

Crossing Delancey: A Refuge for Pushcart Vendors Get a Prime New Home

Essex Street Market is about to move to a glass-walled space as a development aims to mix the old and new Lower East Side

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The picturesque pushcarts of the Lower East Side were forced off the streets by Mayor Fiorello La Guardia in 1940 and moved to drab redbrick buildings of the Essex Street Market with no street-level windows.

Now, the cultural and economic descendants of those pushcart merchants are about to move back into the limelight, to a city-owned market with a 40-foot-high wall of windows in a new 26-story rental building known as the Essex.

Mr. La Guardia waged an extended war against unlicensed and itinerant peddlers, wanting them out of sight. But today, in the age of locally sourced food, street markets and food trucks, the city-owned market is getting a showcase space.

The change also reflects the shifting fortunes of the neighborhood: Younger, more-affluent residents have moved into what has long been a neighborhood of poor immigrants, initially from Europe and later from Puerto Rico and the Dominican Republic. The old market has struggled over the decades.

The new market in the Essex is at the heart of a nine-building development known as Essex Crossing, which has over 1,000 apartments—half of them designated as affordable units—and more than 1.6 million square feet of space.

It is also one of the prime amenities for renters in the new tower above, which houses 195 apartments at [125 Delancey St.](#)

The 98 market-rate units in the mixed-income building will likely achieve the highest rents ever on the Lower East Side, said Matthew Viletto, a senior vice president at Douglas Elliman Development Marketing, who is working on the development.

He cited the limited supply of housing on the Lower East Side, the open views from the soaring upper floors, as well as the amenities in the project that include a lounge on the roof and one on the sixth-floor, with hammocks and grills looking out on an urban farm and the Williamsburg Bridge.

Rents at the Essex would start at about \$3,500 a month for a studio, and are pegged above the strong rents at the Rollins, a new 16-story Essex Crossing rental building with a Target store that opened earlier this year, Mr. Viletto said.

Isaac Henderson, a development director at L+M Development Partners, said the latest wave of neighborhood settlers have driven up retail rents on the Lower East Side and forced out many older businesses,

“It went from being one of the most-diverse retail spaces in the city of New York, to a place for bars and ATMs,” he said. “With Essex Crossing, we are bringing back what the Lower East Side was.”

The Essex is designed to be a hub that affluent gentrifiers who have reinvigorated the neighborhood and their older, less-affluent neighbors can share—both at street level and in a mix of market-rate and affordable apartments above.

Essex Crossing is being developed by Taconic Investment Partners, L + M Development Partners, BFC Partners, and Goldman Sachs Urban Investment Group.

In its heyday, there were four sprawling buildings in the Essex Street Market with more than 140 vendors. But the market shrunk during decades of hard times, beginning in the 1970s. In the fall, the remaining 25 merchants will be moving to the more prominent space in the Essex.

Anne Saxelby, a cheesemonger who sells domestically-sourced cheeses out of a 10-square-foot space in the old Essex Street Market, said merchants were both worried and excited about the change, and working hard to make sure that their customers will follow them across the street.

“We are the same crazy family of vendors. We’ve been trying to communicate that to everyone,” she said.

Ms. Saxelby said the new market will include a demonstration kitchen and meeting space with programs specifically geared toward seniors and low-income residents in the neighborhood. Her space will triple in size in the new market.

The market has a dramatic design. It is positioned below a sloping white roof that resembles barrel-vaulted tile that also serves as the angled floor of the seating areas of a 14-screen Regal Cinemas.

Underneath, the city-owned and subsidized market is connected by broad staircases and light wells to another level of privately-owned subterranean retail space, known as Market Line, that will eventually extend 700 feet under three buildings with food vendors, galleries, fashion boutiques and music venues.

Rohan Mehra, a principal of the Prusik Group, which is developing Market Line, said the first installment is designed to complement the city-owned Essex Street Market. It will include local food outlets such as a test kitchen for Doughnut Plant, a branch of the Ukrainian restaurant Veselka and a beer hall.

Essex Street Market will also have some new vendors, including a branch of Chinatown Ice Cream Factory, Flower Power and Roni-Sue's Chocolates.

"While we want to work together with Market Line, we want to maintain a separate and unique identify for the Essex Market," Ms. Saxelby said.

The city is covering the costs for the move of the Essex Street Market merchants and has agreed to initially keep rents the same for existing space, said Megha Chopra, an assistant vice president for public markets at the city's Economic Development Corporation.