April 21, 2011

PRELIMINARY DESIGN FOR SECTION 106 CONSULTING PARTY REVIEW:
NEW 31st & 33rd STREET ENTRANCE PLAZAS DESIGN NARRATIVE

The scope for Phase 1 on the exterior of the existing James A. Farley building involves creating two new entrances at the 31st and 33rd Street corners to accommodate the users of Moynihan Station entering and exiting in the hundreds of thousands every day. As in the previous design schemes, the primary addition will be steel and glass canopies which will signal new points of entry for the train station. Due to the historic nature of the building, the proposed additions at the plazas have been designed with two primary objectives. The first involves limiting and minimizing alterations to the existing building as a way to preserve as much of the distinct features, materials and spatial relationships that help define the building. The second goal is to take inspiration from the Farley Building in proposing new architectural features that are referential to the historic façade yet differentiate the additions from the existing structure so that there is a clear distinction between the two. These objectives are the fundamental principles inherent to the design of the canopies, entry doors, ground paving and signage which collectively define the new entrance plazas.

Existing Openings

One strategy for minimizing alterations to the existing building is to re-appropriate portions of the building that currently exist, such as the three 4'-0" wide windows at each corner which will be enlarged to create new entrance doors for subway and railroad access below grade and eventually, the new uses in the Farley Building. These openings will be lined with metal paneling to acknowledge the widening of the windows. The panels will be set back 12" from the face of the building in order to reveal and express the granite stone as a self-supported weight bearing exterior wall that is consistent with the rest of the structure as well as preserving façade material uniformity.

Canopies

Above the entry doors will be new canopies at each plaza, each rising higher at their outer edges to acknowledge the corners of the site and draw people towards the entries. From the main building elevation, the two asymmetrical canopies will be mirror images of each other, helping to maintain the overall building façade symmetry that currently exists. The curved form of the canopies takes cues from the organic shapes found on the Farley façade, such as the cheneau cornice and Corinthian column capitals while the existing wrought-iron lattice meshwork found above the grand staircase entry doors is the basis for the modulation and patterning for the glass and steel. In this sense, the new canopies are formally referential to the existing architecture yet clearly contemporary through their material selection and structural engineering.

Structurally, the canopies will be constructed of a painted carbon steel lattice structure with glass suspended from the underside. The steel structure will be composed of built-up steel members, which will accommodate electrical runs for light fixtures. The canopies will be cantilevered structures (having only four points of connection back to new framing within the building) in order to (a) avoid impediments to pedestrian circulation flow around the new entries and (b) minimize obstructions on the historic façade and (c) limit building penetrations in the stone exterior. Drain pipes and conduit

feed penetrations will also occur at these four locations as to aggregate and limit building penetrations with connections made behind the wall.

In order to provide a calming effect in an area of significant visual clutter, several degrees of light intensity will be created to draw attention to entry canopies. Within each canopy, there will be 10 down light fixtures organized in two rows located and recessed with the stainless steel patch fittings and will provide the general illumination at these areas. The overall plaza will be illuminated to a slightly higher level than the existing 8th Avenue sidewalks, as well as being considerably more uniform. The transitions between these zones will be smooth, in order to facilitate adaptation and allow for non-frequent users ease in locating way-finding information. Plaza light uniformity can only be achieved from high mount small scale floodlights at the roof cornice of the Farley Building (4th floor level). This is an ideal vantage point in reducing light wash on the building; eliminating source glare and providing an even coverage of the plazas.

Ground Paving

The proposed entrances at Farley will be lively nodes of activity, consisting of train commuters, subway riders and pedestrians aggregating from many different modes of transport. Extending public areas to create substantial open areas and accommodate this intersection of commuters will help to facilitate unimpeded flows of movement and access below and above grade. In order to create these open plazas, the existing moat wall that currently encloses the corners will need to be removed and the granite stone will be salvaged for possible reuse. Existing granite from the moat wall will be used to outline the trace of the former moat wall in the ground paving. At the North 33rd Street plaza, the strategically repositioned subway station entrance will be aligned with the moat wall so that a segment of it can be retained without impeding pedestrian flow and remain intact as a historic reference.

Ground treatment for the general plaza areas will include dark gray granite pavers organized to reinforce canopy patterns. The dark pavers will be roughly the same color as the canopy and entry door metal panels as a way to create uniformity for the proposed plaza reconfiguration and to distinguish the granite as a new, not salvaged, stone by contrasting it with Farley's distinct 'Milford Pink' granite façade.

Signage

New use at the building plazas calls for new signage and will include horizontal signage elements along with stand-alone features. The horizontal signage will consist of a lettered "Moynihan Station" sign, painted in dark gray steel and pin mounted to the sidewalls of the grand staircase. In addition, a freestanding pole sign is proposed for each entrance plaza. The strategy behind the freestanding sign is to keep the needs of the current project scope (and any future phase work) from being directly attached to the building by aggregating signage to a designated location. Roughly 15'-0" tall, there will be one at each plaza, not exceeding the height of the Farley cornice line just below the two niches.

Summary

As a highly visible gateway for residents and visitors entering the neighborhood and city, the hope for a grand train station lies with Moynihan Station. With thoughtful consideration, the above design objectives will not only achieve in helping to create distinctly new entries for the train station below, but also a new entrance for the city of New York.