

Historic site put on block

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Con Edison is trying to sell an historic piece of the Brooklyn waterfront which the state once wanted for use by its Maritime Museum.

The property, known as the Empire Stores, has been designated a national historic site and has long been proposed for landmark designation by the city.

The Empire Stores is a grouping of 1860s red brick warehouses, located on nine acres just north of the Brooklyn Bridge in the Fulton Ferry area.

If purchased by a private developer, it could be demolished for new construction.

MINIMUM OF \$1M

An advertisement in tomorrow's real estate section of the New York Times says that Con Edison "intends" to sell the parcel at a minimum asking price of \$1 million. Bids are called for by April 30.

City and state officials and community residents long involved in trying to preserve and redevelop the area are upset by the Con Ed move. They also worry that if Con Ed fails to sell the property, it may give it—or sell it at a tax loss—to a different charitable organization.

"All of us have had the long-range objectives of acquiring the property for the Maritime Museum," says Scott Hand, president of the Brooklyn Heights Assn. "If Con Ed sells or gives it to someone else, that puts our long-range plan in jeopardy."

State officials had been trying to negotiate to buy the property, which Con Ed has never used. But the plans were put in abeyance during the financial crunch.

BOARD SAID NO

Last year the Board of Estimate denied historic district status to the Fulton Ferry area after strong objections by Con Ed. The board must approve all designations made by the Landmarks Preservation Commission. Normally, that approval is a simple formality.

But in February 1976 the board returned the designation to the commission "without prejudice," with the understanding it could be reconsidered in the future. The commission held a new public hearing on the proposed designation last week.

It is not known when the commission will announce its decision. But if the panel does approve redesignation, the Board of Estimate could once again reject it.

Designation of city landmark status protects a structure from being demolished in the absence of planning commission approval.

The Fulton Ferry area, a low-rise waterfront district in the shadow of the Brooklyn Bridge, was once the heart of Brooklyn's "downtown." Its varied architecture reflects a rich maritime and commercial heritage.

The Empire Stores is representative of the kind of warehouse that once crowded most of Brooklyn's waterfront.

Con Ed purchased the property in 1963 for a power generating plant that never materialized.

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