

Town & Village

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Mayor officially opens the Madison Square Pedestrian Plaza

By Sabina Mollot

The Madison Square Pedestrian Project, the recently expanded islands between Fifth Avenue and Broadway from 22nd to 24th Streets officially opened on Friday when Mayor Bloomberg officiated at a ribbon cutting ceremony.

“It’s all part of our effort to give neighborhoods more open space, while encouraging bike use and simplifying traffic patterns,” said the mayor at the morning event, as tourists cheered him on from a passing double-decker bus.

The pedestrian project, which despite being incompletely furnished until last week, was already a hit with locals and pedestrians alike, for its seating areas and views of the park and the Flatiron Building.

The finishing touches—shade umbrellas were added to the areas with tables and chairs and planters—were added last week.

The project began in the beginning of summer with a re-paving of the streets, which are now off limits to vehicular traffic.

Gramercy resident Raul Rivera, who was sitting with his daughter Amanda at one of the tables west of the park, said, “We need more of these. This makes us feel like we’re in a different area. It’s a little piece of Europe.”

One goal of the project was to make the area safer for pedestrians—who would often cross the busy intersection by the Flatiron Building, sometimes in an attempt to snap a photo of the neighborhood landmark. The other, as the mayor pointed out, was to encourage more business from foot traffic.

“People are much more likely to buy a sandwich or coffee if there’s a place to sit down and enjoy it,” he said, adding the project has added 42,000 square feet of open space to the city.

With another pedestrian project in the Times Square area, a total of 65,000 square feet were added to the Broadway area. Each of the projects cost about \$1 million, financed by the city, to build. Maintaining the projects will be the responsibility of local BIDS, and in the case of the Madison Square Project, the Flatiron/23rd Street BID and the Madison Square Park Conservancy will be overseeing the project’s maintenance and in the future, possibly its concessions and art installations.

Currently, the project is furnished with tables, chairs, rock benches and planters that weigh between 600 and 1,000 pounds each. At night the furniture is locked up.

