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Boddewyn Gaynor Architects and Avison Young team up to assist W.T. Grant

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W.T. Grant Foundation at One Grand Central Place - New York, NY

New York, NY Boddewyn Gaynor Architects' (BGA) client, the W.T. Grant Foundation, engaged the firm and a team of real estate advisors from Avison Young, to develop an analysis of their current needs and assist them in evaluating potential new locations. Under consideration were a number of midtown properties, as well as the renovation of their existing Lexington Ave. location.

Established in 1936, the W.T. Grant Foundation is a non-profit organization that supports and funds research in the social sciences with the aim of assisting individuals, notably young people, improve their lives. The foundation is named for philanthropist, William T. Grant, an American businessman, who founded the "W. T. Grant Co. 25 Cent Store" in Lynn, Mass.

BGA recommended their investigation phase pre-lease service to the W.T. Grant Foundation with the goal of evaluating various sites, so that they could make an informed decision. This phase can be time-consuming, but for the client who plans ahead, it is well worth noting the carpenter's infamous adage, "Measure Twice, Cut Once" ensures the right "Fit!"

BGA developed a program report summarizing the minimum square footage requirements going forward, based on the current and projected headcounts, plus the support spaces. Their report also included a list of improvements at the foundation's current offices, since after 20 years of occupancy, there were many changes to the way their business is now transacted.

Over the course of several months, the Avison Young team identified a number of alternate locations in class A properties. The BGA team then assessed the pros and cons regarding layout and fit, building services, as well as general building and landlord reputation.

BGA investigated lease issues that could impact the architectural layout of the space and contacted the base building MEP Engineers of the semi-finalist properties for their input. BGA's familiarity with landlord workletters, construction-related leasing issues and the list of approved contractors enabled the foundation to build a realistic project budget. Based on the high ratio of women to men within the W.T. Grant Organization, they developed a design solution to increase the number of toilet fixtures within the women's room. BGA's investigation Pphase information was timely and helped the

Foundation negotiate an equitable Tenant Improvement allowance as part of their lease.

Concurrent with their analysis of the alternate locations, BGA also evaluated the foundation's existing office facility. They recommended modifications to meet their current and future needs and assisted with obtaining construction budgets for review by the Foundation's board, prior to the final site selection.

Ultimately, the W. T. Grant Foundation selected a full-floor of 12,732 rentable s/f of space at One Grand Central Place, formerly the Lincoln Building, which is opposite Grand Central Terminal. The landlord, Empire State Realty Trust has an excellent reputation, a long history at this property, and an ongoing program of infrastructure improvements. This assured the foundation of services while also enjoying the benefits of a classic Beaux Arts building, with its entrance lobby.

Projects like this demand a solutions-driven design project manager with listening skills to craft a design that satisfies all parties. BGA selected Michael Esposito as project manager for this assignment. His creativity and successful track record enable him to translate ideas from all team members into tangible design concepts.

The floorplan layout which Esposito developed for the tower-level floor at One Grand Central Place provided the W.T. Grant Foundation with stunning views from each of the offices, staff areas and the 40-person board room. He integrated support spaces to include meeting rooms, a pantry, copy/mailroom, a guest lounge, a phone booth and closets for visiting board members' luggage needs.

A special feature of the office buildout was the creation of a Panorama window on the south side of the floorplan to capitalize on a spectacular view of the New York harbor. The foundation had seen this feature on the 48th floor of the One Grand Central Place building and successfully negotiated to have a similar window installed as part of the landlord improvements.

BGA's ceiling design featured a mix of exposed slab around the building perimeter, with a suspended acoustical ceiling at the building core. This solution maximized access to daylight via the tall windows and the exceptional NYC skyline and harbor views, while concealing the noise and acoustical issues of the mechanical distribution systems.

The lighting design consists of a suspended ceiling with slender, linear, energy-efficient LED light fixtures. The lights are set up in a rhythm that extends continuously across the floor through closed offices, as well as open work areas, uniting and establishing a cohesive environment throughout.

In terms of finishes, BGA updated the image of the foundation through the selection of a mix of carpets and wallcoverings, as well as wood & glass storefronts at the offices. The new design aesthetic supports the reuse of the W. T. Grant Foundation's existing mix of furniture styles and wood finishes; and the storefronts extend access to the daylight and the views by both staff and visitors. As a bonus, BGA was able to coordinate the donation of a large boardroom table from another of their clients, as part of its downsizing project. Timing is everything!

Working with Goldman Copeland Associates, the MEP Engineers most familiar with this property, we incorporated the two large AC rooms in the ideal location to efficiently serve the floor, while maximizing the finished ceiling height throughout the space.

In awarding the contract for construction, the foundation selected J. A. Jennings, Inc., one of the Empire State Realty Trust's approved construction firms. Given their familiarity with the property, there was no question that they could mobilize and complete the buildout in time for the fall 2018 move in.

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