



## New life for Bronx rail station?

by amy zimmer / metro new york

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BRONX. Can the Cass Gilbert-designed Westchester Avenue Railroad Station — abandoned since 1937 — be transformed into a grand entrance to the Bronx River and its new greenway?

That's the hope of local group Youth Ministries for Peace and Justice — one that's complicated and costly.

"It could be a beautiful gateway from Westchester Avenue to the new park," said Tawkiyah Jordan, senior director for community programs at Youth Ministries.

The boarded-up station that belongs to Amtrak overlooks the new Concrete Plant Park, which is expected to open in summer 2008. After months of pestering Amtrak, Youth Ministries was able to bring in architects to look at the space.

"It's a building that would break your heart to lose," said Joan Byron, of the Pratt Center for Community Development. "But it's about as challenging a site as they come."

It's "fragile," with an exposed steel lattice work embedded with terra cotta, Byron said. "The steel is expanding and exfoliating, like little potato chips flaking off, and that's damaging the terra cotta."

It would cost millions to renovate the roughly 2,700 square foot building above rail tracks. "It's like the size of a ranch house," Byron said, "and that's one of the challenges because it can't generate revenue that would pay for its development debt."

Residents have pitched turning it into a Bronx River ecology center or a place for renting fishing gear and canoes. Some envision a holistic health care and reproductive rights clinic there or a food pantry or restaurant.

Linda Cox, executive director of the Bronx River Alliance, the public-private partnership overseeing the Bronx River Greenway, said any project would be "a daunting" undertaking.

"We need a closer look at the costs, the benefits and if it's even feasible for the building to be made available," she said.

Adam Liebowitz, of community group the Point, said some locals want a hip-hop museum.

“The South Bronx was the birthplace of hip-hop and to have this place all graffitied up in the heart of the neighborhood could be great,” Liebowitz said. If not, “I think Youth Ministries would make sure it’s something the whole community has a stake in.”

### **Other projects**

Youth Ministries sees the station fitting in with its proposal to take down the Sheridan Expressway and build a multilevel supermarket there.