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**REAL ESTATE** REALTY CHECK

## New life coming to West Chelsea's Terminal Stores building



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From 19th century freight warehouse, to 20th century disco, to 21st century cutting-edge office mecca — that's the colorful past and prospective future of West Chelsea's massive Terminal Stores building.

Joint-venture partners L&L Holding Co., Normandy Real Estate Partners and an unidentified institutional investor plan to replace the 1.2 million-square-foot property's half-million square feet of storage space with new offices as well as block-long interior passageway for vibrant public use.

The team paid \$880 million last year for the 19th century relic, which takes up the whole block bounded by Eleventh and Twelfth avenues and West 27th and West 28th streets. It stands across 27th Street from the even more monumental Starrett-Lehigh Building.

Both properties are visions from a long-ago time when the Far West Side was a port gateway. The area fell into disuse in the second half of the 20th century, but has been revived, piece-by-piece, through adaptive reuse of derelict industrial buildings and piers.

The Terminal Stores team was to present its plans before Community Board 4 on Monday night — a first step toward review by the Landmarks Preservation Commission, which must bless the redesign because the building is within a historic district.

L&L Chairman /CEO David W. Levinson said the long-underutilized building has 500,000 square feet of storage space. Only about 200,000 square feet of the office space are currently occupied, albeit with prime tenants such as Uber and L’Oreal.

Levinson wants to make the industrial-era icon welcoming to the public as well as appealing to creative-field and tech office tenants.

Central to the plan is a proposal to carve out some 80,000 square feet of floor area from the middle of the structure — a section that’s currently “opaque and uninhabitable” storage space, Levinson said — and use it to create a public, partly open-air courtyard with abundant natural light.

Other new design features will include restoration of huge arched doorframes on both avenues to create monumental recessed entrances. Some old floors deep inside the building will be removed to create double-height workspaces.

In all, around 150,000 square feet of the existing floor space will be moved to the building’s western end, where several new floors will be added above Twelfth Avenue. Architects COOKFOX will oversee the redesign.

The courtyard will lie within the 670-foot-long, ground-floor corridor between avenues that was once home to the legendary Tunnel nightclub, a sometimes debauched mecca for the city’s “club kids” and downtown celebrity scenes from 1986-2001.

Although the former Tunnel passage is open to the public today, it’s a mostly monotonous walkway with several stores and fast-food outlets that are mainly used by building tenants. The owners plan to make it a lively public arcade lined with new stores and restaurants.

L&L specializes in transforming older properties — such as at 425 Park Avenue, 150 Fifth Avenue and the [\\$2 billion TSX Broadway hotel project in Times Square](#).

Levinson is especially enthused to take on the Terminal Stores, where atmospheric “Free Bonded Cold Storage” signs hover over the neighborhood like 19th century ghosts.

He loves what he calls “the authenticity of this building. It’s a wood structure” under its weathered brick facade, with massive, internal columns made from trees, some of which have been certified as nearly 500 years old.

The long corridor’s current, brick and steel-beam interior will be fitted out with some of the heavy timber below. Hidden old rail tracks will be exposed, High Line-style.

For added atmosphere, artifacts from the Tunnel such as dancers’ steel cages will be reclaimed from storage and put on display.

The redesign project won't need ULURP approval because the partial re-massing of the office space within the building won't add to the total floor area that's permitted under zoning rules.

Levinson estimates the work will take about two years after LPC approval. Some office tenants might have to be temporarily relocated.

But stores and eateries including Danny Meyer's Porchlight cocktail bar and Between the Bread can stay put during construction.