



City supermarkets are dying commodity

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Battered by rising rents and taxes, one-third of the city's supermarkets - about 500 - have vanished in the last 10 years.

Big-box stores and drugstore chains are fast replacing traditional supermarkets, which in too many cases can no longer afford to stay in business.

"Supermarkets are a neighborhood thing; it's not only about making money," said [Joe Verderosso](#), 44, who owns two Key Food supermarkets in [Canarsie](#). "They create jobs for people in the community and are there for them at times of need."

Yet if something is not done, despite their positive impact on the economic and physical well-being of the city, supermarkets could soon be as much a thing of the past as the old trolley car.

"One of our issues with the warehouse club stores is also an issue with the mayor," said Grocery Workers Union organizer [Pat Purcell](#). "The city did a study and determined that we need at least 100 supermarkets in the city, not more BJ's."

It is precisely in Verderosso's neighborhood where the latest episode of this "Big Fish Eats Little Fish" reality series is developing right now.



Grocery Workers Union organizer Pat Purcell

Two giant BJ's Warehouse Club stores are planned for [Brooklyn](#) - one off the Belt Parkway in [Bensonhurst](#), and the other at the site of the old Key Food Warehouse at the Brooklyn Terminal Market in Canarsie.

"I have lived here all my life, and I know that many people are on tight budgets. They - especially the elderly - need a supermarket in their neighborhood," said the Brooklyn-born Verderosso, who has three children.

"These club stores put everybody out of business. When they are no longer profitable, they close, leaving behind an empty building and a neighborhood in decay."

According to the Neighborhood Retail Alliance, BJ's stores gross more than a million dollars a week in sales and attract around 7,000 cars a day. Their impact on the existing supermarkets would be nothing short of devastating.

"I would have to close at least one of the stores," said Verderosso, who has been in business since 1984. "As it is, things are already tight with the high cost of electricity and rent."

Verderosso said his business has suffered since a BJ's opened at [Starrett City](#). The new stores would be even more damaging.

"It is only a few miles away," Verderosso said. "Why open two more so close?"

The [BJ's Wholesale](#) Discount Club's anti-union policies and the \$45 membership fee it charges - an astronomical figure for many residents of these areas - are troublesome enough. Even worse is that as a matter of policy, BJ's stores do not accept food stamps or subsidies under the Women, Infants and Children (WIC) program. This makes it all but impossible for the community to benefit from their discounted prices.

"People need to have access to affordable food," said [Alexandra Yannias](#) of the New York Coalition Against Hunger. "Not accepting food stamps goes against the community needs."

Verderosso's store would not be the only one in trouble if the warehouse stores open. In the case of the Terminal Market site on Avenue D and Foster Ave., there are 26 supermarkets within a 2-mile radius of the proposed BJ's. They would be threatened.

Most of them are minority-owned independent [Key Foods](#), Associates, Pioneers and C-Towns. They came into these neighborhoods in the 1970s when the national chains fled and helped bring back the local economies.

The Bloomberg administration has taken an interest in promoting and preserving the city's supermarkets, a worthy goal that the proliferation of discount club stores makes almost impossible to achieve. aruiz@nydailynews.com.

