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SQUARE FEET



ROGERS MARVEL ARCHITECTS

The Battery Maritime Building is being renovated by the Dermot Company. A 140-room luxury hotel will be added on top.



Pondering Public Uses For a Hall Named Great

By TERRY PRISTIN

What if you had a majestic sky-lit, columned hall in a Beaux-Arts ferry building at the tip of Manhattan and were required to use it as a public space? What would you do with it?

It is hardly the sort of opportunity that comes up very often in a cramped city like New York. But that is the challenge facing the Dermot Company, a New York developer that was selected last year to rehabilitate the century-old Battery Maritime Building's dilapidated interior — while also adding a glassy 140-room luxury hotel on top.

The city has already spent \$60 million to stabilize the ferry slips jutting out from the landmark building and painstakingly restore its ornate exterior. Dermot's partner in the \$150 million project is the Poulakakos family, the owner of several downtown restaurants.

In announcing the selection of Dermot, city officials suggested that the building's *pièce de résistance*, a former passenger waiting room with 30-foot ceilings and 10,000 square feet of space, might be transformed into a smaller version of the Ferry Building in San Francisco. There, a marketplace for artisan food vendors draws customers from all over that city.

But the marketplace idea proved impractical for the Battery Maritime space, which is known as the Great Hall, Dermot executives say.

"It's physically not feasible," said Stephen N. Benjamin, a Dermot vice president. "It's radically

major hurdle this month when the city Landmarks Preservation Commission approved the latest design. In October, the commission asked the architect, Rogers Marvel of TriBeCa, to redesign the three-and-a-half-story glass addition so that it would no longer overpower the historic building.

Originally, the ferry building, designed by Walker & Morris, had three stories. A fourth story, added in 1957, will be removed.

The architects set back the glass structure more than nine feet, reducing the size of the hotel by 3,625 square feet. They also decided to restore four cupolas facing the river. Removed in the 1930s, each cupola was 50 feet tall, including a 25-foot spire. The cupolas will be made of fiberglass and will cost at least \$500,000 each, the architects said.

Reconstructing older elements is something modernists usually resist, said Jonathan Marvel, one of the architects. "To come back with the cupolas took a little adjustment for us," he said.

But recreating them will call more attention to the original building, said his partner, Robert M. Rogers. "The addition becomes more deferential," he said. "I think that's the balance they were seeking."

At the hearing, Robert B. Tierney, the commission chairman, praised the redesign as "extraordinarily sensitive." But Roberta Brandes Gratz, one of two dissenting commissioners, complained that the building would be compromised by a "top heavy" addition.

The former waiting room has 30-foot ceilings and 10,000 square feet of space.

inadequate in size." Situated on the second floor, the hall does not have a loading dock.

Dermot executives, who plan to spend \$30 million on the Great Hall alone, have not ruled out other food-related uses for the Great Hall, including cooking demonstrations or food boutiques. Under Dermot's agreement with the city, the hall could also be used for private events, Mr. Benjamin said.

Another idea is to use the Great Hall for small exhibitions or shows by local groups like the American Numismatic Society, said Alan J. Gerson, the City Council member whose district includes the Battery Maritime Building.

In an effort to solicit ideas from residents and business owners, Dermot and Mr. Gerson will sponsor a public forum at 6:30 p.m. Wednesday at the 3-Legged Dog Art and Technology Center at 80 Greenwich Street.

Completed in 1909, the Battery Maritime Building, at South Street, is the last surviving East River terminal from the era when 17 ferry lines traveled between Manhattan and Brooklyn. An example of what has sometimes been called Beaux-Arts Structural Expressionism, the building is embellished with rosettes, rivets and glazed blue tiles. On the south side, facing the river, three ferry slips sit under huge arches lined in pink stucco; service to Governors Island will continue during the building's renovation, Mr. Benjamin said.

A twin building, the Whitehall Street Ferry Terminal, burned down in 1991 and was replaced in 2005.

Dermot's proposal for the Battery Maritime Building cleared a

With the landmarks commission approval behind them, the developers must now go through the city's seven-month land-use process.

Dermot, which redeveloped the Williamsburgh Savings Bank in Brooklyn as a condominium building in partnership with Canyon-Johnson Urban Funds, will also seek an institutional partner for the Battery Maritime Building, Mr. Benjamin said.

An agreement has been reached with a West Coast-based boutique hotel operator, but Mr. Benjamin would not disclose the company's name.

New York hotels have had three record-breaking years in a row, but competition is likely to increase now that a number of new hotels are being added to the market, including several in Lower Manhattan, said John A. Fox, a senior vice president at PKF Consulting, which specializes in the hotel industry. Though there are no other hotels on the water, the nearby Ritz-Carlton Hotel offers unobstructed views of the harbor.

However the issue of the public space at the Battery Maritime Building is resolved, Lower Manhattan, a growing residential neighborhood, is likely to get a food market, Councilman Gerson said. "It doesn't necessarily have to be at this location," he said.

General Growth Properties, the Chicago-based company that is redeveloping the South Street Seaport, plans to open a modest-size food market in outdoor but covered space at the former Fulton Fish Market, said Michael McNaughton, a vice president.

For the Battery Maritime Building, the main issue is ensuring that the Great Hall remains public, said Julie Menin, the chairwoman of the local community board.

"Unfortunately, we are seeing more and more true landmarks not available for public use," she said, citing 55 Wall Street, a McKim, Mead & White building that became the private Cipriani Club Residence after its short life as the Regent Hotel.

"We want to see full round-the-clock public use," she said.