

'Quality Zoning'...

New York City has long suffered not only from inadequate housing, but also from as poorly designed housing as that of any major city in the world.

The Housing Quality zoning amendment, now before the Board of Estimate, offers a carefully studied alternative to the standard pedestrian formula. It spells out a series of desirable amenities that cannot be achieved under present zoning restrictions: greater flexibility in plot coverage, lower buildings more compatible with certain neighborhoods, better apartment layouts and room sizes, provision of sunlight, security, and recreation areas.

Whether or not a developer elects to build in this manner is completely optional; this legislation is not mandatory. Designing this way could be cheaper, as well as better, than the conventional way, once zoning makes it possible. Indeed, in many cases substantial savings could result.

An immediate benefit would be to make smaller, currently unusable sites profitable for housing, where present zoning requires large assemblages and towers. And there are other advantages for the builder. With housing projects increasingly subject to community board review, Housing Quality standards could be an expediting ally.

Those who don't want to be bothered with an improved alternative are free to continue building as badly as they want to. All the legislation really offers is opportunity. With New York's problems, the city at least deserves a break in the way it lives; this provides a way to better housing with no cost to anyone and profit to all.