

Architect Selected by Jury For City Convention Center

By ADA LOUISE HUXTABLE

New York City's projected convention center moved toward design and construction yesterday with the announcement that Skidmore, Owings & Merrill had been selected as the architect for the \$100-million structure.

The center will be the nation's largest, with more than 750,000 square feet of space for meetings and exhibitions. It will be built on the Hudson River between 44th and 47th Streets as a key part of a long-range plan for midtown Manhattan prepared by the city's Office of Midtown Planning and Development.

The announcement was made by Preston Robert Tisch, president of the Loews Corporation and chairman of the New York City Convention Center Corporation.

The corporation was set up by state legislation in 1971 as a nonprofit public-development corporation with power to issue bonds to finance the project. It is mandated to acquire land, design, build and operate a convention center. The city can purchase the center by retiring the bonds, or the corporation can continue to own and operate it.

Criteria for Project

The selection of the architect was made through interviews, from an invited group of 27 firms. These were reduced to six finalists of top reputation whose buildings are familiar American landmarks. Among them were Philip Johnson & John Burgee, I. M. Pei, and C. F. Murphy Associates, designers of Chicago's new McCormick Place convention center.

The decision was made on the basis of an unusual set of criteria for a politically sensitive project. The first requirement was design excellence. This was followed by cost consciousness, staff capacity and management ability, planning ability and sensitivity to public issues.

According to a city official involved in the selection process, the first and last requirements represented particular departures in commissions of a public nature.

'We're Very Excited'

The firm of Skidmore, Owings & Merrill is one of the country's largest and most prestigious architects, with offices in New York, San Francisco, Portland, Ore., and Washington. It is known for impressive corporate headquarters and skyscrapers. These include Chicago's John Hancock tower and the Sears building, which will be the world's tallest on completion.

The design team, which will consist of planners, architects and engineers, will be headed by Gordon Bunshaft and J. Walter Severinghaus, partners in the New York office.

Mr. Severinghaus was in



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Gordon Bunshaft, left, and J. Walter Severinghaus, partners in New York office of Skidmore, Owings & Merrill, will head design team for the projected center. In background is the Lever House, which Mr. Bunshaft designed.

charge of conceiving the Chase Manhattan Building in lower Manhattan. Mr. Bunshaft has designed Lever House in New York, the Lyndon B. Johnson Library at the University of Texas in Austin, and the Hirshhorn Museum in construction in Washington.

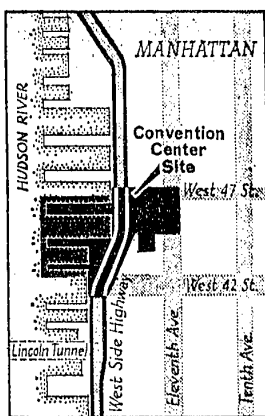
Mr. Bunshaft is also responsible for New York's two most controversial new office buildings, the slope-sided skyscrapers on 42d and 58th Streets.

"We're very excited to get the job," Mr. Bunshaft said at a news conference held at the Four Seasons Restaurant. "This is a tremendous facility. We don't want to build a monster that people say

spoils the city; we want to enhance the city."

The size of the firm, which has its own planners and engineers as well as architects, and more than 200 employees in the New York office, was instrumental in the final decision. Planners from the Washington office will be brought to New York for the job.

The jury consisted of Thomas F. Galvin, executive vice president of the Convention Center Corporation; Carl A. Morse, head of the construction firm of Carl A. Morse, Inc.; Jaquelin T. Robertson, director of the Office of Midtown Planning



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and Development; Seymour Durst, of the Durst real estate organization, and Mr. Tisch.

Constraints Noted

The corporation pointed out in the letter of invitation to the architects that "time, budget and site constraints" make the job "a difficult and exacting commission."

The schedule calls for formulation of the program and completion of the basic plan within six months, a process that would normally take about two years for a building of this size. Part of the architects' work will be a master plan of the area to include traffic patterns.

The corporation also points out that the \$100-million budget is only a guideline until plans are ready on which estimates can be made.

Among the site constraints mentioned is the projected rebuilding of the West Side Highway, for which a coordinator will be chosen to work with the architects, the Convention Center Corporation, the city and the state.

The corporation has set a target goal of 18 months for completion of the center. Two necessary city approvals of the plan, by the City Planning Commission and the Board of Estimate, with public hearings, are hoped for this winter. Bond sales will follow the approval of the plan. Groundbreaking is tentatively scheduled for July, 1973, with work to be finished in July, 1976, in time for the United States bicentennial.