car is such a luxury item. In Queens there's a lot of parking. A lot of private homes do offer parking. So people that may want to rely on a car more and less on public transportation maybe being drawn further out from the city. And I think people like the detached feel of further east. So they're seeing that there's a lot of value in those neighborhoods as well.

#### Emily Myers (02:19):

Wow. So there's a lot of buying that you, like you say, being pushed, pushed east, you're seeing a lot more activity there are you? Rather than perhaps closer to Manhattan, Long Island city?

#### Bianca Colasuonno (02:27):

Yep. The lowest inventory areas are the areas where there's the fewest month's supply are the farthest east. So you're looking mostly at Southeast Queens like Queens Village and those neighborhoods, which you don't hear about too much—are areas where it's really hard to find something right now. And then that's followed by north east Queen. So like Bayside and those neighborhoods. And again, you're almost in a suburban kind of detached feel in many ways. The Northern part of Queens does have co-op buildings and things like that, but definitely a lot of freestanding homes and homes that are detached.

### Emily Myers (02:58):

When people are coming to, to talk about buying In Queens are people very familiar with the borough or are you having to do a lot of sort of explaining about how the borough is laid out?

### Bianca Colasuonno (<u>03:07</u>):

So interesting that you asked that. I mean, we used to have to kind of sell Queens to people. It was definitely something, it was a bit of an unknown quantity, but I think people are becoming more familiar with it when they come to us now. We have less of those people saying like what's Queens like? And we have no idea what it's like. So I think more people are interested in Queens specifically. I think there's a lot of things drawing people to Queens, which is, which is really, really exciting.

#### Emily Myers (03:30):

How have you seen it change in the time that you've been working in Queens?

#### Bianca Colasuonno (03:35):

Oh, I mean, Queens has become cool. The coolness factor has certainly gone up. I mean you hear a lot about Brooklyn, but people were kind of overlooking Queens, I think, but really there's so much of Queens that's that's not really undiscovered undiscovered anymore, but certainly is much more attractive to people. I think that diversity of culture, which really I think is something that attracts people to Queens so much. I mean, you can still go into such culturally specific shops in Queens. Like, let's say you want certain spaces and you want to experiment, you can still find that in Queens, which is so awesome. You don't need to go to Whole Foods to get like authentic Greek feta. Like you can actually go and get that. And I think that's something that's so cool about Queens. I think people also just love like the views of Queens, right? Like you have an awesome view of Manhattan from, of course the waterfront, but all the way up to Sunnyside and Woodside on a higher floor, you can see the Manhattan skylineAnd out in Bayside gorgeous views of the water. I mean, you know, really, really pretty views. I think, I think that's, that's something that's very appreciated in Queens. The Parkland of Queens and all the open space you have has really drawn people in. And I think again, like the variability of the neighborhoods, you know, you can get a well-established neighborhood in a somewhat reasonable price, you know, and that's what I think is very, very attractive for people who are thinking of where they want to make their next home.

### Emily Myers (04:56):

According to market reports prepared by Douglas Elliman, the median sales price in Queens Rose year over year in the last quarter to reach \$660,000. It's the second highest level on record, I think. And the number of sales also increased year over year for the first time in four quarters and listing inventory expanded year over year for the third straight quarter. I mean, that's good news for sellers?

### Bianca Colasuonno (05:20):

I think it's a mixed picture, right? I think it's good news for some sellers. I think it's really good news for sellers of one family homes. I think that part of the market is expanding quickly and I actually think that's something that's been replicated on a national level, even right? We're seeing prices nationally up the highest they've ever been. And I think Queens single family homes, there's a lot of draw. There's a lot of interest in that type of property, but of course, Queens is made up of all types of homes, right? You have single family have multifamily, co-ops, condos, and then of course, commercial buildings. So for properties like multi-family homes, prices are more flat. So I think that that price increase is really just reflected in a part of the market. Condo prices, again, pretty flat. So if you're a seller of a condo, you know, it really, it really is a mixed picture for sure.

### Emily Myers (06:06):

Interesting. and so with regards to some of those new developments, I mean Long Island city has seen a lot of activity with new developments recently or in the past couple of years. So is Queens the place to go if you want to deal? I mean, how does pricing for a new condo in Queens compare to Brooklyn or Manhattan?

