



JULY 27, 2010

Brooklyn completes MLS merger

From The Real Deal

By **CANDACE TAYLOR**

Editor's note: This article is reposted with permission by The Real Deal.

Gerard Longo, president of Brooklyn New York MLS

In a move that has been in the works for nearly two decades, Brooklyn finally has one multiple listing service covering the entire borough.

Sort of.

Early this month, Brooklyn's last two remaining MLSs -- the Brooklyn New York MLS and the smaller Brooklyn MLS, also known as the Bay Ridge/Bensonhurst MLS -- officially merged.

The new system, which will be known as the Brooklyn New York MLS, has a membership of nearly 3,000 agents in 303 offices with 4,000 listings, according to Gerard Longo, the president of the new organization.

The borough has historically been a crazy quilt of different real estate groups. Over the years, organizations from different areas began coming together, creating the BNYMLS, which in turn merged with the Brooklyn Board of Realtors.

The merger with the 400-agent Brooklyn MLS is "the last piece of the puzzle," Longo said, adding that the two organizations first discussed merging 20 years ago.

"It is a big step for us," said Longo, who is president of Brooklyn-based brokerage Madison Estates and Properties. "We're at a point that we've always wanted to be at."

There's one sticking point: several of the borough's largest firms are not members.

Brooklyn's biggest real estate company, long-established family business Fillmore Real Estate, is a member of the BNYMLS. But in recent years, a number of Manhattan-based firms -- the Corcoran Group, Brown Harris Stevens, Prudential Douglas Elliman and Halstead Property -- have moved into Williamsburg and brownstone Brooklyn neighborhoods like Park Slope and Brooklyn Heights.

These large firms are not members of the BNYMLS. In part, that's because they belong to a larger, competing trade group -- the Manhattan-based Real Estate Board of New York.

"It's an expense to be members of both organizations," explained Christopher Thomas, an executive vice president at BHS and managing director of sales in the company's Brooklyn Heights office.

Because most of the BNYMLS listings are in Southern Brooklyn and not in neighborhoods like Park Slope and Brooklyn Heights, he said, the MLS "doesn't really suit our purposes."

The Manhattan-based firms are already members of REBNY, however, and the REBNY listing service, RLS, has all of their Brooklyn listings, which tend to be in the Northwest Brooklyn neighborhoods they specialize in.

"We allocate our marketing dollars where they're best spent," Thomas said. "It's a cost-benefit analysis."

RLS is not a multiple listings service, so it lacks some of the information that an MLS requires of participating agents to share with each other.

Steven Spinola, the president of REBNY, was not available for comment.

When asked whether the BNYMLS and REBNY might merge someday, Longo said he has discussed data sharing with other city organizations. Until recently, however, Brooklyn's MLSs have had their hands full with the complicated two-year process of merging with each other.

Now, they plan to focus on recruiting more Brooklyn members, including the large Manhattan-based firms and smaller companies.

"We'd like to increase our influence with brokers (who) don't currently belong," Longo said. "We're going to be looking to get a little more of brownstone Brooklyn."

He said he's hoping the merger of the organizations will facilitate that by cutting down on confusion among buyers and brokers.

"There was a state of confusion -- which one would those brokers have joined?" he said. "Now that we're all together, it will make things simpler."

He added that as more agents join the BNYMLS -- which lists all of its listings on Streeteasy.com -- the industry will become more transparent.

To join the BNYMLS, firms must pay \$160 per agent, plus an additional yearly fee to join the Brooklyn Board of Realtors. Member firms must also buy stock in the shareholder-owned BNYMLS, which can range in price from \$10,000 to \$20,000.

Michael Guerra, an executive vice president at Prudential Douglas Elliman and the company's director of sales for Brooklyn, said Elliman currently has no plans to join the BNYMLS, since it "does not have a density of listings and business in the areas that our company is currently most active in."

However, he didn't rule it out as an option for the future.

"We will always think about what tools make sense for the agents in our company," he said.