

A Breakthrough in Planning

Water St. to Get Office Tower With Plaza

By ADA LOUISE HUXTABLE

The Pan Am Building on Park Avenue is about to lose its claim to the title of the world's biggest privately constructed office building to a new office tower in lower Manhattan.

The \$150-million blockbuster, to be known as 55 Water Street, on which construction will begin shortly, also marks a king-size breakthrough in collaboration between the city's private developers and its public planning agencies.

More than the Pan Am Building, the even larger Water Street project presages a significant break with the existing scale of the city's skyscrapers. It is part of a current trend toward bigger buildings than ever in New York—new construction that will eventually eclipse the city's traditional skyline.

Park to Be Replaced

The building is being put up by the Uris Building Corporation, with Emery Roth & Sons as architects. It will be bounded by Old Slip, Water Street, South Street and Jeanette Park.

Jeanette Park will be replaced by the developers with a dramatically landscaped plaza the size of Venice's Piazza San Marco.

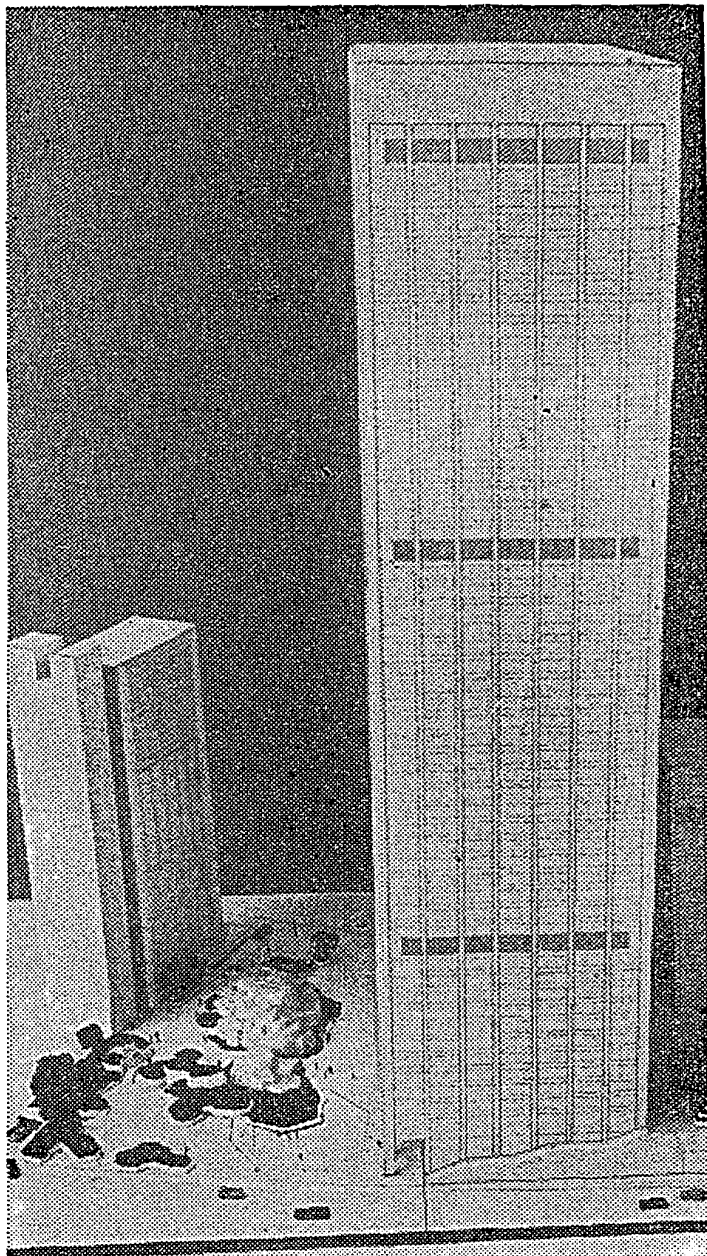
The new plaza will be designed by the landscape architecture firm of Lawrence Halprin & Associates. It will be similar in design to the widely praised city plaza done by the Halprin office for Portland, Ore.

Waterfall Fountain

There will be the same kind of waterfall-fountain spashing over concrete formations into pools, in a stepped, two-level paved area with planting and benches. Portland's plaza has been such a popular public success that local hippies made it their permanent headquarters until banned by city ordinances.

The huge bulk of 55 Water Street will be the largest construction on the Lower Manhattan skyline and in the financial district except for the World Trade Center.

The World Trade Center's 110-story twin towers, a project of a public agency, the Port of New York Authority, will soar higher than the 56 stories of 55 Water Street. But the floor area of each of the Trade Center buildings will be only 43,000 square feet a floor, compared to 55,000 square feet for the Water Street building, which will also have several below-ground floors of a record-breaking 100,000 square feet. The 56-story tower and a 15-story wing will contain a total of 3.5 million square feet of space.



Model of 55 Water Street, a 56-story building to be built in Lower Manhattan. Emery Roth & Sons are architects.

The Chemical Bank New York Trust Company is concluding what is believed to be the largest commercial lease in history, for \$260-million and 1.1 million square feet of 55 Water Street's offices. All of the building has been spoken for by neighboring financial institutions before construction. Rents will range from \$8 to \$10 a square foot a year.

Although the Water Street structure's huge bulk is completely within the limits of the zoning ordinance, to make the four-block superblock possible, the city eliminated two streets, Coenties Slip and Cuyler's Alley, and closed part of a third, Front Street.

In exchange for the closing of the streets and their sale to the developer, the city has received certain planning and amenity concessions, to be contributed at the developer's expenses. Streets have been closed before for private developers, but the process is only beginning to be used as a negotiating tool for major public planning objectives.

As a result of this public-private collaboration, 55 Wa-

ter Street is the first downtown construction to be worked out jointly by the developer and the City Planning Commission to conform to the general principles of the city's Lower Manhattan Plan.

The new Jeanette Park will be the first of the waterfront plazas called for by that plan.

The Uris Buildings Corporation is contributing both the design of the new plaza, by the Halprin firm, and its construction. It will build a 350-car, split-level parking garage under the plaza.

Both the developer and the city say they have acted in self-interest and a spirit of compromise. The compromise has led to something that fits into the general outlines of the city's plan, halfway between the developer's desire for a viable economic investment and the city's desire for a viable environment.

A Uris spokesman says of the mutual planning process, "We've come out better for having done it." The architect of the building, Richard Roth Jr., says of the recently instituted urban design section of the City Planning Department, "I can call the city now and talk to an architect—it makes a big difference."