

Rus in Urbe?

With their hearts in the right place but their judgment wrong, Bloomingdale's and the Parks Department are about to wreak the latest unnecessary damage on Central Park in the form of an "entertainment pit" on the Mall. How curiously the city chooses to celebrate Olmsted's sesquicentennial with proposals destructive of the spirit and substance of his genius. How unfailingly inferior ideas are imposed as scars on his grand design. And how often facilities that should be temporary and movable become permanent blots on the landscape.

The money for this woefully miscalculated priority would go a long way toward repairing the artful Olmstedian balance of the formal and natural that is the abused and poorly appreciated beauty of Central Park. The "forces of good" persist in its aggressive destruction.

Unpopular as the suggestion may be, it is probably time for the Parks Department to draw back a bit on its tireless promotion of culture, fun and games when it encourages irreversible changes in their name, and to rethink the gift of design excellence of which it is ostensibly custodian. *Rus in Urbe* is rapidly disappearing.

There could be no better activity for a sesquicentennial year than to restudy Olmsted's original great work and its subsequent erosions, for a new master plan with emphasis on restoration and maintenance of planting and features lost and threatened, and their appropriate uses today. And there could be no better place for the generously proposed donation than to fund such a program. No one needs a \$300,000 hole in the ground.