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# ICONIC BUILDING WRITES NEW STORY IN LYNN

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*Local officials are given a tour of the newly renovated former Daily Item building on Exchange Street in Lynn.*  
(Spenser Hasak)

LYNN — The significance of the rebirth of a signature building in the downtown is not lost on Mayor Jared Nicholson.

“We’re thrilled to see this in its final stages,” Nicholson told brothers Hashmat and Hourmat Rauf, after touring the 122-year-old Item building on Exchange Street, a historic edifice that the Raufs are converting into 31 apartments and seven commercial units. “You want to see buildings like this be preserved and offered in a way that fits the community. They’ve found a way to do that. This is a great use of an historic asset.”

Nicholson was joined by Ward 5 Councilor Dianna Chakoutis on the tour, which was coordinated by Economic Development & Industrial Corporation (EDIC/Lynn) Executive Director James Cowdell and led by the Raufs.

Cowdell said the building looks nothing like the last time he visited, prior to the massive overhaul.

“This is a significant project for the downtown,” Cowdell said. “With the building located steps from the train station and the arts and cultural district, we expect it will be an appealing place for people to live. We really want to activate this area.”

The five-story Flatiron structure housed the *Daily Item* newspaper from 1900 to 2015 and has been vacant since Essex Media Group purchased The Item and changed locations, first to Munroe Street and recently to the other end of Exchange Street.

The building includes seven studios and 24 one-bedroom units on the second through the fifth floor. The first floor will be used for commercial space, including Kimochi Café, which is expected to open in mid-March. The first tenants should be in by that time as well, Hashmat Rauf said.

A one-bedroom unit on the top floor features exposed brick and a spectacular view extending to the nearby ocean.

The Raufs, who own Lynn-based BuildAR Group, bought the building in December 2018 for \$1.4 million from an Atlanta-based development company. They have invested more than \$6 million in the rehab, with financing coming from Newburyport Bank, MassDevelopment and EDIC (through the Lynn Municipal Finance Corporation).

“We are very interested in Lynn,” Hourmat Rauf said. “It is a city that is up and coming. It’s great that you can get to Boston by train in 20 minutes, but you don’t need to go to Boston with all that Lynn has to offer here.”

Hashmat Rauf said EDIC/Lynn played an important role in the project, from providing a \$150,000 loan to help build out the commercial units, to offering guidance throughout the process.

“The whole team at EDIC/Lynn has been super helpful to work with,” he said.

Hashmat Rauf earned an economics degree from Boston University, while Hourmat earned a civil-engineering degree at UMass Lowell and a master’s in construction management from the Wentworth Institute of Technology. Figuring their skill sets matched perfectly, they went into business together in 2017. They have done projects in Chelsea, Revere, Everett and Boston, along with owning other residential and retail property in Lynn.

The Raufs’ next project will be building 25 condominiums and two commercial units on the Mount Vernon Street side of the Item building.

“There is a snowball effect,” Cowdell said. “The more people who live down here, the more demand for businesses. That’s one of the reasons this project is so important for the city.”