

DAILY NEWS

Tuesday, July 20, 2010

Pols trying to book new Westchester Sq. library branch

BY DANIEL BEEKMAN

THE FUTURE of this Bronx business hub could be in the books.

City officials are in talks to bring a state-of-the-art New York Public Library branch to Westchester Square.

Councilman James Vacca (D-East Bronx) has promised \$8.3 million and Borough President Ruben Diaz Jr. \$1 million to move the Westchester Square branch from remote Glebe Ave. to a spot smack-dab on the square.

“This would be a dream come true,” said Vacca, who called a new library key to the ongoing renewal of Westchester Square.

Located in the same two-story building as a mental-health center, the current Westchester Square branch is rundown, not air-conditioned and not handicapped-accessible, said Gesille Dixon, an NYPL Bronx manager.

It would cost nearly as much to renovate the branch as it would to build a new one from scratch on Westchester Square, said Vacca.

By chance, the century-old Huntington Free Library, a privately endowed library open to the public, is looking to sell its half-vacant annex on the square.

Although the Huntington and the city have yet to close the book on a deal, Westchester Square booster Sandi Lusk called the library swap a match made in heaven.

“This is the best idea for the community, the library and the Huntington,” said Lusk, a volunteer at the Westchester Square branch for 20 years.

The current branch is popular and boasts a floor devoted to children’s books. Art classes that Lusk teaches there draw 60 kids a pop, she said. But with no AC, the branch bakes in the summer and it lacks technology, she said.

A spot on the square would allow NYPL to build a 10,000-square-foot library wired for computers and more — one that would lure more folks of all ages, said Dixon.

Bright new NYPL branches on E. Kings-

bridge Road and Morris Park Ave. have generated interest from seniors and teens. The public library system had \$61 million of a \$77 million budget cut restored this month.

“A new branch would allow us to serve more people and more schools,” said Dixon.

Just down E. Tremont Ave. is Lehman High School.

The obscure Huntington, founded by a railroad baron who summered in Throgs Neck, wants to engage the community through more public programs, said President Ed Morgan.

But the cash-strapped library needs help. Selling the annex could pave the way for the Huntington to partner with NYPL and the Bronx Council on the Arts, which hopes to occupy a vacant bank near the square.

With the Owen Dolen Recreation Center overhaul slated for the fall, shopkeeper Greg Perry sees Westchester Square as a puzzle nearly complete — and a new library fits.

“The more foot traffic, the more business,” he said.