

STONE TO DESIGN CITY CIVIC CENTER

Reidy Says Mayor Approves Plan for Architect to Coordinate Project

2D FIRM WILL AID WORK

Eggers & Higgins to Draft Design on the Municipal and Archives Building

By ADA LOUISE HUXTABLE

Public Works Commissioner Peter J. Reidy announced yesterday that within a few days he would commission Edward Durell Stone as architect for the coordinated design of the New York Civic Center.

In this post Mr. Stone will be responsible for the design of the Executive Office Building, the Civic Center Mall and all related facilities, including underground parking, shops and services.

His reputation as a designer of distinguished governmental structures was established with the completion of the New Delhi Embassy for the State Department in 1960. The building has received international acclaim.

Mr. Reidy, who said he had the approval of Mayor Wagner, indicated his purpose in announcing the appointment of Mr. Stone was to give a more specific idea of the city's plans for the design of the Civic Center and to answer questions and increasing criticism.

Discussions Held

Mr. Reidy said that he had discussed the entire Civic Center concept with Mr. Stone during the last few months, and that a contract for his professional services as architect and coordinator would be submitted for the Mayor's signature within the next few days. The firm of Eggers & Higgins will design the new Municipal and Archives Building, which will also be subject to coordination by Mr. Stone.

From the time of its release on Dec. 8, the day New York's newspaper strike began, the plan for the Civic Center has run a curious obstacle course, marked by an inordinate number of delays.

The plan grew out of an officially commissioned \$86,500 city study authorized in February, 1962. It was prepared by a committee of leading New York architects—Max Abramovitz of Harrison & Abramovitz, Simon Breines of Pomerance & Breines, and Robert W. Cutler of Skidmore Owings & Merrill.

Finished in December

The study represented one of the few occasions in the city's history when top-ranking architectural experts were asked to work out one of the city's major urban design problems. The coordination of the city's administrative center, including state and Federal buildings, in terms of planning, circulation and esthetics, was intended to replace previous piecemeal plans. It was completed in December, 1962, and disappeared immediately in the news blackout.

When it reappeared in the papers in April, it was generally hailed as an exemplary step forward in municipal design. But its future became clouded at once by complications concerning the Federal Court and Office Building slated for Foley Square. The \$78,000,000 structure had already been designed and was ready to go out for bids before the New York plan was finished. The Federal building was in a less-than-ideal spot in the new scheme, and agitation began to have it moved and redesigned by the General Services Administration, the Washington agency responsible for Federal construction.

City officials, including Mayor

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Wagner, have made repeated requests to the agency and to President Kennedy for changes, but the result, so far, is a stalemate, with the present plans apparently going ahead. The G.S.A. pleads that time, money and the difficulty of obtaining more funds from Congress outlaw the possibility of revision.

In the city, things have gone no better. One positive step forward was taken on April 17 when the City Planning Commission adopted the Capital Budget and incorporated the Civic Center plan into the Master plan. Beyond that, neither the City Council nor the Board of Estimate has taken action, and their approval is required because of expenditures involved. Much of the \$165,000,000 of the Civic Center's cost is already appropriated for building projects and would be merely re-allocated to the new scheme; about \$13,000,000 would represent extra cost.

Council Delays Action

The specific obstacle holding up the entire plan right now is the City Council's lack of action yesterday on a Capital Budget amendment needed to acquire the property at 280 Broadway, which will form one "arm" of the plan, and the site for the new Executive Office Building. The same item will come before the Board of Estimate on June 14. Meanwhile, Commissioner Reidy speaks pessimistically of "death by delay."

While the city delays, other questions are being raised. Opposition has come from some of the city's younger architects, who believe an open competition, rather than the appointment of a coordinating architect, would produce the best results for the city. The City Club's refusal to give its Bard Awards for Excellence in Civic Design this year, and its accompanying attack against the standards of New York's municipal architecture, have added to discontent.

Chapter Backs Plan

The New York Chapter of the American Institute of Architects opposes a competition and backs the present plan. Geoffrey Lawford, president of the chapter, said yesterday that the decision was based on the fact that the plan had already had serious study by competent architects and that it was too late to start over now.

The strongest opposition is led by businessmen, headed by Henry Modell, the leading tenant of 280 Broadway. This group contends that the project has been inadequately studied, despite the work of the appointed architects' committee, and insufficiently publicized.

Mr. Reidy reportedly hopes that at least some of these conflicting concerns will be allayed by the announcement of Mr. Stone's appointment, as an indication of the standards that the city intends to establish for the execution of the Civic Center.