

Toward a Vital Times Square

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Finally there is a 42d Street Development Project that promises to be more than idle chatter. After years of false starts, the city, with the help of the Urban Development Corporation, has committed itself in a new study to ending the area's long, sordid slide. This belated resolve and the lively state of Manhattan's real estate market may be the right combination at the right time to turn Times Square around.

The study is called a "discussion document" and is not intended to be the final word. Some of its aspects, like the fate of the Portman Hotel, require immediate consideration. But the city is finally acting on the correct assumption that renewal of this focal point of New York cannot be achieved through unrelated new construction projects or by developers' conflicting plans.

The goals for Times Square should be not only to eliminate blight and decay, but to forge links with its surroundings and to restore the area as a theater and entertainment center. Forty-second Street should be seen as the connector between the East and West sides, between the garment and theater districts and between the Clinton neighborhood and the new Convention Center. The area's architectural features and special assets should be preserved, with a high priority for the restoration of the fine old 42d Street theaters. There

should be some reassurance about the quality and appropriateness of new commercial building.

Achieving such a sophisticated mix of rehabilitation and construction will not be easy, but the effort is now properly begun. This is a most welcome kind of planning, which the city has too long ignored. If the suggested schedule is observed, a total plan could come before the Board of Estimate by fall and the city will be in a negotiating rather than a begging position.

The validity of the city's economic and marketing assumptions is still being measured by consultants. The specific recommendations include a merchandise mart for one of the most blighted sites, and a concentration of new office buildings close to Times Square. Strong emphasis is placed on continuous retail and entertainment activity. Developers are to be offered access to eight parcels and their suggestions will be incorporated into the final project.

Coordinated development is the only medicine for Times Square's multiple ills, but the result must pay its own way. No plan will succeed if it fails to restore the "greatness and glamour," as the study puts it, that made 42d Street and Times Square the crossroads of the world. The understanding of what creates such unique variety and vitality is the most impressive part of the proposal. It should not be lost.

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