

Frick Plan Runs Into More Flak

By ROBERTA R. GRATZ

The simmering controversy between the Frick Collection and the Landmarks Preservation Commission heated up yesterday at a commission hearing to consider the museum's present and future building plans.

Under discussion was a Frick plan to alter its east wall by demolishing the Widener mansion next door and creating an elaborate garden that would be seen but not used by the public.

Haven't Submitted Plans

Frick representatives are loath to publicly say anything more than they deem proper. They have not yet submitted plans to Planning Board 4, which must consider them before the commission can legally act.

Only the Frick Mansion—the former residence of the 19th century steel magnate who amassed one of the world's great art collections—is a designated landmark, requiring commission approval for all exterior alterations. But the Frick owns the adjacent properties at 5, 7 and 9 E. 70th St., which contain the Widener House and two vacant lots containing museum storage areas.

In announcing the museum's "long-range and more immediate plans for the area," Henry Clay Frick 2d, head of the board of trustees, said, "both mounting attendance and increasing activities would make the construction of a wing desirable."

Sunday attendance averages 1200 to 1700 and ticket requests for five Sunday concerts and Saturday lectures exceed 600—while the auditorium only holds 180, museum officials pointed out.

"Usable for Our Needs"

But construction of a new wing is not "imminent," Frick said. He made clear, moreover, that whatever the plans turn out to be, there was no room for the retention of the five-story, 1909 Widener mansion.

The museum plans to demolish the Widener house and build a terrace and garden over the three lots, Frick said. The front door of the Widener House would be incorporated in the existing Frick building as a new entrance.

Questions from commissioners and the audience focused on three basic points: a garden the public could see but not enter, demolition of an elegant turn-of-the-century townhouse when the Frick's stated concern is preservation of the 70th St. block front, and the validity of the museum's "need" for more space when the garden design provides no additional storage or public facility areas.

The commission will wait for the Planning Board 4 to consider the Frick's plans before making its own ruling.