# Bianca Colasuonno (<u>06:24</u>):

Well, it's still more affordable than of course, you know, downtown Brooklyn or the heart of Brooklyn or parts of Manhattan, for sure. And I think that, you know, prices being flat, you can still get incentives, in new construction for sure. Prices had come down a bit, but I think brand new construction—I think developers are trying to hold the line in pricing, but they may be offering specific incentives on things like, potentially paying transfer taxes, offering amenities at a discount, even paying common charges potentially for six months or a year for a new purchase. So I think in that way, they're trying to incentivize purchasers without, without lowering prices. And I also think within buildings, if you have a unit that may be less desirable, let's say it's a low floor unit, a unit that's been available for a while. Those type of units, you can certainly, you can certainly look to negotiate on, for sure.

### Emily Myers (07:13):

So as a buyer, you're looking for specific units then as well that had been on the market for awhile?

### Bianca Colasuonno (07:18):

Yeah. Buyers, I think, you know, across the board are looking at days on market and you can get a deal by looking at something that's been on the market awhile.

### Emily Myers (07:27):

And you get the same sort of amenities for less money or the same space for less money compared to... You were saying, prices are lower than Brooklyn and Manhattan. I mean, are you getting the same amenities and space?

### Bianca Colasuonno (07:40):

I mean, you can, you can, but I mean, of course the highest, highest level buildings in Manhattan are still going to be the highest level buildings in the city, but Long Island city is offering great opportunities for people and you can get things like parking in some cases, which can be hard to come by and other parts of the city. So there are opportunities to, to avail yourselves of other things.

#### Emily Myers (07:59):

But you're saying at this point then with this interest in the sort of eastern parts of Queens that the lowest inventory areas are single family homes, that's, what's sort of hottest in the borough.

### Bianca Colasuonno (08:14):

Yeah, absolutely. Absolutely. And that is again, I think, I think you touched on it earlier, just talking about people's tastes changing, about where they want to live and how they want to live. And do they want to live in a building where they need to enter an elevator to access their apartment? You know, I think that there was a time when the condo buyer was a very different buyer than the single family home buyer. But I think the pandemic has blurred those lines. We see people saying, you know what? I'm opting out of a condo and I'm thinking of a house instead. I think there's, there are some, you know, it's a give and a take because owning a home, there's a lot of requirements for maintenance that you wouldn't necessarily have in a building per se, but you'd have some advantages. I think people like the multi-level living that a house can offer people, because you just have that, you have the variability in space. If you're going to be in your home all the time, you like to have that as opposed to being on one level all the time. I also think that carrying costs for houses are something people are considering but you're getting more for your money, right? You may be getting a parking space as we discussed. You may be getting a little yard or a garden. You can get a place to sit outside that's private. So all of these, these things are really, really interesting to buyers. And I think that's, what's drawing people into the single family market.

#### Emily Myers (09:25):

And are people interested in perhaps a two family home?

### Bianca Colasuonno (09:28):

Yeah. I mean, there, there is a segment of the population that is, that is interested in that of course. It can offset your living costs if you're living in the other unit with rents having fallen a bit. I think that that might've changed the calculus for some people. We also see some people taking houses that would have been converted from a one into a two at some point, and converting them back or using them as a one so less interested in the rental portion of it. And also, you know, tenant issues are something people are very nervous about. You know, there's been a lot in the press about tenants and problem tenants, and that can really scare people. It kind of gets into people's psyche if they've never owned before, some people are very nervous about becoming a landlord for the first time.

#### Emily Myers (10:09):

Yes. The rent laws that were ushered in two years ago have made it perhaps a bit more complicated to ask a tenant to leave say...

### Bianca Colasuonno (10:17):

I think there's a lot of fear about that. I really do. I think it's, it's people are nervous about it. And what's interesting in terms of negotiating for purchasers who are looking at buying a house with a tenant in it, we see a lot of negotiations around tenancy. Will the tenants stay? Will the tenant be asked to leave? How do we handle that in a situation where you really can't ask a tenant to leave and you really have to work with them?As a sellers representative, ideally, where we're always selling it with the tenant, you know, we always are trying to keep the tenant there. It's easier. The process is smoother and if it's a good tenant, you know, there's no reason not to, but as a buyer's representative, a lot of people,

especially buyer's attorneys are very nervous about taking on someone else's tenant, not really knowing the full history of what may have happened. So I think it's, it's definitely a point of a point of negotiation, for sure.

New Speaker (<u>11:04</u>): So buyers are asking for discounts, are they?

Bianca Colasuonno (<u>11:07</u>):

I think in some cases that's one of the things you can push on in a competitive bidding situation where you can say, you know what, I'll take your tenant—and it can help to elevate your offer above others, where they may ask for a tenant to be out.

