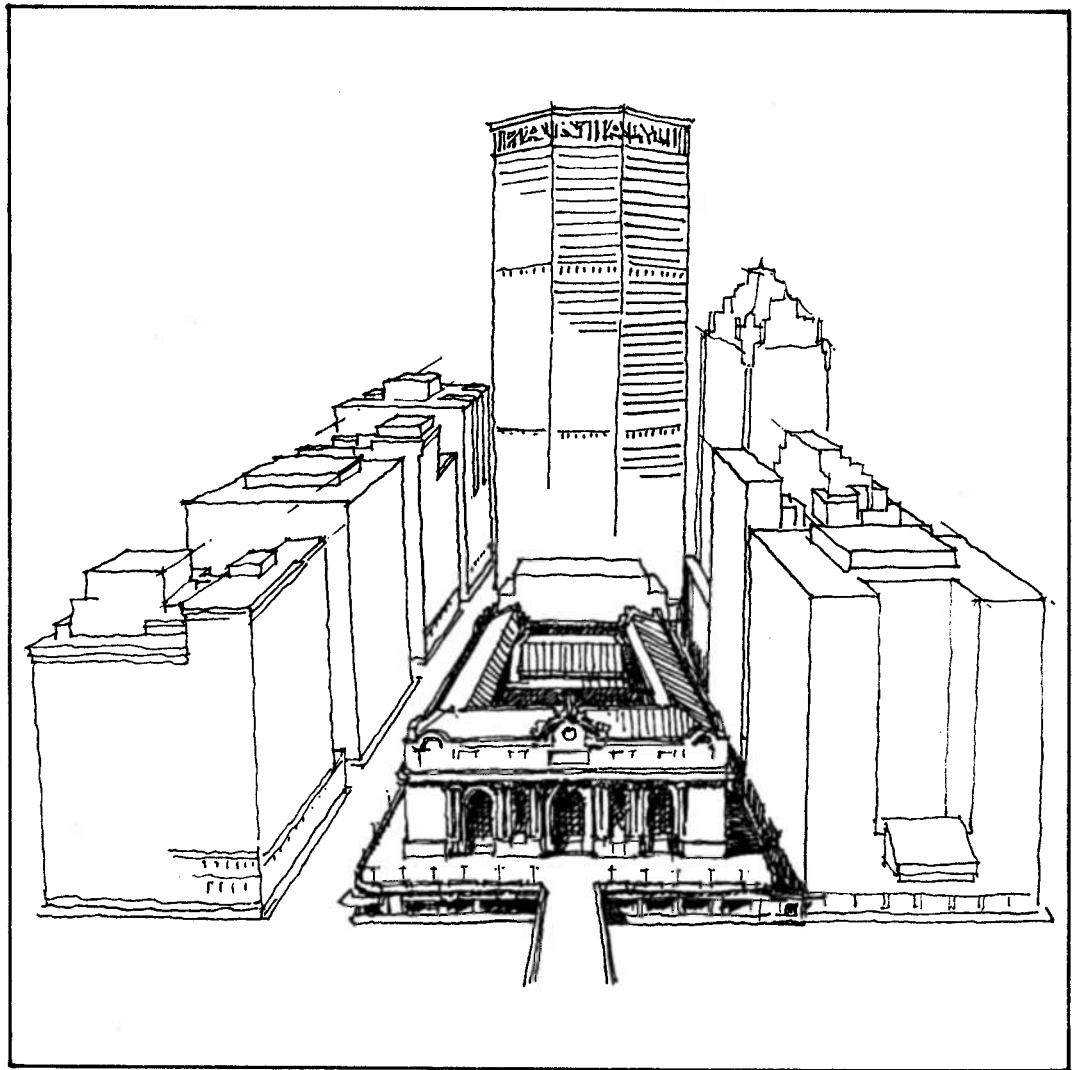

Grand Central Area

Proposal for a Special Sub-District



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Introduction

Grand Central Terminal is a vitally important transportation hub as well as a symbolic center of New York City. Over 700,000 people pass through the station each business day, many using the extensive underground and street-level pedestrian circulation network that connects the terminal with the nearby high-density commercial development. In anticipation of future development opportunities in the Grand Central Terminal area, this report proposes a planning framework to ensure that both the functional and aesthetic environment of the terminal is enhanced.

