

Appendix 8 – Neighborhood Character

HISTORY OF DEVELOPMENT AROUND GRAND CENTRAL TERMINAL

Development of the area around Grand Central Terminal was a key component of the original Grand Central project and the character of the neighborhood surrounding Grand Central, while changing significantly over time, has continued to be strongly defined by its relation to the Terminal building.

In 1902, the New York Central Railroad proposed a novel plan to raise revenues for construction of the new train depot—by selling and leasing the air rights over the tracks between Madison and Lexington Avenue from East 42nd to East 50th Streets (and including the west blockfronts of Park Avenue between East 50th and East 52nd Streets) to allow for construction of revenue-producing office, hotel and apartment buildings.

The area was developed in two general phases. First, the area directly around the Terminal was developed in the 1910s, while the area further north along Park Avenue was developed in the 1920s. The 1910 generation of buildings—all built before the introduction of the 1916 New York City Zoning Resolution—were generally characterized by high street walls unattainable under the new regulations. The 1920 phase buildings were built pursuant to the 1916 zoning regulations and were configured with lower street walls, building setbacks and towers, best exemplified by the Waldorf-Astoria. Development of the area was rapid, such that three of the buildings built during the first phase were replaced by new, larger developments in the second—including the Graybar Building.

By the time it was fully developed in the late 1920s, this 48-acre area, which became known as Terminal City, had a post office, eight major luxury hotels, including the Waldorf-Astoria, Roosevelt Hotel, and Barclay Hotel (now the Hotel Intercontinental), 11 office buildings, including the New York Central Building, Postum Building, Graybar Building, Vanderbilt Concourse and Vanderbilt Office buildings, six large luxury apartment buildings, and the Yale Club. This mixture of uses was reflective of the Terminal's then-position as predominantly focused on intercity travel. Many of the buildings, particularly those located around the Terminal itself, were further linked together through a below-grade pedestrian network emanating from Grand Central.

Beginning after World War II, the Terminal's intercity service began to fall off and it soon became an exclusively commuter facility serving the most affluent parts of the region. The area around the Terminal began to reflect this change as many of the hotels and residential buildings along Park Avenue were replaced by Modernist office buildings (such as the Union Carbide Building at 270 Park Avenue) as the area became the most valued corporate business address in New York City. These were joined by the Pan Am Building which replaced the Terminal's rear Baggage Building. This redevelopment of existing Terminal City buildings continued in the 1970s and 1980s as a number of the earlier first phase buildings closer to the Terminal were replaced or rebuilt, including the Commodore and Biltmore hotels. More

recently in the 1990s, the 450 Lexington Avenue office building was built on top of the U.S. Post Office building and 383 Madison replaced the earlier commercial Knapp Building. This history of near-continual reinvestment in the Terminal City area has made it one of the most successful business areas in New York City, only recently stalling with the lack of new development after the completion of 383 Madison Avenue. This reinvestment continued the original plan for the area as a dynamic mixed-use section of the City connected by rail to the metropolitan region, and with buildings linked together by the below-grade pedestrian network emanating from the Terminal building. This dynamism and connectivity remain defining neighborhood characteristics of the area notwithstanding the disappearance of Terminal City buildings.

Remains of the earlier Terminal City buildings are few and generally dispersed throughout the Grand Central area with more-modern structures having been constructed around them. Of the 27 buildings developed as part of the pre-war Terminal City complex, nine remain, including two New York City landmarks. The largest concentration (five) of these buildings are located along Vanderbilt Avenue; however, a number of more-recent structures including 335 Madison Avenue (the rehabbed and reclad Biltmore Hotel), 383 Madison Avenue, and the MetLife building have been built in between them, breaking up any coherent grouping of the older structures.