

## Yonkers considering arts-industrial district

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Jessie Matrullo talks about her vintage clothing business called Bohemian Royalty at the YOHO Artist Studios on Nepperhan Avenue in Yonkers .March 4, 2016.

*The City Council is considering a change in zoning that would allow up to 20 percent of the carpet mills' space to be used for retail shops, art galleries, restaurants or personal services providers.*



(Photo: Carucha L. Meuse/The Journal News)

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**YONKERS** - Jessie Matrullo runs a vintage clothing business from a studio at the YOHO Artist Studios on Nepperhan Avenue, so it's not such a stretch for her to imagine a store full of her wares.

The question is: Would anyone come to shop at the former Alexander Smith Carpet Mills?

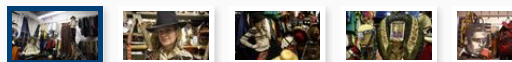
"We don't have a lot of people visiting from anywhere to come and shop for vintage," said Matrullo, a film and television stylist who has rented space at YOHO for three years. "I see it's slowly happening. It's just not happening fast enough to say I'd love to have a retail store."

City officials are hoping to speed up the carpet mills' transformation into an artsy destination. The City Council is considering a zoning change that would allow up to 20 percent of the massive buildings' floor space to be used for retail shops, art galleries, restaurants or personal services providers.

The rezoning would combine with a parallel effort by the buildings' property owners to create a Carpet Mills Arts District that could eventually result in a complex similar to the Chelsea Markets, a shopping and dining destination in New York City on the ground floor of the former Nabisco cookie factory.

Currently only industrial uses are permitted in the carpet mills, which stretch from Lake Avenue on the north to Ashburton Avenue on the south and Nepperhan Avenue on the west to Saw Mill River Road on the east. The former carpet mill buildings date to the late 19th century and produced carpeting until 1954.

Story continues below gallery



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Yonkers Deputy Planning Commissioner Louis Albano said over the years, the carpet mills' light manufacturers have turned to pianos, upholstery, drapery, sculpture and other consumer-oriented businesses. The zoning change is needed to help these businesses and the artists with production studios there.

"It was decided to take advantage of some of the artisans in the area and create this district to allow them two things," Albano said. "To show their wares and to open galleries that would be ancillary and complementary to the crafts that they produce in their shops, but also to create restaurant space to create more visitors and foot traffic into the area."

In December, the [Carpet Mills Arts District](#) won a [\\$500,000 state grant](#) to advance the transformation from drab brick warehouses to a regional destination for art lovers. [Randolph Rose](#), one of the owners in the complex, said the grant will allow property owners to pay for banners to delineate the area and install up-and-down lighting on the buildings' exterior, among other efforts.

There is already a significant artist presence in the nascent district. There are about 30 arts-based tenants in Rose's buildings at 500-530 Nepperhan Ave., and the YOHO Artist Studios at the neighboring 540-578 Nepperhan Ave. has about 80 arts-based tenants.

The district has enjoyed some success in becoming a public destination with an annual spring open studios event that often coincides with Yonkers Arts Weekend.

Councilman Mike Breen asked Albano during a recent meeting if rezoning the carpet mills would derail or weaken the city's redevelopment efforts on its downtown waterfront.

"This would actually be complementary to what we're doing on the waterfront," Albano said to Breen. "Even though there is a distance between the two, we hope to connect the two districts into one area so we have our downtown night life district in what's going on in the waterfront and then we have our art gallery and our little baby Soho going on in the Nepperhan Valley."

Albano said the zoning change is designed to preserve light manufacturing in the carpet mills because of the 20 percent limit for retail.

Displacement is a concern for Albert Valentine, Jr., president of the Valenti Neckwear Company, which makes uniform ties from his space in the YOHO Studios. Allowing some ground-floor retail would be a good idea for some of his neighbors, but Valentine said it wouldn't work for his business.

"Hopefully with all that they don't run little manufacturers like myself out with higher rents," said Valentine, adding that the transformation of industrial spaces for other uses is happening throughout the New York City metropolitan area.

The City Council is expected to vote on the zoning change Tuesday.

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