Background

Grand Central Terminal was completed in 1913 by the New York Central Railroad. At the time of the design for Grand Central, Park Avenue north of 42nd Street existed as an open cut between Madison and Lexington avenues. William J. Wilgus, chief engineer of the railroad, is credited with the original idea of a "Terminal City" surrounding the station. Wilgus proposed that the trackage up to 56th Street be covered and that income from the sale of development rights be used to pay for construction of the new terminal and electrification of the trains.

In the years between the terminal's completion and 1931 when the Waldorf Astoria Hotel was constructed on the last vacant development site, neo-classical apartment buildings and hotels sprang up around the terminal. Although Wilgus's vision of a unified complex of office and apartment buildings, hotels, theaters, shops and department stores enveloping the terminal was never fully realized, the terminal's pedestrian network has nevertheless integrated the Grand Central area into a definable district. Currently, the pedestrian circulation network connects

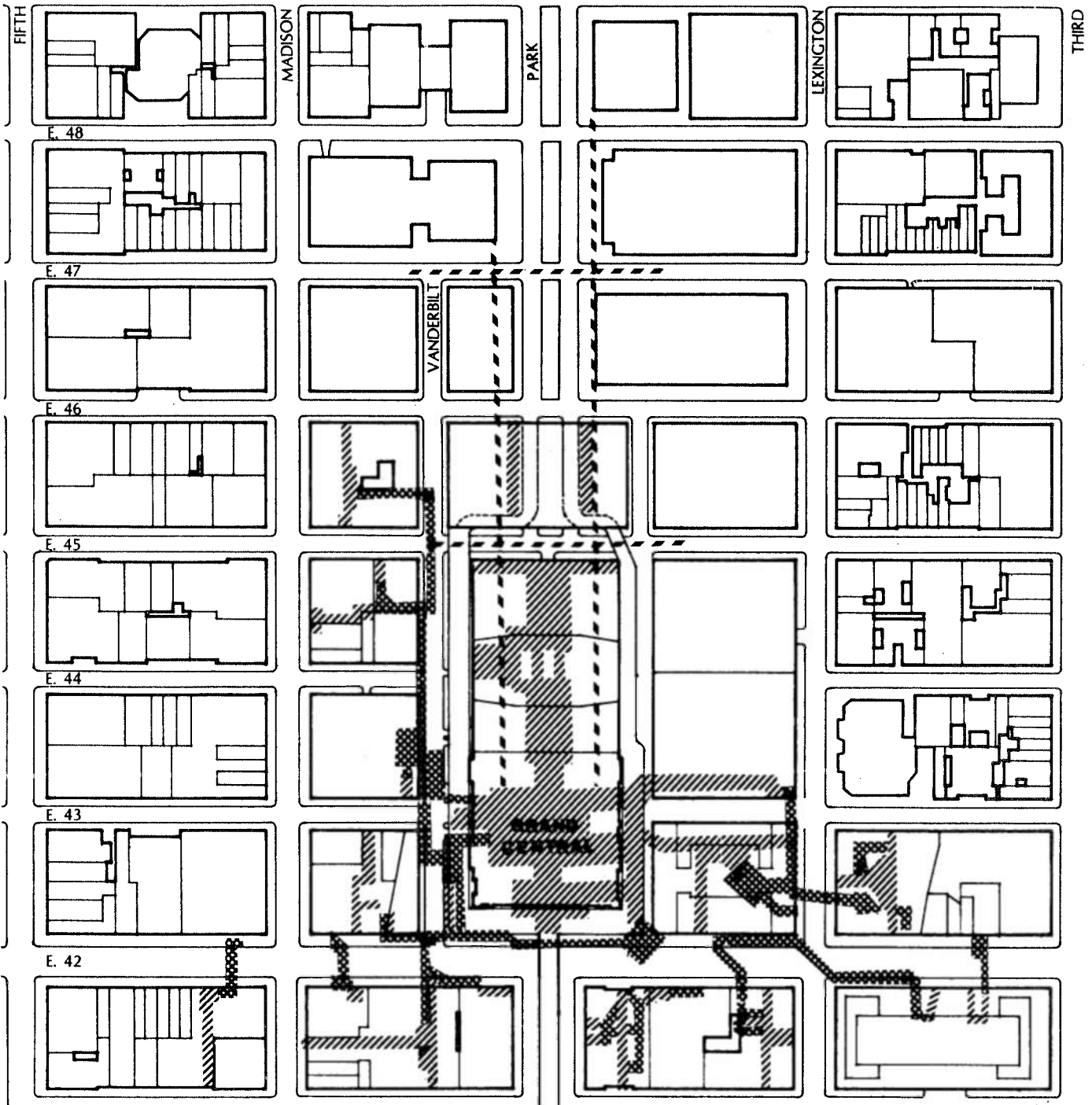
21 buildings to the terminal and significantly eases congestion on sidewalks and street intersections throughout the area.

