

Flatiron street to become pedestrian plaza

By Sabina Mollot

As part of the city's attempt to become more pedestrian friendly as well as give a boost to local businesses, several busy sections of streets throughout Manhattan, Brooklyn and the Bronx will soon be converted into car-free zones with tables, chairs and decorative plantings.

One of the areas destined for a pedestrian plaza, where work is already well underway, is the west side of Madison Square Park, where Fifth Avenue and Broadway connect.

Dubbed "The Madison Park Pedestrian Project," the conversion will create over 35,000 square feet of public space filled with 40 tables and large umbrellas, 110 chairs and 170 plantings, including shrubs and trees, in three areas. Those three plaza areas are located between 22nd and 23rd Streets between Broadway and the Flatiron Building, between 23rd and 24th Streets where there is currently a small island in the middle of the intersection and around the Worth monument in the park.

Jennifer Brown, the executive director of the Flatiron/23rd Street Partnership BID, joked that the project will give tourists a more convenient place to snap their photos of the Flatiron Building.

Right now, "they do it from the buses," she said. "Sometimes they get off the bus, but this would give them a place to stand."



The area west of Madison Square Park, shown in a DOT photo taken last month, will soon become part of a pedestrian plaza.

Earlier this year, the Flatiron/23rd Street Partnership agreed to become one of two maintenance partners in the pedestrian project, which was spearheaded by the Department of Transportation. This means that once the converted streets are paid for and completed by the DOT, The Partnership and the other maintenance partner, the nonprofit Madison Square Park Conservancy, will be responsible for

keeping the areas clean and turning them into destinations.

Debbie Landau, the president of the Conservancy, said once the plaza areas open, the partners will begin evaluating the best uses for the space.

"The first thing we want to see is how people use it," said Landau. "Parks are all about passive enjoyment. It's where

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people come to relax or contemplate."

Possible uses for the space that are being tossed around include a flower market, a holiday market similar to the one that takes place

each year in Union Square, public art installations and a concession stand.

"Hopefully then the tourists will want to stay in the neighborhood," said Brown. "And if there

were some kind of market, it would be an amenity for residents and workers."

Additionally, the expanded pedestrian spaces, which are scheduled to open in late August, will include more crosswalks, an expanded lane for bicycles, and a shortened Fifth Avenue bus route. According to information provided by the DOT, the entire project is expected to cost about \$1 million, and will be funded by the federal

CMAQ (Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality) program.

Other areas in the midst of being converted to a pedestrian space are Broadway Boulevard and the HUB in the Bronx. Recently completed similar projects include changes to the Gansevoort area, the reconfiguration of 9th Avenue between 16th and 14th Streets and Grand Army Plaza and the Pearl Street Plaza in Brooklyn.