

Political Planners

In appointing a second member of his own personal staff to the seven-member City Planning Commission, Mayor Lindsay has struck a damaging blow at the independence the commission must have. His action is especially disappointing because the advance in the quality of city planning in recent years has been one of the outstanding accomplishments of the Lindsay administration.

The appointment comes in a period of intense political pressure by major real estate operators for a zoning "bonus" that would enable them to construct more high-rise luxury apartments on sixteen East Side tracts. Despite strong and inexplicable backing by City Hall for this unsound twisting of the zoning rules, four members of the commission have steadfastly held out against it. They have rightly believed that its approval would encourage further speculative raids by powerfully connected builders and hasten the trend toward making Manhattan an island for the very rich and the very poor, with no middle class.

One of the holdouts against the zoning change has been the man the Mayor declined to reappoint yesterday, Ivan Michael. When he was originally named by Mr. Lindsay three years ago, his principal discernible qualification seemed to be that he satisfied the demand of the black community for representation in city planning. However, he has shown much creativity as well as independence in his period as a commissioner. It is hard to disagree with a fellow commissioner's conclusion that the dropping of Mr. Michael was an act of "plain and straight retaliation" for his refusal to go along on the zoning giveaway.

His replacement, Gordon Davis, now the Mayor's liaison to the Human Resources Administration, also starts without background in planning. The much bigger question is how free he will be, particularly now that a municipal election is coming up. The decisions of the City Planning Commission can mean millions of dollars for real estate interests. Much more important, they can determine the city's livability and amenity.