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Restaurateur Is Said to Win Pier A Lease

By Patrick McGeehan

A prince of the restaurant scene in Manhattan's financial district could soon expand his realm to a 125-year-old Victorian pier that juts out from Lower Manhattan toward the Statue of Liberty.

Peter Poulakakos, whose family operates Harry's Cafe and Steak and several other restaurants near Wall Street, was selected as the best candidate for a lease on Pier A at the edge of Battery Park, he and other people with knowledge of the decision said Monday. The directors of the Battery Park City Authority are scheduled to vote on his bid on Tuesday night, a spokeswoman for the authority said.

"I would do several good things for Lower Manhattan," Mr. Poulakakos said on Monday. But the usually extroverted Mr. Poulakakos said he would not discuss his plans for the pier until after the board had voted.

The choice of the Poulakakos family could breathe commercial life into the city-owned pier, which sat empty and decaying for decades before the city ceded control of it in 2008 to the Battery Park City Authority. The authority is a state agency that built and runs Battery Park City, across West Street from the site of the destroyed World Trade Center.

But how the decision will be received in Lower Manhattan is a mystery because the authority has been so secretive about the selection process. Several community leaders said they had inquired about the plans for Pier A but had been rebuffed by officials of the authority.

"The whole process should have gone through the community at large," said Julie Menin, the chairwoman of Community Board 1. "It shouldn't be that we read about a new tenant of Pier A in the newspaper, when taxpayer dollars are being expended."

Ms. Menin said the process was reminiscent of the decision by George E. Pataki, the former governor, to reserve a site in Battery Park City for a women's museum that was a pet project of his wife, Libby. "There was no public review process," Ms. Menin recalled. That museum was never built, and a public school was eventually built on the site.

Ms. Menin said she would prefer that the pier include a cultural institution of some sort to attract the millions of tourists who are expected to flood the area after the World Trade Center memorial opens. One of the other bidders for Pier A, Joseph J. Grano Jr., had proposed installing a

museum of Italian-American heritage in the two-story pier shed. But Mr. Grano has not heard a response from authority officials in several weeks, a person close to him said.

Leticia Remauro, a vice president of the authority, disputed Ms. Menin's characterization, saying the community board's opinions had been solicited.

"Whatever requests were ever made of us were fulfilled," Ms. Remauro said. She added, "The overwhelming request by the community was that they wanted to keep it a public place."

Warrie Price, the president of the Battery Conservancy, said she did not know how the decision might affect the users of Battery Park, which lies just below the pier, because she had not been told anything about it. "We're the next-door neighbors." Ms. Price said. "We're very interested to know who it is and what are their economic goals."

The Poulakakoses are no strangers in the downtown community or at City Hall. The family was a partner with an architectural firm that received a city contract three years ago to restore the Battery Maritime Building at the tip of Manhattan.