# Emily Myers (11:19):

We have articles on every aspect of buying, selling, and renting in New York City at brickunderground.com, including comprehensive guides to closing costs, a timeline for selling your apartment. And in our series on neighborhood secrets, we have insider guides to some of the areas in Queens, Sunnyside, Woodside, Ridgewood Jackson Heights, and our market reports also take a look at data on deals and leases, which can help you navigate your housing goals, whatever they are. And we also love answering your questions. So please do get in touch either via the website or @brickU on Twitter and @brickunderground on Facebook, I'm talking to Bianca Colasuonno, a broker with Compass. So yeah, you've been talking really about the one-family buildings being very hot at the moment. What's the price point that is getting the most bites in Queens right now?

### Bianca Colasuonno (12:09):

I would say anywhere between \$950,000 and \$1.1 million. It really depends on where you are and what neighborhood you're in. Because as I mentioned earlier, Queens Village and those areas, the price point is considerably lower. And Queens is such a diverse borough in terms of pricing, but certainly condition is, is really, really important. So in any part of the borough in any price range, condition is really driving the market. If one families are in good shape and they're being marketed well, those are the type of homes that are selling quickly.

Emily Myers (12:37):

Is there advice in there for sellers?

# Bianca Colasuonno (12:39):

Don't skimp on preparing your home for sale and that is something that sellers are too quick to do, sometimes they don't want to invest the money. And unfortunately you're leaving a lot of money on the table and a lot of time on the market. So it's very, very important to get that home looking as good as you possibly can and taking advantage of things like paint, which are so easy to do. If you have to do a little bit more work, like even a light renovation in certain areas, it's very much worth it. And we're seeing buyers that are just not too interested in doing this type of work. And if they come into a space where they feel they can move right in, you're going to open, you're going to open the doors to so many more buyers. Uand also the photography is so important because people do not want to come out so much during a pandemic and take a look at a home that they're not excited about before they get there.

Emily Myers (13:22):

Interesting. We recently wrote about some of the no fee renovation loans you can get from at least three of the major real estate brokerages in New York, including Compass. This is obviously where a buyer can do upgrades with the help from a real estate firm that they are using and then pay for the work with the money from the sale. So if you're advising a seller on getting that place ready for market, what should they prioritize? You've mentioned paint, but smaller upgrades? I mean, should you change the bathroom?

# Bianca Colasuonno (13:49):

You could really depends on the house. You have to keep in mind that, of course, if you're going to be under renovation, that's going to take quite a while to do and the market is strong right now. You don't want to waste too much time during a renovation. So you do want to be careful. I mean, right now we're in a hot market. Right now, timing, seasonally wise, it's a great time. So if you think your renovation is going to take you six months and you're going to be in the fall at that point, you want to carefully consider that. But I would say yes, avail yourself of those products. I think the easy ones are decluttering. Of course, we all talk about it, but it's so, so important. And it's easy. It's basically free. And use the people that you're using as professionals. Rely on their advice, right? Your broker can help you, but you can also have a staging company come in and can help work with the pieces you already have in the space. These are not high cost items to kind of get the property in good shape. And one secret tip is always clean the windows inside and out. That's something people overlook. And I think it's so, so important because that sun shining through the windows. It makes a huge difference when the windows are dirty, you don't realize it, but subconsciously lighting is everything.

### Emily Myers (14:47):

And that's a great tip. You mentioned photography. So are tips on how to get the best photographs of your listing?

### Bianca Colasuonno (14:54):

Well, I would again think of a sparse space, right? Think of a space that's open and clean and fresh and bright. Those are the really important tips and those are things that you can do. A lot of it at a very kind of low cost situation. I would avoid dark color paints or accent walls. They're fun in real life, but photography, when you look at an accent while it really draws your eyes in a really awkward way at times. So think of neutral paints and definitely think of a clean space. I always say, look at a West Elm catalog, or look at Pottery Barn, look at how they're decorating. I mean, you know, you don't have to emulate their style necessarily, but that open, clean minimalist feel really works well in photography.

### Emily Myers (15:33):

Interesting. And is there information in there then that can be used by buyers? So are there deals on properties that need work?

### Bianca Colasuonno (15:40):

Yes. I was going to point that out. It's a great question. And I fully agree with that. I think properties that need work are overlooked often in the market and it used to be that buyers really wanted that they were looking for that property that needed work. And now so many people are passing that by that if you're a buyer that's willing to take on a project like that, or maybe enjoy a project like that, then absolutely you can negotiate on those types of properties. And if buyers are not coming to see the

property, you can often negotiate as a buyer, a buyer's agent, a great deal on a property that's not being marketed well.

### Emily Myers (16:10):

Well, 12 months ago, obviously virtual tours were the only way you could view a property. Now, of course we are back to in-person viewings. Are you seeing large numbers of people attending open houses or are people more comfortable with sort of virtual tours?

