

Frick Plan Is OK'd by Board

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By ROBERTA R. GRAY

The controversial building plans of the Frick Collection moved closer to reality this week after a committee of the local planning board unanimously approved the proposal.

The Frick Collection—a rich assortment of primarily 18th and 19th century European art housed in the 1913 Frick Mansion at 70th Av. and 70th St.—intends to demolish the turn-of-the-century Widener House at S. E. 70th St. and replace it with an elaborate garden that would be seen but not used by the public.

Eventually, in 10 or 20 years, the museum plans to replace the garden with a building addition that would include a large auditorium for free concerts and lectures.

A Landmark

The Frick is a recently designated landmark. Because the expansion plans affect a small portion of the mansion's facade, approval of the Landmark Preservation Commission is required.

However, before the Commission may act, the local planning board must have the opportunity to review the proposal.

The full planning board is scheduled to vote Wednesday on the committee's endorsement. A decision from the Landmark Commission which held hearings on the Frick plans last month will then be forthcoming.

Edith Fisher, chairman of the planning board's cultural affairs committee which approved the plan by a vote of 14 to 0, said yesterday that she had rarely seen such an outpouring of support for an issue.

Vacant Lots

Only the Frick Mansion itself is a designated landmark, requiring Landmark Commission approval for all exterior alterations. But the Frick owns the adjacent properties at S. 7 and 9 E. 70 St., which contain the Widener House and two lots containing storage areas.

Plans call for demolition of the Widener House and construction of a terrace and garden over the three lots.

Opposition has focused on demolition of the Widener house, which the museum argues is inappropriate for any future use and the design of a garden that the public can see but not enter.

The notable interiors of the Widener House, however, had been willed to the Cooper-Hewitt Museum and have long since been removed.

The Frick Collection, which opened to the public in 1935 and has never charged for admission, is a 40-room, chateau-like mansion built for Henry Clay Frick, the 19th century steel magnate who amassed one of the world's great art collections.