

HOTEL PLAN SET FOR GHOST TERMINAL

Monday, February 7, 2011

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An airline terminal at John F. Kennedy International Airport that started as a jet-age architectural icon but has become a security-age relic could be reopened as a boutique hotel.

The Port Authority of New York and New Jersey is looking for developers to turn the vacant Trans World Airlines Flight Center into the centerpiece of a small, high-end hotel that would allow the agency to reopen the terminal and recoup some of the money it spent restoring it.

The curving, winged terminal opened in 1962 at what was then Idlewild Airport. It became a symbol of the glamour of air travel. Its designer, Eero Saarinen, is considered a master of midcentury modernist architecture. Among his other works are St. Louis's Gateway Arch and Manhattan's CBS headquarters.

But as baggage systems got more complex and security concerns grew along with the airport, the terminal became unwieldy. After a bankrupt TWA was bought by American Airlines in 2001, the terminal closed. JetBlue Airways eventually built a new facility around the Saarinen-designed building. Since then, it has sat empty. Attempts to find a tenant fell short. So in 2008, the Port Authority decided to spend \$20 million to remove asbestos and restore the interior to better appeal to developers.

Now, the agency hopes to find a developer who will build a small hotel in the space between the old TWA terminal and the new JetBlue building. The interior of the TWA space would serve as an entry way and lobby for the hotel with restaurants and shops.

"You can have perhaps the hippest, coolest-looking front office to a boutique hotel that serves a very special and unique air traveling market," said Port Authority Executive Director Chris Ward. "It's not a big airport hotel. It's going to be a niche-market boutique-style hotel with about 150 rooms."

The Port Authority issued a request for qualifications last week. The agency hopes to have construction finished two years after it signs a contract with a developer.

That developer will have to contend with a number of challenges. Anything built on the site must pass muster with the Federal Aviation Administration, so the hotel's height will be limited. And the TWA terminal is both a New York City landmark and listed on the National Register of Historic Places, meaning alterations to the original structure must be minimal.

"Clearly drawing inspiration from, but then also not clouding the Saarinen terminal is going to be a key part of our evaluation of the proposals," Mr. Ward said.

The terminal is a darling of preservationists, who have urged the Port Authority to find a way to reuse the property.

"I think [the hotel proposal] definitely has potential—and it would still be part of the airport, which is very important," said Alex Herrera, director of technical services at the New York Landmarks Conservancy. "I think it'll be tricky to fit modern hotel use in there—they'll have to go more toward the European concept of a hotel in an old castle."

The market for hotels in New York, while still down far from its 2008 peak, has begun to recover faster than other types of real estate because of a rebound in tourism. The Port Authority is also in negotiations with a potential tenant for the much larger former Ramada Plaza hotel at JFK's edge.

Mr. Ward sees the new hotel as catering to business travelers and others in the city for a short period of time who might otherwise stay at fashionable luxury hotels in Manhattan. The cavernous original building, meanwhile, would also be open to travelers for dining and shopping. They'd be attracted, he hopes, by the building's considerable cultural cachet.

"There are few buildings designed for airports that have resonated with the public as much as this one," said Frank Sanchis, a senior advisor at the Municipal Art Society of New York. "To have that in New York as part of our major airport for New York City is a tremendous gift."