Grand Central was designed to face the existing business district on its south side, although entrances were also included on the east and west sides of the terminal. It was not until the Pan Am building opened in 1963 that pedestrian movement through the complex became possible from the north. Though one can now enter the terminal as far north as 46th Street through the Hotel Roosevelt, the MTA has developed a proposal for expanding north end access in order to meet the current and future needs of pedestrian traffic. (See Figure 1.)




Existing Zoning

Development within the Grand Central area is governed by the regulations of the Special Midtown District. The terminal and surrounding lots are in a C5-3 district which permits a base of 15 FAR; C5-2.5 districts mapped in the mid-blocks permit a base of 12 FAR. (See Figure 2.) Sites in both districts can achieve a bonus of 1 FAR for an urban plaza and a bonus of up to 20 percent of the base floor area for providing a major improvement to an adjacent subway station.

Midtown regulations mandate a streetwall at the street line for buildings fronting on 42nd Street or Fifth Avenue and a streetwall within 10 feet of the street line for those on Madison, Park, or Lexington avenues. A new building in Midtown must have a minimum streetwall of 85 feet and may have a maximum of 120, 125 or 150 feet depending on the width of the street upon which it fronts. The building mass above the required streetwall is governed by the height and setback regulations of the Special Midtown District. Along 42nd Street, and Fifth, Madison, and Lexington



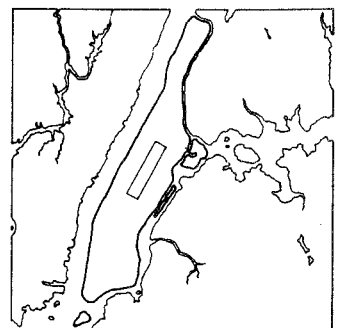
Network of Pedestrian Circulation

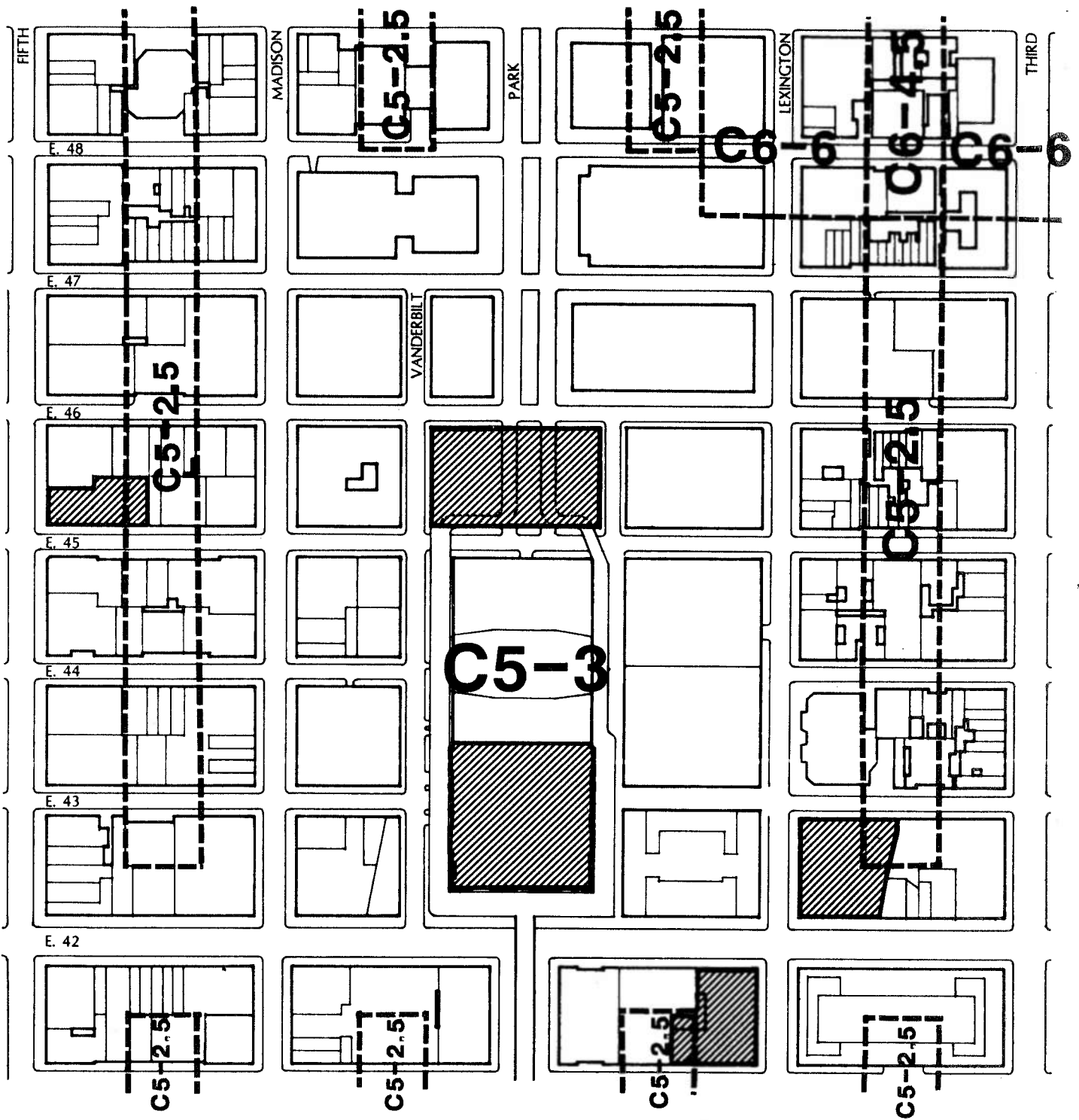
-  BELOW GRADE CIRCULATION NETWORK
-  STREET LEVEL CIRCULATION NETWORK
-  PROPOSED NETWORK

