

Plan for Pershing Square Would Yield New Park

By DOUGLAS MARTIN

The shabby, walled-in space beneath Park Avenue where the roadway rises to veer around Grand Central Terminal has been notable mainly for the flocks of pigeons making it home. But if the area's business improvement district has its way, this underside of the viaduct will be the centerpiece of the next Bryant Park.

Yesterday, the city and the Grand Central Partnership announced revitalization plans for Pershing Square, including a restaurant and what ultimately the business district hopes will be a tree-shaded park on each side.

The city has agreed to lease the viaduct space to the Grand Central Partnership, which in turn will rent it to a yet-to-be-named restaurateur. The estimated \$2 million cost of renovating the space, including walls of sheer glass, is to be shared by the partnership and one of several restaurants that have expressed interest in the site. The deal calls for a 20-year lease under which the city will receive an annual base rent of \$75,000, plus an undetermined proportion of the restaurant's profits. The restaurant would likely not open for several years.

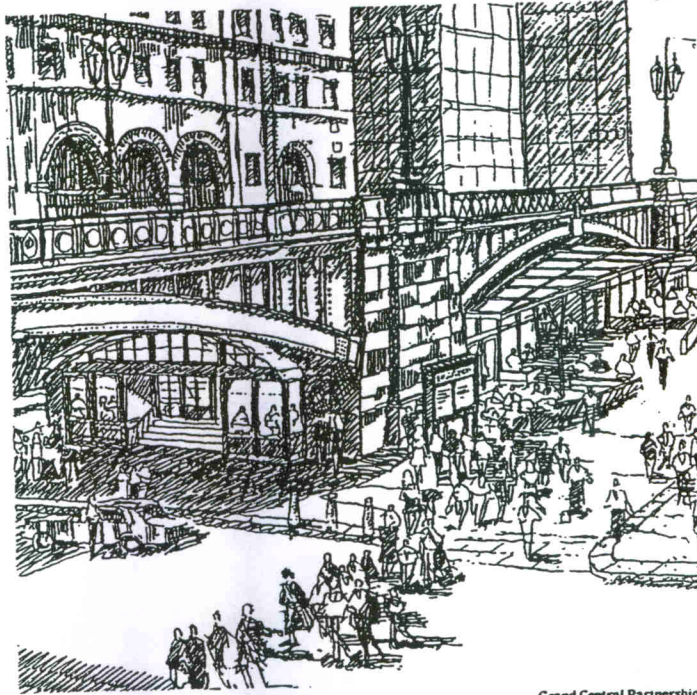
"What we're trying to do here is exactly the same thing as the Terrace Restaurant in Bryant Park," said Daniel A. Biederman, president of the partnership as well as the Bryant Park Restoration Corporation, which oversaw the successful renovation of that park.

Once, the underside of the bridge served as an open trolley barn. It was closed in for a visitors center for the 1939 World's Fair, then became New York's City's Visitors Information Center. Its last incarnation was as a discount store, which was evicted three years ago for nonpayment of rent to the city.

The next use will depend on which restaurant is selected. Ideas have ranged from fancy restaurants to huge bars to moderately priced places. "Lutèce would be too pricey for what we have in mind," Mr. Biederman said.

The partnership, which has coveted the space for more than a decade, also hopes to create a parklike space on each side of the restaurant with trees, shrubbery, flower beds and a performance space.

The plan for a permanent plaza still needs city approval, particularly from the Department of Transportation, which would have to close off



Grand Central Partnership

A sketch shows what the Grand Central Partnership envisions for Pershing Square, across 42d Street from Grand Central Terminal. The partnership's plans include a restaurant and a park on each side.

at least a block of Park Avenue fully.

"This is an exciting idea for a new public space," said Marcia Reiss, deputy director of policy for the Parks Council, an advocacy group. "But we have to make sure the design welcomes the public, even if they are not paying customers."

The southbound side of Park Avenue has already been closed for four hours a day for the last two summers, with tables set out for brown-bag lunchers. Community Board 5, which has only an advisory role, has opposed shutting off the north side. The board chairman, Nicholas Fish, said that the quality of the park would be crucial to winning community support but that the issue of balancing public and private concerns would rate even higher.

"There is a principled issue of transferring control of pure public space to private entities," Mr. Fish said, adding that he fears a domino effect in other areas with business improvement districts. "This whole BID movement represents experiments in privatization. They raise pretty fundamental policy questions which people ought to ponder care-

A shabby spot in midtown may be reclaimed.

ence — all using the underside of that bridge."

Mr. Sander said he hopes to find similar places where he can turn defunct transportation spaces into people-friendly environment. "There are opportunities like this throughout New York," he said. "This is a paradigm change. As we examine neglected urban space there are other considerations besides the through-put of vehicles."

Andy Manshel, the partnership general counsel, said a vital element of negotiations was persuading the city to accept less money than might have got from a fast-food operator or another discount outlet. He said the partnership — after failing to convince Mayors Edward I. Koch and David N. Dinkins — successfully pressed the case with the administration of Mayor Rudolph W. Giuliani that a more prestigious use would help upgrade the surrounding neighborhood, ultimately increasing property tax revenues.

Some remember that the spot where a building now stands, at 11 Park Avenue across the street from the viaduct, was once a small park. It disappeared in 1920, but a plaque declares that the park once existed