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West Side's Museum Mile

By JENNIFER MALONEY

The first lease for the Hudson Yards project is breathing life into another idea: A new space for arts and culture on the site that, along with the Whitney Museum in the Meatpacking District, would bookend what is envisioned as a kind of Museum Mile for the West Side.

City officials say they are planning a Hudson Yards arts center that serves as a blank canvas. It could simultaneously host theater performances, traveling exhibitions and community events on different floors—or the entire space could be marshaled to stage one large show.

Mayor Michael Bloomberg said Tuesday that the center, which has been part of the project's plans since its 2005 inception, will become the home of Fashion Week. "This would add a great deal to New York's ability to have big events and keep the

industries that are coming here growing," he said while announcing that Coach Inc. plans to be the first tenant in an office tower built by Related Cos.

Situated adjacent to that tower, the arts center—called Culture Shed—would anchor the north end of the High Line,

A new lease jump-starts dreams of an arts corridor along the High Line.

which itself is becoming an open-air gallery for public arts installations.

"Hopefully, it's totally synergistic" with the elevated park, said Kate Levin, the city's commissioner of cultural affairs. "It gives people a destination to walk to."

If the plan comes to fruition, people will be able to stroll along the High Line from the Whitney, stop at a few Chelsea galleries and continue to the Culture Shed, a space that city officials say would showcase not just art, but fashion and industrial design.

Another stop on this art walk could be the new site planned by the Dia Art Foundation, which moved from Chelsea to Beacon, N.Y., in 2003, and this year bought a West 22nd Street property steps from the High Line. Fund raising is under way to develop the third and final section of the park, from 30th Street to 34th Street, where the Hudson Yards project will be situated.

City officials cautioned that the Culture Shed is still in its infancy. Officials, who are shepherding the idea but won't run the center, said they hope to have a clearer plan by next sum-

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Hudson Yards 'Shed' Marks a Museum Mile

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mer for the building's design, the money required to build it and the shape of the nonprofit organization that will lead it.

The design, by Diller Scofidio & Renfro, in partnership with the Rockwell Group, is still under development. An early rendering showed a five-story building with a footprint of 22,000 square feet, couched in two outer shells that could be rolled outward to expand the space to more than 55,000 square feet.

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Thomas Krens, the former director of the Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation, said he was approached several years ago by the mayor's office to discuss possibilities for an arts center at Hudson Yards. New York, he noted, doesn't have a center devoted solely to traveling exhibitions, something that is common in Europe.

Because of the increasing demand for contemporary programming, and the sheer size of today's pieces, what the city needed, he told them, was programming space—and lots of it.

"There's no doubt it will be successful," he said of Culture Shed. "Things will happen there that you can't imagine today."

Cecilia Alemani, director of the High Line's public art program, said the return of Dia and the prospect of the Culture Shed will make the High Line a gateway to a new destination for art. "I like to think of the new Museum Mile on the West Side of Manhattan," she said.

She said she hopes the park's art program, with sculptures on the walkway, photography on a nearby billboard and video installations projected on adjacent walls, will pique the interest of a new audience. "Galleries are great, but they're kind of intimidating for someone who is not an art person," she said.

City officials say it's too soon to say when the Culture Shed might be built. The Whitney is moving from the Upper East Side and scheduled to open downtown in 2015. The Dia foundation has not said when the Chelsea space will debut.