

Astor Place Plazas, January 2011  
 Community Board #2 Manhattan – January 20, 2011 Hand-Out




The plans presented for Astor Place & Cooper Square are impressive. But the theme has morphed from the original plan worked on for years and last presented in 2008, which had achieved much consensus. That original scope and goals were pedestrian-friendly thoroughfares, traffic calming and safety measures, and park improvements.

We do not challenge the roadbed changes, the improved pedestrian crossings, the public transit access (bus and subway) or the additional space for pedestrian access and flow.

We do challenge the rush to approval of a physical design for the plazas which now provide significantly more open space inviting programmed uses and which has transformed three plaza areas into destination locations yet undefined or ever presented for public comment . There are, further, some physical conditions that have evolved since the last public review in 2008, that we feel warrant either more explanation or consideration. (e.g. addition of Grace Church School, addition of 500+ residential units facing Village Plaza, increased east-west traffic from East Village (11<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> Sts.) dorms to Greenwich Village campuses,

There are a variety of design reconsiderations that could meet the underlying concerns – well documented in 10 years of public discourse but not satisfied in the new plan - that should be revisited for refinement by the affected communities. There are, too, several historical issues related to overall use, that have not been vetted in the plan to date, which also beg more discourse. [See Task Force Comments of 2008: [http://www.thevillager.com/villager\\_273/astorplcoopersq.html](http://www.thevillager.com/villager_273/astorplcoopersq.html) ]

For the purpose of offering DOT, DDC, Parks and the Designers more specific references upon which they can refine their proposal for further community review, we offer comment on some current renderings and the following suggestions:

 <p>DDC / DOT / Parks WKY GRP Oudot Tilet Reconstruction of Astor Place and Cooper Square 1/06/2011 Rendering Scale: N/A View of Astor Place Design Proposal</p>	 <p>DDC / DOT / Parks WKY GRP Oudot Tilet Reconstruction of Astor Place and Cooper Square 1/06/2011 Rendering Scale: N/A Alamo Plaza Design: Axonometric View</p>	 <p>DDC / DOT / Parks WKY GRP Oudot Tilet Reconstruction of Astor Place and Cooper Square 1/06/2011 Plan Drawing Scale: Graphic Scale Proposed Design for Village Plaza</p>
<p><b>Astor Place Subway Entrance, Jan 2011</b> Seating steps around all plantings, residences large resident apartment buildings north west east and south, wide sidewalks possibly accommodating unregulated 1<sup>st</sup> amendment street vendors, performance artists or programmed installations unless restricted</p>	<p><b>Alamo Plaza, Jan 2011</b> Seating steps around tree plantings, stone block seating on sloped ellipse, large sidewalk on periphery accommodating street vendors or other programmed installation(s) unless restricted</p>	<p><b>Village Plaza, Jan 2011</b> Permanent seating steps around planting area at the northeast, trees and planting area blocking deliveries parked on the southbound Third Ave parking lane (with no parking/delivery available in the intersection opposite Kaplan or 2 Cooper Square).</p>

1. **Less large open space; more definition of uses.**

Options could include:

- a. More trees, more plantings,
- b. Water features as proposed in 2008
- c. Public Toilet installation(s)
- d. Designated areas for Public Art (display and performance).
  1. In the case of performance, strict guidelines regarding hours of operation, amplified sound.
  2. From a design standpoint various conditions need to be built into the design and construction: ambient lighting hook ups and any surface material accommodation that can withstand rotating installations.

2. **Seating:** the design is overly enabling to an expansion of the Astor Place/Saint Marks visiting crowds to come and linger. CB3 is rightfully concerned with the south end and the real potential for increased late night use in the spill out from the areas high density of entertainment venues, especially impacting the quality of life for the senior residencies at JASA. *But the considered removal of benches at the south end is not the whole answer, nor does it help to integrate the real benefit of increased local public use during the day.*

- a. Provide a plan and definition for areas with removable furniture for public, non-commercial, use, perhaps overseen by the educational institutions who have custodial staff who can set up and strike down, and classes that end at reasonable times of day.
- b. Remove the “steps” around planting areas which provide more seating than the initially proposed benches
- c. Alternatively or in conjunction, design for more fenced off seating areas that could be closed at an agreed upon hour. One such area for exploration could be the tree/planting area south of Cooper Park that might be transformed to a smaller gated park mirroring the Cooper Park Triangle and utilizing more of the plaza space.
- d. Re-consideration of stone block permanent seating and raised ellipse at Alamo Plaza as concerns sight-impaired and wheelchair ease of access.

3. **Detail is needed on access points for deliveries and emergency vehicles.** Concern is compromise of basic need for deliveries and FDNY access to some very large residential and institutional buildings. These include buildings facing Village Plaza, Cooper Union Buildings, the Cooper Sq. Hotel and Lafayette Street. Lafayette is the north-bound route for emergency vehicles from the Great Jones St. firehouse. Serving areas east of Lafayette St. may be impacted by the new east and south moving configuration. FDNY input should be included in the narrative of this plan. Changes that impact deliveries and emergency access include:

- a. Addition of large trees in front of Sculpture for Living and along the Village Plaza building line.

- b. Median on Bowery/Third Ave.
  - c. Working bus layover and pick up, only, roadbed.
  - d. Lafayette St Bike Lane, west side parking and new plaza at Joseph Papp Theater reducing one lane of traffic/parking as it enters new Astor Place (configuration).
  - e. Permanent seating locations.
4. **What agencies/entities will be responsible for oversight, security and maintenance of this very large area.** The plaza design is now built to include a variety of programmatic additions. Should it have fewer? Should there be initial guidelines?

It is unlikely that the Community will feel that this plan should be overseen by a sponsor or sponsors or a Business Improvement District. A plan or agreement or guidelines regarding ongoing review and approval by the affected Community Boards for any programmatic, event or special event use of this public space needs to be defined. Plazas in other areas of the City have not had this definition. Maintenance and use have become the responsibility of surrounding businesses, private third party contracts.

5. **Construction Protocols:** While perhaps not a consideration in this design proposal some provision should be made in any resolution that construction protocols should be vetted with the two Community Boards prior to construction start and scheduling. The southern and eastern areas of this plan area still endure Water Tunnel construction of 4+ years with blasting 24/7, along with early morning and frequent night and week-end schedules and, on the west side of Third Ave and along Lafayette and 4<sup>th</sup> St. major sidewalk closures impacting businesses and residences alike – with more to come.
- a. Provisions regarding construction hours beginning no earlier than 8am and ending at 5pm (if only for the rush hour traffic that Bowery/Third Ave endures),
  - b. Staging areas” that don’t further jeopardize businesses or handicapped vehicle pick-up and drop off areas (which it has for 4 years)
  - c. NO weekend construction – as the Bowery/Houston Traffic Survey will testify, the night and weekend traffic issues along this corridor are already considerable

We realize that there are many people and multiple communities involved with this plan and that any of the issues here emphasized may have multiple remedies. We are, however, respectfully requesting a postponement of action so that the consultants can address a variety of potential modifications, so that DOT and DDC can more thoroughly contemplate construction planning and so that the Joint Task Force and the Communities they serve may have a more complete and considered plan to review.