



## Hipster Vibe Transforming Garner Historic District

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Brewery, Tavern, Coffee Roasters — Making Garner Historic District A Tourist Draw

By Tina Traster

For more than a year, Jason Poole struggled to find industrial space in Queens for his startup beverage company [Kojiya](#). Landlords and realtors, he discovered, didn't want to rent to startups. He even tried working with the Queens Economic Development Corporation.

"Landlords were looking for a year's worth of rent and prior sales," said Poole. "I gave up on Queens and googled 'industrial complexes'".

Up popped Garner Historic District – the game-changer Poole was looking for even though he'd never heard of it, or Haverstraw for that matter. This year, he signed a two-year lease for 6,300-square-feet to manufacture koji, a traditional Japanese seasoning and curing agent used to make a fermented rice drink. He's been building out the space for the past six months and plans to launch in January. Eventually, he plans to open his doors to tours and tastings.

"It would have cost me four times as much to rent the same space in Queens," Poole said.

The Garnerville Arts and Industrial Center, recently rebranded as Garner Historic District, is ready for its next act. For years, the 27-building, Civil War-era landmark factory complex, with about 365,000-square-feet of space, has been a haven for artists and artisans. Now that the Village of West Haverstraw has rezoned the 14-acre site from light industrial to mixed use, the complex is attracting a new ilk of tenants that are likely to make the center a destination for foodies, hipsters, and tourists.

Recent newcomers to Garner Historic District include Kojiya, Industrial Arts Brewing, Stack Street Coffee, Ayu Yoga Studio and Ballet Rockland. Hudson's Mill Tavern & Catering is slated to open for New Year's Eve.

"I could see this Dickensian "village" as a respite from the world, a place where people could come to enjoy arts and culture," said Robin Rosenberg, president and director of Garner Historic District. The center has 110 tenants, with 80% occupancy.

The center leases spaces ranging from 200 square feet to 10,000 square feet. Rosenberg would not reveal rental costs but says it's a lot more economical than taking space in a shopping center. "Every space is unique," she added.

"Being here, in a community of makers, is not just about making the product. It's about the experience."

Rosenberg's vision for this one-of-a-kind real estate asset in Rockland County is likely to put Garner Historic District on the map. For more than two decades, the center has been a draw for exhibitions and installations, film screenings, live performances, and a Creekside sculpture trail. The aftermath of Hurricane Irene, which affected the entire complex, got Rosenberg thinking about the future. Rather than put it all back together again in the same way, the director envisioned new uses that would be a catalyst for business and tourism. It took nearly five years, but the Village of West Haverstraw in 2017 changed the zoning from light industrial to mixed use, which meant retail and restaurants could open.

"We are on the cusp of a renaissance," said Rosenberg. "I can picture this village as a collection of makers and eclectic shops selling coffee and baked goods."

Rezoning Garner Historic District dragged on for several years. But given its importance to Mayor Robert D'Amelio, his administration passed the law eight months after taking office. "There is nothing like this in Rockland County," said D'Amelio, who remembers working at the center when he was a teenager. "I saw what the future had for it. Jobs. New businesses."

Stack Street Coffee, named for the smoke tower at the center, is a coffee roaster with a Brooklyn vibe that will open in early 2019. Stack Street Coffee's owner Yehuda Reich has leased 16,000 square feet for production, warehouse and offices.

"I could produce in a warehouse in the middle of nowhere and sell to groceries," said Reich. "Being here, in a community of makers, is not just about making the product. It's about the experience."

For now, Reich is focused on ramping up the manufacturing but he intends to open a café and tours. "We are excited about the evolution of the complex," said Reich. "We're investing a lot of money. We see investment all around. It's going to snowball; it's going to keep attracting new companies."

Rosenberg knows that rebranding will take a lot of work, but she's already formulating the next chapter; a residential component to the complex. That would require another zoning change but change is what often keeps an historic treasure a treasure.