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FIGURE 1

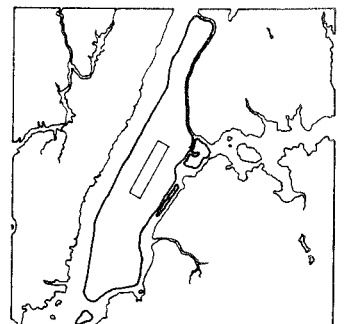




Current Zoning & Designated Landmarks

-  ZONING BOUNDARY
-  LANDMARK

FIGURE 2



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avenues, retail uses are mandated at the street level and the width of lobby entrances is limited.

Planning Context

A critical planning and development issue is the potential impact that the use of development rights from Grand Central Terminal could have on the surrounding area. As a designated New York City landmark, the terminal could potentially transfer some or all of its approximately 1,700,000 square feet of unused development rights.¹ The current transfer mechanism, Section 74-79 of the Zoning Resolution, permits transfers to those sites immediately adjacent to the landmark or in a chain of ownership. This mechanism was used in 1979 when the City Planning Commission and Board of Estimate approved a special permit for the conveyance of 74,655 square feet of development rights from Grand Central Terminal to the site of the former Airlines Terminal Building on the southwest corner of 42nd Street and Park Avenue to facilitate the construction of the Philip Morris headquarters. The approved special permit allowed for a 447,930 square foot building (21.6 FAR).

In taking a broader view of a potential transfer of development rights from Grand Central Terminal, the following factors must be considered:

- Due to the terminal's relatively low density and large footprint, a substantial amount of development rights is available for transfer.

¹ In addition to the terminal building itself, there are four other designated New York City landmarks within a few blocks of the terminal complex: the Helmsley Building between 45th and 46th streets at Park Avenue, the Chrysler Building on the northeast corner of 42nd Street at Lexington Avenue, the Chanin Building on the southwest corner of 42nd Street and Lexington Avenue, and the French Building at 45th Street and Fifth Avenue. All but the terminal building contain more floor area than is now permitted by zoning and therefore do not have any development rights to transfer.

- Current zoning regulations permit development rights to be distributed over an area defined primarily by the terminal's complicated ownership patterns rather than by a plan based upon appropriate planning concerns.
- Currently the 74-79 special permit mechanism does not place a specific limit on the amount of development rights which may be transferred to any one parcel. The amount of transfer permitted is at the discretion of the City Planning Commission and the Board of Estimate in accordance with the required findings of Section 79-792.
- Opportunities to expand Grand Central Terminal's valuable pedestrian circulation network have not been maximized.

Collectively, these circumstances make it clear that the current regulations could lead to an ad hoc series of applications for the transfer of development rights from the terminal under Section 74-79. In order to provide a comprehensive planning framework to govern the transfer of development rights from landmarks, City Planning proposes a new Grand Central Sub-District within the Special Midtown District. The following objectives would be achieved by the plan:

- Formation of a more rational method for distributing development rights.
- Reinforcement of the established character of the Grand Central area.