#### Bianca Colasuonno (16:26):

I think people are coming to open houses and I think people are coming to see properties in person. I think very few people are actually buying properties, sight unseen in our market. We do have people from outside of the area, of course, looking at videos. We're still doing a walkthroughs by video at times, but for people to actually pull the trigger, they are coming physically, you know, nine times out of 10 to see that property before making a decision. And especially if you're looking at homes that are detached and nobody's home, it's a pretty safe environment.

### Emily Myers (16:53):

And you've talked about it being competitive. I mean, are you seeing bidding wars?

### Bianca Colasuonno (16:56):

Yep. We're absolutely seeing bidding wars, but again, pricing is important. You know, you can overprice things in this market. You can generate a bidding war by being close to market. I think people that are pricing their properties so they're just so aspirational. A lot of times they're turning buyers off in a market where there really should be a lot of activity on properties.

### Emily Myers (17:15):

So actually in compiling Brick Underground's list of most affordable places in New York City, the areas in Queens that were identified for affordability were Jamaica Hills, Lindenwood and Briarwood. What is it that people who are curious about Queens should know before they buy or move there?

### Bianca Colasuonno (17:33):

Well, I, you know, again, it depends on how you're going to need to access the city in the future because some of those areas are not serviced well by public transportation. You have parts of Glendale, there's a lot of spillover from Brooklyn. There's a lot of people that maybe have been priced out of Brooklyn. They're looking around that Brooklyn Queens border they're looking in Forest Hills, they're looking in Woodhaven, parts of Woodhaven and parts of Glendale, like the Liberty Park section of Glendale. Those are affordable areas. They're options that I think are very, very hot and they're options that people are considering.

#### Emily Myers (18:05):

Obviously Forest Hills is a very unique part of the borough isn't it? Can you tell us a little bit more about that area?

Bianca Colasuonno (<u>18:10</u>):

Forest Hills is amazing. It encompasses is pretty much every type of housing stock you could imagine, which is the really interesting part of it. Of course you have Forest Hills gardens, which is stunningly beautiful is completely suburban and gorgeous and upscale. And then of course you have along Queens Boulevard where you have, have a lot of co-ops and a lot of co-op inventory. So you have pretty much everything. You're really surrounded by different parks. There's a lot of sections of Forest Hills where you can get anything you really like. And as I mentioned, we have a lot of people coming from parts of Brooklyn or even Manhattan to achieve a suburban kind of feel, but still stay within the borough.

# Emily Myers (18:46):

And of course outside space has been a priority in every sort of purchase, it feels like, that's obviously the same in Queens?

# Bianca Colasuonno (<u>18:53</u>):

I would say so, yes, it's critically important. I mean, you know, of course with the private homes, you have the little backyard and it's—people are loving to garden and getting outside. And all of that is, is super attractive. I've even seen co-op buildings open up their grounds which is something they don't usually do. They have all these beautiful, you know, closed off grounds that they don't let anyone sit on or even touch the grass. But now I see them starting to open those to people sitting and enjoying, enjoying the space, which is really smart in my opinion.

# Emily Myers (<u>19:22</u>):

So that's interesting. Are we seeing a sort of culture shift then in some co-ops? I mean co-ops notoriously have that very strict rules about how they operate, but are some of these co-ops showing flexibility in, in their kind of community?

### Bianca Colasuonno (19:37):

A few of them are, and I think it's really smart. I really do because they're slow to change in some cases. And I think co-op boards that are receptive to that need and have even done it on a temporary basis. And now some of them have made it permanent. I think it's very, very smart. You know, people want to be able to sit outside. I think it's attractive for people. We've of course seen a lot of buildings, adding things like bike storage, which is another thing that people want. So if buildings have the room and they can make space for it, I think it's very smart for them to, to pursue that.

### Emily Myers (20:07):

If you're looking for a co-op, where, where are the main areas to, to search for it?

### Bianca Colasuonno (20:11):

We talked a little bit about Forest Hills. There are a lot of co-op buildings in Forest Hills. And if you're looking toward, you know, further east, you can be in Oakland Gardens, there's a lot of co-op, small townhouse, two story development type co-ops. And then closer to the city, of course you have, you know, Sunnyside, Astoriathose neighborhoods in Woodside, and a lot of buildings to choose from.

Emily Myers (20:31):

We've talked a little bit about advice for sellers, but advice for buyers as they navigate the market right now, I mean, mortgage rates are low, but banks are increasingly risk-averse. Do you have advice for buyers at the moment?

