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on Horizon at  
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BY WINNIE McCROY

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## After Years of Blight, Affordable Housing on Horizon at Seventh Ave. Site

Added by **Scott Stiffler** on October 25, 2018.

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This dilapidated strip of buildings at Seventh Ave. and W. 22nd St. will be converted into 29 units of affordable housing. | Photo by Scott Stiffler

**BY WINNIE McCROY** | After decades of promises, New York City is about to make good on a move to renovate a strip of dilapidated buildings on W. 22nd St. Hope is now in sight for the properties at 201–207 Seventh Ave. to become 29 units of affordable housing, with its original tenants offered home ownership.

“All the people who lived there before — the five long-term tenants, with the last one set to move out this month — are all guaranteed an affordable co-op” when the renovations are finally complete, said Joe Restuccia, co-chair of the Community Board 4 (CB4) Housing, Health &

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Only ownership of the buildings began in 1978. Over the years, however, they shifted from one program to another. Now, they are part of a Housing Preservation and Development (HPD) program called the Affordable Neighborhood Cooperative Program (ANCP), helping renters form co-ops to manage and maintain the properties. They will eventually be able to buy their apartment for \$2,500 under the Tenant Interim Lease (TIL) program. All families will have the of VillageCare is taking a high-tech path

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Over the years, as administrations changed and officials at city agencies turned over, the process of moving. So Espinal and other tenants formed the Alliance for Progress Tenants Association, working with elected officials to get the renovation project off the

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Recently, the city helped Espinal relocate to an apartment on 37th St. that is still within

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school, because we are committed to making the sacrifice so this project can finish."

"I was actually born in these buildings, and I can say that we as a family are excited about finally coming home to fully renovated apartments," Espinal said. "These buildings are definitely in very bad shape, and have been getting worse as the years have gone by. So we are excited that the process is moving along. It has been a long time coming but we're ready to take it to the next level and not be the eyesore in the community any longer."

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Once the four buildings become one large coop, the structure or composition of the board may change, but Espinal is dedicated to remaining a part of the board, to keep their new home beautiful. Her family is one of five original renters who will move back into 1, 2, or 3 bedroom units, depending on the "family composition" taken when the relocation happened.

The development company tapped to oversee the project, AAFE, is a nonprofit organization dedicated to enriching the lives of Asian Americans and those in need. They have confirmed that there will be 29 residential units, and 3,900 square feet of commercial real estate on the ground floor, where the A&A Deli stood until it closed this summer. The construction financing for the project will most likely close in the middle of next year, and the construction timeline is about three years, after which the original residents will return.

"AAFE is looking forward to welcoming five families back to their homes at 201-207 Seventh Avenue, and creating a new affordable co-op in the Chelsea neighborhood," said Thomas Yu, co-executive director of AAFE. "After many years of diligent advocacy efforts led by the community, this corner will finally come alive with new ground floor neighborhood retail, as well as new affordable housing. We are excited to be working with tenants, Community Board 4, and the Councilmember to bring this project to fruition. We were proud to have successfully completed the first project under the city's Affordable Housing Cooperative Program [AHCP] at 244 Elizabeth Street, and are anticipating another great partnership in Chelsea."

Architectural renderings for this project are not yet available. And somewhere along the line, the city discovered that various structural problems prevented the original facade of the building from being preserved, as CB4 would have liked. So they settled on demolition and new construction in a style that "connects to the neighborhood around it," said Restuccia.

"It's an intricate process. They bring you something they think you want, and we say, 'No, we don't want fake Art Deco,' and then they bring you something else," he explained. "But architect Amie Gross listened hard and was sensitive to our concerns, and we will arrive at a good-looking building."

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The A&A Deli had a month-to-month lease, and was told to vacate over the summer. | Photo by Scott Stiffler

Restuccia said that rather than the original four buildings, the end result will be a single 12-story building with a 125-foot setback, like other buildings on the block.

“We will keep the character of the area,” Restuccia vowed. “It is not going to be some glass tower. There will be no panels or any of that crap. And we are really pushing for there to be two and three [bedroom units], because children exist in this city.”

But don’t call the U-Haul quite yet. Those in the know say that a rumored administrative “mayoral zoning override” never panned out, and a Uniform Land Use Review Process (ULURP) will be necessary. A demolition timeline will not be available until both the ULURP and financing are complete.

“While a financing agreement is still being negotiated, HPD looks forward to transforming these long-vacant buildings into much-needed affordable housing,” said HPD’s Juliet Pierre-Antoine, who added that she expects it to be financed through their ANCP program in 2019.

Local community groups seem pleased by AAFE’s willingness to show up at CB4 meetings and present their plans, listen to input from the community, and come back with revisions. And after decades of living with this blighted block, they don’t even much mind waiting for the ULURP process.

“We hoped from the get-go that we could get by the ULURP process, but after 35 years of waiting, what’s another six months or so?” said Sally Greenspan, of the preservation group Save Chelsea. “We know it has to happen. But after so many years, I don’t know what more they’re going to learn. I think everybody will feel somewhat comforted when the actual process starts. When we see the buildings coming down and the work beginning, we’ll know it’s really happening.”

Greenspan said the community has worked diligently on this effort for years, depriving the neighborhood of vital units of affordable housing while allowing the block to become “any eyesore, like a blighted slum to walk by, attracting rats and becoming a fire hazard.”

“I can’t say how excited we all are not to have to walk by the wreck for much longer,” Greenspan said. “I’m surprised it hasn’t caught on fire, because it looks like if you push it, it might fall down. And who knows, maybe they can make up for lost time somewhere else. The need is so great!”

Speaker Johnson’s office confirmed that the final tenant is currently looking at relocation units, after which they will do borings into the ground for samples looking at possible contamination, and to ensure structural stability for the project.

“Working with the current and former residents of the buildings and Community Board 4, I believe we’ve crafted an affordable housing project that we can all be proud of,” Johnson said. “This project will add over 20 new units of permanently affordable housing and will provide a healthy mix of 1, 2, and 3 bedroom units to meet the needs of families who are in desperate need of affordable housing.”

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**Joe Masters**

Wonderful news! Now if they can do something with the building on the opposite corner as it is a hazard and blight in the neighborhood.

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