

Tweed Courthouse

One of the Beame administration's first acts was to take a hard and unhappy look at the beleaguered Civic Center area and at the chaos of City Hall. The result was an executive order establishing a Civic Center Task Force to reorganize and restore City Hall and construct new administrative offices. The order also specified demolition of the old Tweed Courthouse behind City Hall and erection of a new executive office building on that site.

To its credit, the administration has rediscovered its own expertise, such as the resources of the Office of Lower Manhattan Development, and is now re-evaluating the situation. A feasibility study has been made of the practicality of restoration and reuse of the Tweed Courthouse rather than demolition. This recognizes the growing trend toward progressive preservation and urbanism as demonstrated in such spectacular economic and esthetic successes as the renovation of Boston's Old City Hall.

It has become a New York habit to think of the Courthouse as an ugly and irredeemable monument to ignominy and graft, rather than as the sound and handsome landmark structure that it is, despite its origins. Even with kickbacks, the nineteenth century built more solidly and spaciously than today.

It is reported that the feasibility study states that renovation would be both possible and cheaper than a new building. Vibrations from City Hall, however, indicate a reluctance to embark on so controversial a project in spite of strong indications of success and other cities' triumphant examples of adaptive reuse. Mayor Beame, anxious for action, will make a decision soon.

The right decision would be renovation. The essential new space would be achieved conveniently, economically and creatively in a building that is, and should remain, a part of New York's art and history.