



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Jessica Ramos

## Queens Elected Leaders Write Letter To Astoria Key Food Landlord

JESSICA RAMOS July 20, 2020



Senator Jessica Ramos, Assemblywoman Aravella Simotas, Councilmember Costa Constantinides respond to real estate developer Jenel Real Estate in the wake of local Key Food closing and mass layoffs due to a halt in negotiations between the developer and supermarket.

Michael Hirschhorn, President

Jenel Real Estate

275 Madison Avenue, Suite 1100

New York, NY 10016

A&H Acquisitions Corp.  
1412 Broadway, 3rd Floor  
New York, New York 10018

Dear Mr. Hirschhorn & All,

We are writing in response to your letter dated May 21, 2020 wherein you discussed your proposed new development at 22-11 31 Street in Astoria. Thank you for taking the time to initiate a dialogue. Since 2018 we, along with other elected officials who have represented the neighborhood in varying capacities over the years, have written to express our concern with the prospect of losing a unionized supermarket that has provided affordable and fresh food for over 50 years right in the heart of northern Astoria. We hope you can appreciate our efforts and understand our perspective in doing all we can to preserve dozens of union jobs, neighborhood character, and access to fresh food.

It's disappointing to know that negotiations with Key Food have broken down. Key Food has a proven track record of serving this community and its employees well. They have been a good neighbor and that's not an easy thing to come by. We hope that between the time of your last writing till now there may have been some new progress. Key Food has repeatedly expressed their desire to remain on 31st Street, but they need a genuine negotiating partner in return.

With that being said, we are optimistic to learn that you too recognize the need for a quality supermarket in the community. Even though you listed other grocers as alternatives in your letter, it's important to acknowledge how iconic 31st Street is and why keeping a supermarket on this particular street is necessary. This is where the MTA N/W subway lines terminate; thousands of northern Astorians walk this street, making this a hub of activity. That is why Key Food has always been such a staple. As people are coming home from work

getting off the subway, it's incredibly easy to pop into Key Food and pick up everything you need to make a home-cooked dinner. This has been the case for 50 years and we want to make sure it's the case for another 50. The other grocers you mention are almost all significantly farther away from the subway and aren't as easily accessible. We have all been supportive of efforts to make New York City more walkable and less car-dependent. Eliminating a supermarket located right off a subway stop, which 15,000 to 17,000 people pass through on the average weekday, doesn't help towards that end.

You mentioned that you are in talks with another major supermarket chain to replace Key Food. We would like to know who that is. It's important to know which retailer could be calling Astoria home in the near future, especially because of Key Food's strong commitment to organized labor. In fact, we saw a strong partnership between Key Food and UFCW Local 1500 through this crisis. Dozens of union employees were given personal protective equipment and hazard pay for putting their own health on the line to keep their neighbors fed. We don't want an exemplary employer to be replaced by a bad actor. Union labor is America's backbone. With every union job that's lost, we widen the wealth gap and help the rich get richer. That's something we must tirelessly fight against because every drop in the bucket matters.

Finally, we ask that you remain aware of the serious challenges and distress COVID-19 caused our communities. Even though it seems like we're out of the woods, we live under a constant threat of a second wave as cases skyrocket across the country.. We remember the months of March, April, May, and even June when the lines at the grocery stores circled around the block. The empty shelves and the difficulty of finding basic food items like flour, eggs, and milk are memories that'll stay with us for some time. In fact, we stand to see a sequel this fall — as already growing food insecurity approaches the threshold of crisis. So, we ask that you extend Key Food's current lease for the short-term, in order to avoid having

a supermarket boarded up while a global pandemic still rages on. We understand that we're in uncharted territory and even the best epidemiologists can't predict the virus' course, but the thought of taking a supermarket offline this October is a scenario we don't want to contemplate.

We welcome a continued dialogue on this matter and look forward to hearing from you.  
Thank you for your attention.

Senator Jessica Ramos

Assemblywoman Aravella Simotas

Councilmember Costa Constantinides