- Enhancement and, where possible, expansion of the pedestrian circulation network which extends from Grand Central Terminal and is integral to the area's function and character.

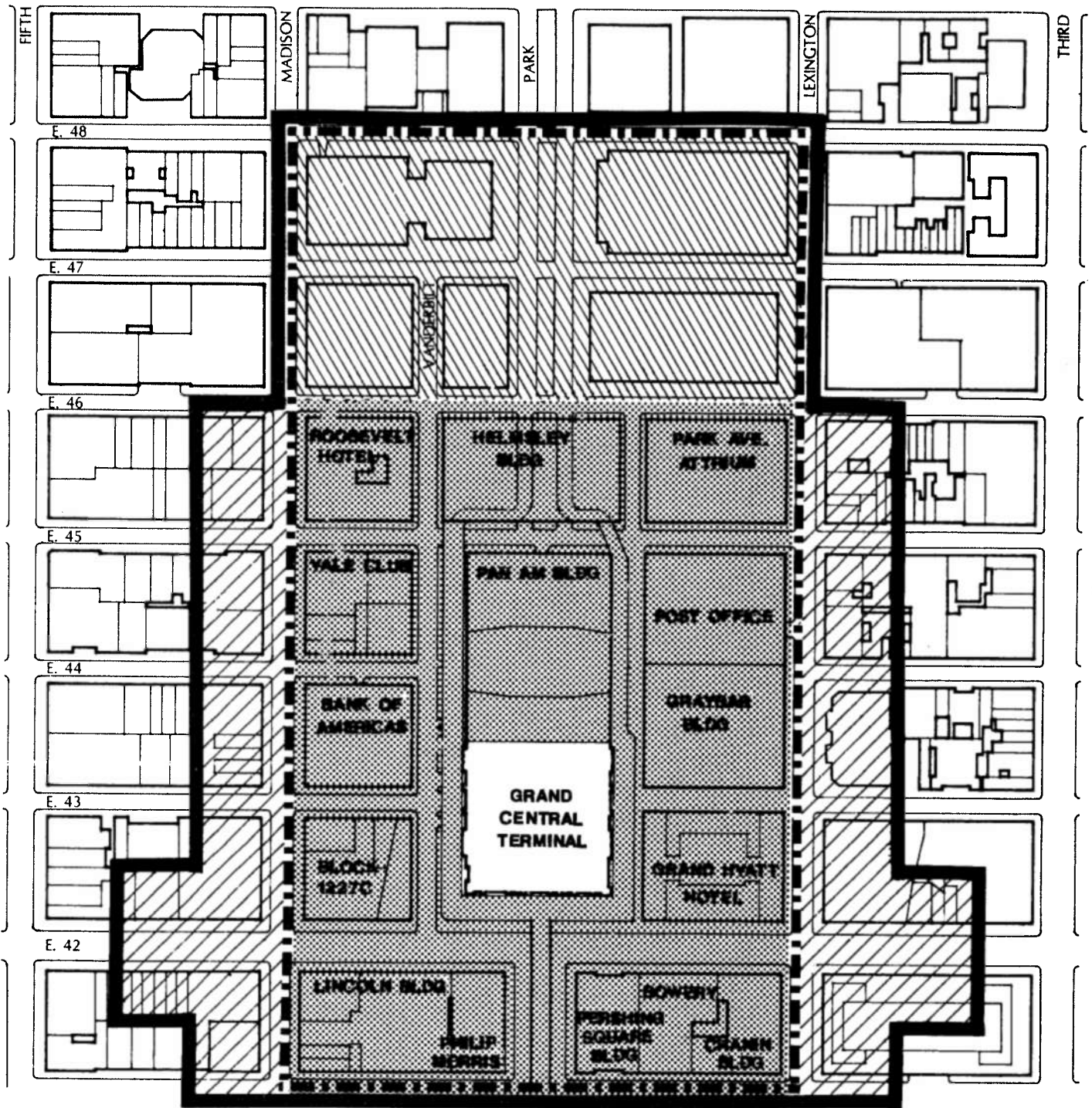
Description of Proposed Grand Central Sub-District

The proposal developed by City Planning for a Grand Central Sub-District would:





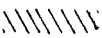
- permit the excess development rights from Grand Central Terminal to be distributed over a wider area defined by the extensive pedestrian circulation network;
- place a cap on the total amount of development rights which may be transferred to any individual site;
- establish a mechanism for making and evaluating pedestrian circulation improvements; and
- specify bulk regulations to enhance the sub-district's special character.

