

Should Faneuil Hall Marketplace Become a Draw for Locals?

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Image via Nick DeLuca

Faneuil Hall Marketplace is one of the most visited tourist destinations in the world, drawing in close to 20 million individuals each year. That fact is hardly lost on Bostonians who consider the marketplace as the ultimate tourist trap, a place where one goes to see a concentration of fanny packs, people wielding selfie sticks and groups huddled around a map in an attempt to navigate the city.

Ashkenazy Acquisition Corporation (AAC), owner of the marketplace since 2011, is striving to bring Boston residents back to Faneuil Hall Marketplace and turn it into a place where locals

and nonnatives are more willing to cohabit for even just an hour or more, if not a long, leisurely afternoon.

AAC was joined by architecture firm Elkus Manfredi Architects at Ned Devine's in Faneuil Hall Marketplace Tuesday night to present their master vision to the public.

And while the two companies are proposing a revamped marketplace that preserves the historic architecture and deep-seated significance of the three elongated buildings that form the campus, they also wish to provide contemporary enhancements aimed at enticing the lifeblood of the city back.

Those in attendance, though, a congregation mostly comprising this past generation and prior, did not receive the proposal with approbation. Rather, they were unabashedly proud of the landmark and skeptical of what the proposal means for local retailers, vendors, food services and the lasting legacy of the marketplace.

"The most important property we own today, that has the most history and character, is where we are today," said Barry Lustig, executive vice president at AAC. "We treasure the buildings, we treasure the history and it's our goal to celebrate all what Faneuil Hall was about in its past, what Faneuil Hall is about today, and enrich all of that for the future."

Faneuil Hall Marketplace has evolved in terms of both form and function since its inception in 1824. The primary building, Quincy Market, celebrated for its center rotunda, has offered foodstuff for roughly its entire lifespan. It was in subsequent years that market overflow catalyzed the purchase of the two flanking North and South Market Buildings.



Image courtesy of Elkus Manfredi Architects

The goal of AAC and Elkus-Manfredi, who's also working with design firms Sasaki Associates and Biederman Redevelopment Ventures, for the exterior is to install new lighting, provide uniformed signage, activate programming areas, fill cobblestone gaps for a seamless surface, utilize neighboring Clinton and Chatham Streets and build new glass canopies over the facades. Further, the intention is to build three glass pavilions spanning the South Market promenade in addition to rebuilding the greenhouse, currently situated next to Faneuil Hall itself, for retail purposes. The South Market Building, too, is expected to house a hotel, but that plan will undergo its own Boston Redevelopment Authority approval process.

On the inside the plan is to reposition and redevelop space occupied primarily by food vendors, turn the rotunda area into a destination by offering new seating and a moveable bar, and, upstairs, welcome retailers like [Uniqlo](#), which is using part of that space as its new flagship store.



Design courtesy of Elkus Manfredi Architects

Transformations are already being undertaken in terms of activation. For example, simple tables and chairs were recently installed on the South Market side. Along with those is a pool table, ping pong, board games, three racks of reading materials, historical tours of the site and programming for people of all levels.

"People can control exactly where they sit, which is critical," said Dan Biederman, President of Biederman Redevelopment Ventures. "I would say the amount of programming you're seeing here is equivalent to the third or fourth year in Bryant Park. Boston's taking to it very quickly. There were times we didn't have much of a crowd in Bryant but the games were taken up very quickly here."

Bryant Park in New York City is the brainchild of Biederman and in the 1980s became the first programmed park in the United States. It features games, lessons, entertainment, and more with happenings taking place all day, 80 to 90 hours a week for 12 months.

Biederman is bringing the same kind of playable engagement to Faneuil Hall Marketplace, where the primary objective of any visitor has been to eat, shop, take a photo and use the restroom.

