My laptop was acting up, dispatching emails before I hit “send,” so I set off for Tekserve. It’s my neighborhood computer-repair store, and it’s been serving Manhattan for decades — “the Apple Store in New York City before there was such a thing as an Apple Store,” The Times called it. When I arrived, a clerk told me it was about to close, permanently. The rent had doubled.

Tekserve started serving Mac owners in a funky upstairs space on West 23rd Street when computers were still unwieldy and mysterious. It soon became so iconic that it appeared in an episode of “Sex and the City.” Later, it moved to a neighboring loftlike space where customers took paper tickets and sipped free bottled water or Coke in green glass bottles. Tekserve answered questions by email at any hour of the day.

Suddenly, I saw another downside to the city’s real estate boom. It’s driving away the unique, friendly places that make living in the city worth the effort.

It’s not a new problem — in years past my husband and I mourned the loss of the Empire Diner in Chelsea and Vercesi Hardware. But it seems to be picking up speed. In the last few weeks, by my count, about a dozen institutions have disappeared. Some of them sold things you simply cannot get anywhere else.
Where else will New York’s quilt-makers go for supplies now that the City Quilter, on West 25th Street, shut down? New York Central Art Supply had the best drawing paper in the city. What will replace it?

AR Trapp Opticians, on Madison Avenue near Rockefeller Center, had a national clientele because of its old-fashioned, unusual eyeglass frames. First, its landlord rented the shop next door to a competitor, then raised the rent.

In the Flatiron district, a charmingly grumpy store called Krup’s Kitchen and Bath carried old-fashioned appliances alongside sleek new European luxury brands and hard-to-find refrigerators and stoves from mainstream American suppliers in odd sizes to replace those built into tiny New York kitchens. Krup’s, too, is gone.

The wave is lapping beyond Manhattan, too — deep into Brooklyn, patrons mourned when Rocco’s Calamari, an Italian cafeteria that, despite its name, served much more than fried squid, closed its doors.

A happier tale is the story of one beloved institution pushed out of my neighborhood by rising rents: the Union Square Cafe, which Danny Meyer opened in 1985 at 21 East 16th Street, long before he became a globe-trotting restaurateur. Fortunately, it is reopening soon on Park Avenue South, near the farmers’ market that supplies many of its ingredients. But Mr. Meyer, with his other restaurants and Shake Shack empire, had the resources and inclination to find another location. Few other business owners have either.

It’s not just a matter of my personal convenience or quirky shopping habits. The usually well-paying, stable jobs lost when family-owned shops close will not be replaced if chain stores with fast-changing work forces come in. And since many chains are already here, a lot of shop fronts will remain empty, producing no revenue — and no street life — at all.

It’s not just rent that’s driving these businesses out. They emerged out of an older era, in which goods were distributed to retailers by carts, then small trucks coursing through alleys. In New York, however, the efficient street grid doesn’t have any alleys, so deliveries have to take place on busy city streets.
“In an economy-of-scale world, where traffic itself has become a valuable commodity, the mom-and-pop store suffers,” as a friend, the investment adviser Frazer Rice, pointed out to me. And, he added: “The tax and regulatory climate for a small business is nothing short of punishing. At some point, why bother?”

I’m far from the first person to notice the rapid deterioration of the city’s street-level fabric. A writer who uses the pseudonym Jeremiah Moss has been bemoaning the problem on his blog Vanishing New York since 2007. His organization, #SaveNYC, is trying to hold back the tide through awareness and grass-roots lobbying. You can join in.

Mr. Moss has called for curbs on tax breaks for chain stores, laws ensuring reasonable rent increases and fines on landlords who leave their storefronts empty. He’s also pushing for a cultural preservation program, which would protect businesses that have contributed significantly to a neighborhood’s social fabric.

They’re all great ideas; unfortunately, the impending extinction of New York’s small-business storefronts doesn’t seem to be on any politician’s radar. It should be: Our city’s uniqueness comes from the little shops and restaurants many of us have been taking for granted for far too long.

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