

Museum in railroad station proposed by design class

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NEW BRUNSWICK — A museum featuring a stage coach, wagons and carriages from the 1800s and a miniature train exhibit could be developed in the Penn Central Railroad Station, a Cook College urban design class has proposed.

Not only the railroad station would be transformed, if dozens of recommendations for Fifth Ward improvements are accepted as part of the city's revitalization program.

In back of the station, on the other side of the railroad tracks, a 500-car parking garage would be built at Easton Avenue and Wall Street. A vest-pocket park would be on the same site.

Church Street, from French Street down to Spring Alley, could be closed off and converted into a pedestrian mall.

A cafe, situated in a small park with a water fountain, could be located on the north side of French, opposite the intersection with Joyce Kilmer Avenue.

Just up French from that corner, a multi-story building could be built to span French, with the base on the southern side now where the abandoned Getty Oil gasoline station is located.

Or maybe — because the students have some alternate plans — instead of a new structure spanning the French Street "gateway," the site of the Getty station could be converted into a mini shopping mall with boutiques.

Some of the buildings across on the north side of French — where Middle-

sex General Hospital once proposed a parking garage — could be restored. But a greenway could be developed linking French with Little Albany Street at the rear of the block. At the corner of French and Brown, another small park with a nearby flea market could be provided, surrounding two sides of the existing Gaslight Antiques store on the corner.

These are only a handful of the ideas the 50 students have proposed for the Fifth Ward. Their instructor is architect Ray Heinrich.

"Our ideas stand as fundamental strategies which can meet some of the human and physical needs of the Fifth Ward community," said the students. 52-page report has been turned over to New Brunswick Tomorrow (NBT), the private revitalization agency, and the Hungarian Civic Association.

"The students bring a fresh, youthful viewpoint," said NBT President Abraham Wallach. The report is being furnished to NBT's neighborhood consultant, Raymond, Parish, Pine & Weiner, which is preparing specific improvement plans for the Fifth and Second Wards.

The railroad station is a "fine example of early 20th Century architecture and should be preserved, allowing one to experience the early historic character of the city," the report says.

The interior of the building is "typical of decaying buildings, receiving little attention and little use."

Some museum displays, such as a stage coach, can be placed on the railroad waiting platform, the students said. They proposed a suspended balcony in the main waiting room area to

increase display space for the "mini-museum."

Plexiglass windbreaks should be erected on the east and west ends of the waiting platforms, the report suggested.

In addition to sandblasting and sprucing up the exterior, "interior floors should be carpeted to add warmth and deter people who discard litter. Rooms should be lit by lamps and lanterns typical of the late 1800s. Cases should be constructed to house small exhibits, and walls used for hung murals."

The pedestrian tunnel leading under the tracks between the north and south-bound train platforms could be converted into the appearance of a mine shaft, with railroad ties and "electrified mining lamps."

While a "large sum of money" would be needed to restore the building, "the station affects the image of the city as a whole," the students noted.

"The railroad company which owns the building should recognize the need for renovation and react to that need," the students said.

As part of the French Street "gateway" improvements, they proposed that a building owned by Middlesex General Hospital on the south side of French, down from the intersection of Brown on the other side of French, be used as a pharmacy for hospital outpatients.

The area under the railroad elevation on French, "presently a dark and unpleasant tunnel, can be made an attractive and exciting experience to walk through by means of bright colors, super-graphics and small plantings."

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