Boundaries

The proposed sub-district would extend from East 41st to 48th streets, from the midblock west of Madison Avenue to the midblock east of Lexington Avenue. Included within a "core area" are properties that are currently connected, as well as those which may in the future be connected, to the pedestrian circulation network. The "core area" would be the area between the center lines of Madison and Lexington avenues between East 41st to 48th streets. (See Figure 3.)



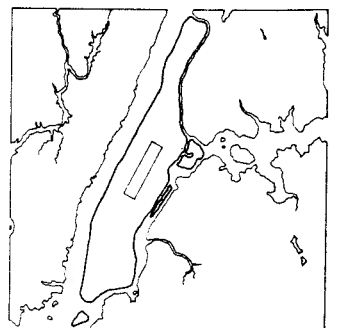
Sub-District Proposal

-  SUB-DISTRICT BOUNDARY
-  CORE AREA
-  ELIGIBLE UNDER EITHER CURRENT SECTION 74-79 (NO CAP)
OR PROPOSED SUB-DISTRICT (21.6 FAR CAP)
-  ELIGIBLE UNDER PROPOSED SUB-DISTRICT (21.6 FAR CAP)
-  ELIGIBLE UNDER PROPOSED SUB-DISTRICT (16 FAR CAP)

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FIGURE 3



Density and Transfer Provisions

The proposed district would increase the number of sites eligible for transfer of development rights from landmarks within the district as follows:

1. All sites within the sub-district would be eligible, by authorization of the City Planning Commission, to receive up to 1 FAR of development rights from designated landmarks. Approval of an authorization would be conditioned upon a program for the continuing maintenance of the landmark. The urban plaza bonus would be eliminated.
2. Sites within the "core area" would be eligible for a transfer of development rights up to a maximum of 21.6 FAR by City Planning Commission special permit contingent upon (a) improvements to, including expansion of, the existing pedestrian network and (b) a program for continuing maintenance of the landmark. The "core area" reflects the primary area served by the pedestrian circulation network and potential development sites are, or can be, connected directly with that network.
3. Sites currently eligible under Section 74-79 would retain their eligibility for a special permit. According to the Zoning Resolution, the grant of a special permit requires "(a) that the permitted transfer of floor area or variations on the front height and setback regulations will not unduly increase the bulk of any new development, density of population, or intensity of use in any block to the detriment of the occupants of buildings on the block or nearby blocks, and that any disadvantages to the surrounding area caused by reduced access of light and air will be more than

offset by the advantages of the landmark's preservation to the local community and the city as a whole; (b) that the program for the continuing maintenance will result in the preservation of the landmark; and (c) that in the case of landmark sites owned by the city, state, or federal government, transfer of development rights shall be contingent upon provision by the applicant of a major improvement of the public pedestrian circulation or transportation system in the area."

Urban Design Controls

A set of urban design controls would be mandated in order to ensure that new development is compatible with the high coverage character of the existing buildings in the Grand Central area.

For new developments on 42nd Street, Depew Place and Madison, Vanderbilt, Park, and Lexington avenues within the subdistrict, the minimum streetwall height would be 120 feet with a permitted maximum of 150 feet at or within 10 feet of the streetline. (The proposed location of the streetwall along Vanderbilt Avenue and Depew Place may require further analysis regarding the feasibility of placing a building above the railroad tracks.) A "wrap-around" of the streetwall on narrow streets would be required for a distance of 100 feet from the intersection of a wide street. Height and setback and recess requirements would be similar to the existing Special Midtown District regulations.

In recognition of the area's importance as a transportation center, proposed street level urban design controls are intended to enhance pedestrian circulation opportunities in the area of the terminal. New developments would be required to provide multiple entrances with recesses and through-block connections on through lots. Curb cuts and

curb cut widths would be limited. Special Midtown District pedestrian circulation space regulations would be further refined regarding arcades and sidewalk widenings.

Conclusion

The proposed Grand Central Sub-District is intended to provide a sound planning framework for future development in the Grand Central area. In addition to increasing the number of opportunities available for transfer of development rights from Grand Central Terminal, the proposed sub-district prescribes a set of urban design controls to ensure that future development reinforces the aesthetic character of the area particularly with respect to the terminal. The Department of City Planning has prepared this summary to serve as the basis for a full public discussion involving community, civic, and business groups prior to the initiation of zoning text amendments.

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