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From home cooking to housing

Restaurant not viable, so plans in place for Alycia's Apartments

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Phil Hossack / Winnipeg Free Press Anthony Panchoo (left) and Chris Lucas plan to convert the former Alycia's Restaurant & Deli to seven apartments.

There's something cookin' in the building that used to be home to one of the city's most famous Ukrainian eateries -- Alycia's Restaurant & Deli.

The one-storey brick building at Cathedral Avenue and McGregor Street has been purchased by a

couple of local developers who have big plans for the structure.

But those plans don't involve reviving Alycia's, which served up its famous perogies and Ukrainian dishes for more than three decades before quietly closing its doors in March of last year.

Although Anthony Panchoo and Chris Lucas originally wanted to bring Alycia's back to life, a cost analysis concluded it wouldn't be profitable over the long term.

So they're planning to convert the 7,000-square-foot structure into seven rental apartments. Although their proposal still has one final hurdle to clear at city hall, they're hoping to start renovating the building by the end of the summer and to have tenants moving in by Christmas.

"There is a need for more rental units in the North End, and not a lot of guys want to build rental properties in the area because it's perceived as a tougher market to deal with," Panchoo said in an interview.

But he has no such reservations. Alycia's will be his eleventh infill residential redevelopment project in the past eight years, and most of the them have been in the North End.

He and Lucas also have three more North End infill developments in the works -- two on Selkirk Avenue and one on Salter Street. All three involve demolishing derelict homes and replacing them with multiplex structures.

Panchoo, who immigrated to Winnipeg from the Caribbean when he was 15, owns a local construction company -- Jaks Constructing -- as well as a designer concrete-finishing firm -- FauxStone Designs.

Lucas owns a local travel agency -- Lucas & Associates Travel Group -- and a construction/real estate firm -- Lucas & Associates.

His construction firm has renovated four or five apartment blocks and two hotels over the last five years, and converted a number of single-family homes into duplexes.

But these are the first redevelopment projects he's been involved in as an owner/developer.

Panchoo said a growing number of local and out-of-province developers have been flocking to the North End over the last three to five years in search of infill residential development opportunities.

But most of them are replacing derelict homes with new single-family homes they sell.

He prefers to build multi-family rental complexes, which he keeps and manages.

The Alycia's project has already received a stamp of approval from the City of Winnipeg.

"There are a number of benefits to increased residential density in existing neighbourhoods, such as the efficient use of existing infrastructure and more people to patronize existing commercial establishments," area planner Noah Yauk said in a recent email.

Yauk said each redevelopment is judged on a case-by-case basis.

"Typically, proposals for multi-family development are supported when they are at a scale compatible to existing neighbouring development, are located on streets that can handle traffic and have direct access to public transit," he said.

"The Alycia's property is a good example of where modest multi-family development makes sense, as it is located on McGregor Street, which is considered a community corridor with many commercial establishments.

"(It also) can handle significant traffic volumes, provides direct access to public transit and is in walking distance of many community and commercial amenities."

Another benefit is it breathes new life into an existing building, he said.

Lucas, Panchoo and a silent partner bought the building because the exterior walls and the foundation are still structurally sound.

Only the roof needs to be replaced, Lucas said.

He said building condominiums instead of rental units was never a consideration.

"Everyone is doing condos, and that, I think, is kind of coming to the end of its run.

"We're treating this as more of a long-term investment."

Panchoo lives in the North End and said he really likes the area.

"It's very down to earth and genuine, and over the last 10 years, it's been starting to come back a little at a time."

He said he would have loved to have revived Alycia's Restaurant.

"I used to eat there for many years and I really liked it. It had a lot of memories for me."

He even went as far as to acquire the original recipes from the previous owners, Sharon Staff and Roger Leclerc.

That was before he found out reviving it wasn't feasible.

But to ensure the name lives on, they're naming the new complex Alycia's Apartments, they said.

Know of any newsworthy or interesting trends or developments in the local office, retail, or industrial real estate sectors? Let real estate reporter Murray McNeill know at the e-mail address below, or at 697-7254.

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Project to cost about \$350,000

Here's what developers Anthony Panchoo and Chris Lucas have planned for the former Alycia's Restaurant & Deli building at 559 Cathedral Ave.:

- Spending about \$350,000 to convert the building to rental apartments. That includes the cost of buying the property.
- The original exterior walls and foundation will be retained, but the roof will be replaced.
- New windows and doors will be added to the exterior walls, which will also be refinished with cultured stone and stucco.
- The interior will be gutted and new electrical, plumbing, heating systems and interior walls will be installed.
- The space will be subdivided into seven apartments -- three two-bedroom units, three one-bedroom

units and one bachelor suite.

-- The three-bedroom units will be about 700 square feet and will likely rent for about \$795 to \$850 a month. The one-bedroom units will be about 600 square feet and rent for about \$650. The bachelor unit will be about 550 square feet and rent for about \$500.

-- Work is expected to get underway by the end of the summer and be completed before Christmas. Panchoo said he plans to do the design work and most of the construction himself.

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