

Last stand at 2 Columbus

AFTER nearly eight years, the city may actually choose a new owner for 2 Columbus Circle, formerly the Huntington Hartford Museum and now the subject of a preservationist battle.

Economic Development Corporation President **Andrew Alper**, after speaking at an Association of Real Estate Women's luncheon last week, told me the group hasn't decided whether the Edward Durell Stone-designed white edifice should stay or go.

He said a decision is weeks away, but others said it may come sooner.

It was a relief to those who want to tear down the structure that Community Board 5 last week decided not to ask the Landmarks Commission to hold a hearing on whether the building should be preserved.

Those in favor of demolition — and apparently many others — think the structure is ugly. Why do they all use that word?

The European art museum known as the Dahesh wants to keep the building as is. But the museum's years of loud lobbying make it least likely to win.

Donald J. Trump wants to strip the structure to its steel and build an elegant residential hotel.

He was spotted at City Hall last week. But even the larger-than-life developer knows that sometimes loose lips can sink ships — like a \$16 million-plus purchase.

He was unusually cagey, responding with a question of his own: "Do you think I'll get it?"

Now we've learned that the tiny American Crafts Museum, which has been quietly tending to its artifacts, will now walk away with the prize.

We look forward to the announcement, which may



BETWEEN THE BRICKS
LOIS WEISS

arrive any nanosecond.

While Downtown planners vie this week for the task of laying out the 16 acres for the next World Trade Center, most folks have forgotten there's a hotel that could return if it wanted to.

Marriott paid mostly upfront for its site and doesn't have a big-bucks lease pay-

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ment each month as does Silverstein Properties.

But where would the hotel go? It needs a lean and long layout as it had between the Twin Towers.

Sources said the Port Authority would have to provide a foundation, then Marriott would step in. But the company still hasn't said if it wants in on a site that is expected to someday draw an 10 million visitors a year.

Marriott will have to make a decision pronto, however, because the planning team is supposed to begin work Friday night.

The availability rate for commercial office space is now in double digits in all three areas of Manhattan,

with 10.8 percent available in Midtown, 13.4 percent in Midtown South, and 14.2 percent in Downtown, according to Plymouth Partners' **James Meiskin**.

Sublease choices total 36.8 percent of the availabilities as offerings rose from 16.8 to 18.1 million square feet. Companies are only too happy to take advantage of other people's built-ins when making their flight to quality.

Broker **Azita Agravhi** brought developer **Kamran Hakim** to the Upper West Side table to buy his Columbus Avenue block front. Agravhi's co-broker from Eastern Consolidated, **Brian Ezratty**, was on the sell side and not on the buy side of that deal, which we talked about last week. An eagle-eyed reader noted the AOL Time Warner restaurant will not, in fact, be **Thomas Keller's** first effort in New York.

Some years ago, French Laundry star Keller apparently operated Rakel on Varick Street in partnership with **Serge Raoul**, the owner of Raoul's.

O.K., foodies, we want to know if AOL co-developer **Ken Himmel** is man enough to let Beantown's **Lydia Shire** break the glass ceiling at AOL's fancy, fourth-floor food courtyard, thus becoming the only female chef on the floor.

Himmel and **Timothy Lynch** just teamed up with Shire to create a new, modern American eatery in a spot now inhabited by Shire's Biba on Boston's Boylston Street. That place will serve its last meal on June 8 before a redesign by **Adam Tihany**. Is New Yawk next?

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