

Remember the Convention Center?

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Inching its way along like the mastodon it is growing more and more to resemble, New York's convention center now seems to be stalled between the last contending sites—the 34th Street railyards and the 44th Street piers. The welcome word from a City Hall that has been too leisurely about economic development is that the decision on what to build where will be made in 45 days.

A marketing study, recommended by Mayor Beame's Convention Center Committee to determine the proper size of the facility, is about to begin. Whether 560,000 or 750,000 square feet are needed will, in turn, affect the selection of the site. The two midtown locations will also be examined in terms of air pollution, traffic flow and construction problems. Financing is to be explored with the Metropolitan Transportation Authority, for possible funding from the Triborough Bridge and Tunnel Authority, while construction cost guidelines are prepared and the cooperation of labor unions is sought.

This team effort will be run by an assortment of deputy mayors and city agencies, headed by Robert Wagner, chairman of the City Planning Commission, and Robert Milano, the Deputy Mayor for Economic Development.

It sounds like a fine game plan on paper. After six years of surveys and false starts, the convention center is clearly on overtime. It will be six months since the last committee report before anything can be done at all. Once the location and size are settled, design decisions will have to be made, architects, engineers and technicians hired, contracts let and foundations prepared. It will still be years before a building actually materializes.

For much too long now, the convention center has bounced from site to site and administration to administration. The "earliest resolution" of the issues promised by Mayor Koch cannot come soon enough. This project remains a factor in New York's economic health and one test of the city's capacity to plan and develop.

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