

A Glittering Prize for the Battery

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After 15 years of false starts and failures, construction is about to begin on Battery Park City. The joint announcement last week by the New York State Urban Development Corporation and the Canadian developers, Olympia and York, signaled a dramatic addition to the Lower Manhattan skyline. The development leadership that finally brought the project to the brink of reality bodes well not only for lower Manhattan but also for Times Square, where a similar undertaking is in the works.

Except for one group of apartments now rising, the landfill in the Hudson River next to the World Trade Center has for years been as empty as the promises of city and state officials. Conceived by Governor Rockefeller in 1966, the project produced nothing but complicated plans without political or financial foundation. By 1979 the Battery Park City Authority faced default on its bonds.

But the state and the U.D.C. have now managed to

turn the project around, taking advantage of the present demand for commercial construction. Their success also required a commitment to coordinated controls rather than piecemeal development.

A unified, attractive plan turned out to have great appeal for investors and brought a commitment to build the entire project at once. And features like a waterfront plaza and promenade are obviously beneficial to the city; the project promises to be the best piece of architectural and urban design in New York since Rockefeller Center.

The lesson for Times Square is clear. There, too, the U.D.C. and the City Planning Commission are collaborating on a comprehensive approach to resolve conflicting proposals from builders and the city's needs. To take advantage of the strong new investment interest, the city and U.D.C. should complete their plan as quickly as possible. If Battery Park City is a fair experience, the result could be another glittering prize.

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