## Bianca Colasuonno (20:43):

I would say, look, if you see a house that you love, I would be aggressive because rates are so low and the money is, you know, it, the rates are the lowest they've ever been. So it makes sense if you fall in love with the house to be aggressive especially if you're going to be there long-term. You know, this is not a market for fix and flip. This is a market for people who want to live long-term. Pre pandemic there were a lot more cash transactions, and those were a real challenge for buyers, especially trying to enter the market. But now it's about removing things like inspection, contingencies and financing contingencies, where they're still accessing financing, but removing the mortgage contingency.

# Emily Myers (21:18):

Are those contractors then coming into to remodel or, or are they just very savvy buyers?

# Bianca Colasuonno (21:23):

It's amazing. They're not always, it used to be that it used to be that fix and flip buyer who's willing to do that. Now it's someone who's going to occupy the house, which is such an interesting shift. It's actually people and you know, their family and whomever is going to live in the home, making these aggressive offers.

# Emily Myers (21:38):

How would you advise a buyer who is interested in a property where you feel like a competitive bid might be saying, we're going to remove these inspections.

### Bianca Colasuonno (21:46):

I think the best advice for any buyer in a situation like that is try to find out what the seller wants. Right? It may be something like they want an extra month in the house. They want a little more time, or perhaps they want a quicker closing—things like that can make all the difference when negotiating, and if you find out what works for the person on the other side, you can often have an advantage where people don't even think to ask.

### Emily Myers (22:08):

Interesting. And is that really coming down to, you know, the brokers knocking heads and seeing seeing what they can work out?

### Bianca Colasuonno (22:14):

Absolutely. I mean, if we're, if we're representing a buyer, we'll absolutely ask the listing agent what's important to your client.

### Emily Myers (22:20):

We've talked obviously about buying and selling. What's the the scene in the rental market in Queens at the moment?

#### Bianca Colasuonno (22:26):

It's finally picking up, which is good news for everyone. You know, the rentals were really a soft spot. We saw prices off by 25%, which is, which is really unheard of and vacancy rates that, you know, I mean, in some newer construction buildings, I was hearing a vacancy rate of 30%, which is amazing when you think about that. So certainly it was, it was a part of the market that was in real trouble. We're starting to see things come back. I think part of that is seasonally driven. This is a better rental market, generally in the spring anyway, people don't like to move in the winter. So we're starting to see things or larger investors offer incentives, but even private landlords having to offer incentives at times paying brokers fees and things like that.

### Emily Myers (23:13):

And we saw earlier in the year up to three months free, presumably that is lessening, or are we still seeing those kinds of very deep incentives?

### Bianca Colasuonno (23:23):

We're not seeing three months free in the area anymore. But certainly for newer buildings, it was one to two months free. And now it's one month and the broker's fee. So very few apartments where you'll have to pay a fee in the current market. But also landlords, look they're willing to accept a dog or maybe even two dogs. You know, it's not something that would have happened. They're offering things if they have them like parking in the building or in the house. They are throwing something like that in to try to incentivize people.

Emily Myers (23:53):

So there's sort of flexibility for on lifestyle issues rather than a reduction in rent?

Bianca Colasuonno (<u>23:59</u>): Yep, absolutely.

Emily Myers (24:00):

Where are rents then in terms of you know, where they've been historically?

### Bianca Colasuonno (24:06):

They're, they're not as high as they were certainly pre-pandemic. I mean, I think there are less renters in the market period. I mean, we saw so many people exiting their lease early, so, so many people leaving, going back, you know, to where they may have had family, if they lost their jobs. So, I mean, there were so many vacant apartments. We're certainly not going to be back there for a while. We'll have to see what the rest of the year brings as businesses start to reopen and people are more comfortable with traveling around. But yeah, I mean, they're, they're definitely not back where they were.

Emily Myers (24:35):

And so what sort of timeframe do you give that then?

Bianca Colasuonno (24:37):

Oh, it's so hard to say, right? That's the million dollar question. I mean, will this be a cultural change going forward long-term? It's really, really hard to say that for sure. I do think that people will come back. I always believe in New York and I think that New York City is going to come right back, but you know, we'll have to see if all of those apartments are absorbed or what happens with rental prices. And maybe there'll be a bit of a reduction over a long period of time. That is a possibility.

Emily Myers (25:01):

Yeah. Well, Bianca, that's great. Thank you so much for joining us.

Bianca Colasuonno (25:06):

Thank you so much for having me. This is wonderful.

# Emily Myers (25:10):

That's Bianca Colasuonno, a broker with Compass. I'm Emily Myers. Thank you for downloading the Brick Underground podcast. For more information, head to brickunderground.com. The podcast is produced by myself and Jenny Falcon. Terry Rogers is our executive producer.