

# Once-Crumbling Apartment Building Seeks to Add Health Food Store Updated August 17, 2012 12:10pm

August 17, 2012 12:10pm | By [Jeanmarie Evelly](#), DNAinfo

DNAinfo.com's  
**NEW YORK GUIDE**  
Find hundreds of local listings & deals in your neighborhood



The new owners of 935 Kelly St., a formerly dilapidated apartment building in the Longwood section of the South Bronx, are looking for a tenant open a health-food focused business on the building's first floor. (DNAinfo/Jeanmarie Evelly)

LONGWOOD — A few years ago, 935 Kelly St. was riddled with housing code violations and was a haven for squatters, drug-dealers and rodents.

But now, its new owners want to turn part of the newly-renovated apartment building into a health food-focused business venture to serve the South Bronx.

Part of a five-building portfolio on the same block, the Kelly Street buildings went into foreclosure in 2010 and became notorious for their rundown conditions, targeted by city housing officials as among the worst properties in the city.

"It was a very hostile, drug-infested area," said Russell Cheek, a community organizer with the Banana Kelly Community Improvement Association, one of three organizations that partnered last year to purchase and renovate the buildings. "The buildings were totally dilapidated — holes in the stairs you could fall right through, raccoons living on the first floor."

After a performing major renovations on the buildings this year, the new owners — Banana Kelly, residential contractors Monadnock Construction and affordable housing firm Workforce Housing Advisors — are looking for a new tenant or tenants to turn 2,822 square feet of commercial space at 935 Kelly St. into a healthy food store or restaurant.

The owners, under the partnership name [Kelly Street Restoration LP \(KSR\)](#), released a Request for Proposals earlier this month asking for potential operators to submit plans for the space by September. KSR is offering a number of

incentives to entice businesses, including discounted rent, an apartment within the building to use at no cost, and partnerships with local food advocacy groups and community gardens for locally-grown produce.

"We thought that instead of it just being another bodega ... what if we turned this storefront into a business that provided fresh and healthy foods, that provided affordable food, and also enhanced the community," said Ilana Moyer, project manager for Workforce Housing Advisors.

With its expertise in the affordable housing market and not the health food business, the company decided to issue a Request for Proposals to see if someone from the community could make a suggestion for the space. KSR has established an advisory committee, made up of experts and local stakeholders to help chose the winning proposal.

"An important part of this is that its affordable and accessible," Moyer said, adding that they're looking for ideas that are creative, but still realistic. "It could be a market, it could be a takeout place that has affordable, fresh take out food, it could be a restaurant, it could be a mix of all of that."

KSR will offer its chosen commercial tenants a reduced rent — \$7 a square foot compared to \$25 a square foot. The site is currently broken into three separate commercial spaces, each with entrances on 163rd Street.

The potential tenant will also have access to a partnership with nonprofit GrowNYC, which will help connect it with New York-area farms to supply fresh fruits and vegetables. Plans are also underway to [start a community garden](#) in the building's own backyard.

"This new proposal will not only help grow our economy by creating much needed jobs, but is also a positive step toward improving the health of countless Bronxites by seeking a business that provides access to affordable, healthy and fresh food in a neighborhood that is currently underserved," Bronx Borough President Ruben Diaz, Jr., said in a press release.

Known for years as one of the city's "food deserts," where access to fresh fruits and vegetables are scarce, the South Bronx has some of the highest diabetes and obesity rates in the city, according to the Department of Health.

Valerie Davis, 56, who lives across the street from the building, said she is somewhat skeptical about how well a health food store would fare in the neighborhood.

"People around here don't eat healthy," she said. "I don't think it would work."

But she says she's happy with the vast improvements the renovations at the buildings have brought to the block, compared to how things were a few years ago, when the properties were in the throes of foreclosure. Back then, she said, 935 Kelly St. was known for drug dealers and the sound of gunshots.

"This building was bad, the baddest building on the block," she said. "A lot of crack, dope, any drug you can name, you could find it there. We don't need that on the block."

**Also on DNainfo.com...**

Read more: <http://www.dnainfo.com/new-york/20120817/longwood/once-crumbling-apartment-building-seeks-add-health-food-store#ixzz247FYJxXJ>