



NEWS

FORMER GAY BAR UNDERGOING RENOVATION TO BECOME HOUSING

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BY THOMAS GRILLO

LYNN — The shuttered home of what's been called the **Bay State**'s oldest gay bar will soon have a new lease on life: a \$2.2 million apartment house.

Fran's Place closed last fall after more than three decades on lower Washington Street as a safe haven for gay patrons.

Last fall, the 20,148-square-foot, three story building was purchased by **776 Washington Street LLC** for \$297,500. The entity is owned by Omar Guerrero, who once managed **Omar & Oscar Jewelry of Lynn in Central Square**.

Guerrero declined to comment.

But filings with the city's **Inspectional Services Department** revealed he is seeking to build 14 one-bedroom apartments on the two upper floors while keeping the 5,000-square-foot former bar as commercial space.

The LLC borrowed \$1.75 million from the **Massachusetts Development Finance Agency**, the state's development bank, for the renovation.

James Cowdell, executive director of the **Economic Development & Industrial Corp.**, (EDIC) the city's development bank, said he's met with Guerrero and supports the project.

"He's putting more than a dozen market-rate units in that section of the city," he said. "And when he's done, it will look great."

Charles Gaeta, executive director of **Lynn Housing Authority & Neighborhood Development**, whose office provided Guerrero with a \$20,000 planning grant, said he's excited about the project.

"The city is expected to invest more than \$150,000 in new sidewalks and trees in that area," he said. "It will dovetail nicely with our nearby Gateway Residences project."

Last year, the **Gateway Residences on Washington** broke ground, the first housing development to benefit from a \$100 million state fund to create workforce housing.

The 71-unit mixed-income housing complex is a collaboration of **Neighborhood Development Associates** of Lynn and Boston-based **Hub Holdings LLC**.

Gateway Residences will feature a five-story, wood-frame building with 18 one-bedroom units, 46 two-bedrooms and seven three-bedrooms. Eight units will be market-rate. The project also will contain a common room, fitness center, laundry rooms and other common tenant spaces.

"We're excited, said Gaeta. "That whole area is being rejuvenated and there's more on the way."

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