

ACCESS , SPACES

Parade for privately owned spaces occupies midtown

Posted on October 17, 2011 by Yolanne Almanzar

Two years ago, architect Brian Nesin was trying to eat lunch in an arcade at Le Parker Meridien, an upscale hotel in Midtown, when a security guard kicked him out.

Nesin suspected this passageway was supposed to be open to the public. He decided to found Friends of Privately Owned Public Spaces to make sure that the more than 500 zones like this in New York City remain accessible to everyone. And last Saturday morning, he led a crowd of about 50 people in the Arcade Parade – a tour through 10 midtown sites that represent the best and worst of what such spaces bring to the city.



Photo: Yolanne Almanzar/The New York World

While Zuccotti Park, home to Occupy Wall Street, was not part of this tour, its role at the center of public protest gave the parade special resonance to the parade, led by the clanging brass and drums of the Hungry Marching Band.

"This is your space," Nesin said to the parade participants at their starting point, at the AXA Gallery on West 51st between Sixth and Seventh avenues. Along the route, some spaces had clearly marked hours at the entrance and friendly guards who opened the door as paraders passed through the arcades. Most, however, appeared to violate the spirit of the law – which is to create an environment open and welcoming to the public. A security guard rushed people out of an enclosed arcade on West 56th Street, and most spaces had no seating available. Le Parker Meridien is currently using its space as a plush cocktail lounge. (Its public relations firm declined to comment for this story.)

An ordinance in 1961 allowed developers to build larger, taller buildings in exchange for plazas, arcades, and other open-air spaces accessible to the public. The spaces, mostly built in the 1970s and 1980s, vary in appearance: some are filled with lush plants and inviting seats and tables. Others are barren or display illegal "no trespassing" signs.

David Grider, cofounder of Friends of Privately Owned Public Spaces, said he, Nesin and other members organized the event to bring attention to these overlooked arcades, where entrances are often blocked by trucks. "The parade evolved out of thinking, how do you accentuate this feature of New York City planning that's been built, but has hardly any recognition," he said.

In May, Community Board 5 passed a resolution asking the city Department of Transportation to study the possibility of creating pedestrian walks connecting the 10 midtown arcades visited by the tour. The Department of Transportation completed a traffic study in August and so far committed to add one midblock traffic signal, on West 57th Street between Sixth and Seventh avenues by the end of the year.

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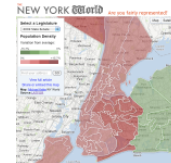
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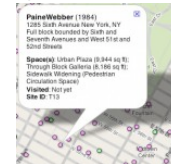
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The New York Times, Nov. 22, 2011. See Pei Shan Hoe's story for The New York World on the recent rise in ethics waivers.

Queens housing project to be all 'affordable'
Crain's New York Business, Nov. 16, 2011 (subscription required)

Bloomberg's Long War Against Protests - Politics
The Atlantic Cities, Nov 16, 2011

LI Senate, Assembly Boundaries to Change
Newsday, Nov. 15, 2011. References The New York World's redistricting map.

Liu Contributions Linked to Convict
The Wall Street Journal, Nov. 16, 2011 (sub required)

City Delays Tighter Rules for Homeless People Seeking Shelter (NYT)

Budget Transparency & Visualization Tool, Look at Cook, Open Sourced
Civic Commons, Nov 1, 2011

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