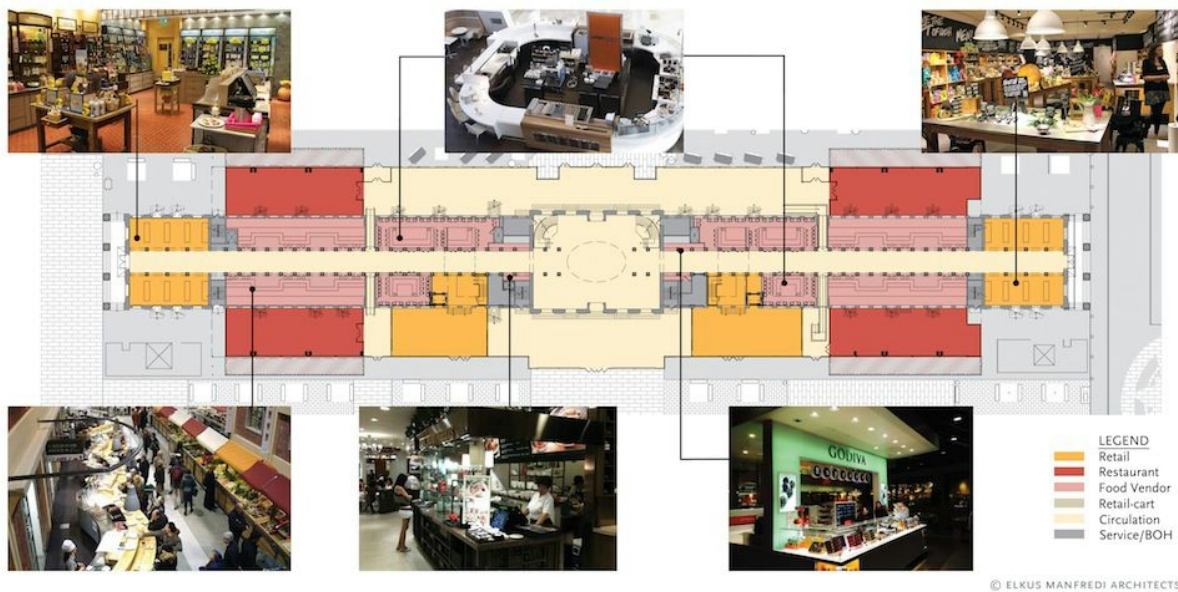


Image courtesy of Elkus Manfredi Architects

Even Jane Thompson, widow of Benjamin Thompson, who was the leading architect behind the Quincy Market restoration in the 1970s after spending decades of disrepair, spoke out saying that AAC and Elkus Manfredi are completely missing the point of what the marketplace is all about. She, too, has been involved in design since the 1960s and ran her own firm between 1994 and 2013.

"How in the hell is a hotel coming to the biggest marketplace not just in Massachusetts but in the United States?" Thompson posited. "[Developers have] come in and taken the meaning of the whole monument and basically turned it into a private facility. This requires an explanation."

Marilee Meyer, an architecture historian and member of the Victorian Society of America, went beyond the hotel to convey to the project proponents that Faneuil Hall Marketplace shouldn't be lumped in with Bryant Park because its essence is completely different.

"This is not Bryant Park, this is an active market with history," said Meyer. "I don't think the developer and architect understand the DNA of Boston. The new plans discourage a full array of diversity. They're not trying to get Bostonians involved, they're trying to create a clubhouse for new transplants. Since when does the public have to be programmed and entertained all the time?"



Image courtesy of Elkus Manfredi Architects

AAC, Elkus Manfredi and the BRA had the opportunity to respond to each audience member's respective issue. But to Meyer, who elicited multiple ovations, Lustig had no comment, which evoked noticeable whispers and murmurs from the crowd.

For his part, Lustig reinforced that he absolutely doesn't intend to displace anyone, is working with tenants to draft longer term leases, and that this plan aptly mixes historical preservation with a modern twist that will generate sales and profitability for all stakeholders. "What we have today is very static and we want Faneuil Hall Marketplace to be the tourist gateway to see everything there is to see in Boston," said Lustig.

Teresa Polhemus, executive director at the BRA, noted that the BRA board will be voting on the vision (not every developmental component of the project) at its meeting next week.

From there, the BRA, along with ACC and Elkus Manfredi, are expected to continue engaging the public and soliciting feedback on how the Faneuil Hall Marketplace redevelopment project could and should proceed.