

The Met Gets Expansion OK

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By ROBERTA B. GRATZ

The Landmarks Preservation Commission today gave provisional approval to the Metropolitan Museum of Art for three of the seven proposed additions included in its comprehensive expansion plan.

The three approved additions are the American Bicentennial Wing and Garden Court and the Rockefeller Wing of Primitive Art.

The commission approved the plans with the understanding that "as many as possible of the existing trees in Central Park be retained, that new grading blend into the surrounding naturally landscaped area of the park and that the Commission review detailed and clarifying drawings of the Bicentennial Garden Court."

"The commission feels the proposed new additions are consistent in design with the current west facade," commission executive director Frank Gilbert commented. "The commission also recommends that the number of trees to be moved be kept to an absolute minimum and that the original landscape plans of Frederick Olmsted be retained as the best setting for the new structure."

The commission held a public hearing on the proposals on May 1 at which many of the oft-repeated criticisms of the museum's expansion plans were heard. Objections focused on museum encroach-

ment into Central Park impairment to existing wings of the Metropolitan, architectural appropriateness and use of city funds.

There are seven components to the museum's overall expansion plan. Two of them—the Lehman Wing on the west side and the Temple of Dendur enclosure on the north—are now under construction. There are no current plans for construction of the Western European Arts

Wing or the European Wing Garden Court.

The three additions approved by the Landmarks Commission now have to be approved by the Arts Commission. They could be ready for construction at the end of the year.

The American Wing, which will provide three stories of public galleries, is the only addition for which the museum is seeking city funds. Of the \$15 million cost the

museum is asking \$3 million from the city to be matched by \$3 million from the federal government, since the American wing has been given officials status as a national bicentennial project. The remaining \$9 million is to be privately raised.

Landmarks Commission recommendations for city-owned buildings are not mandatory as they are with privately-owned landmarks. A designated landmark may not be externally altered or demolished without commission approval.

Reports on public buildings from the commission are not required by law to be made public—they are issued to the Mayor and Parks Administrator. In 1970, the commission recommended approval for the Temple of Dendur enclosure but "objected vigorously" to the Lehman Wing plans. Those negative findings, however, were unknown to the public until leaked to the press. Current legislation before the City Council revising the 1965 landmarks law would require that all commission reports be made public.

The Rockefeller Wing includes a slanted glass and strait limestone facade. The American Wing contains a four-story glass-roofed enclosure designed to preserve the 1823 facade of the U. S. Branch Bank building which was incorporated in the museum facade when that wing was built in 1924.