

Political Football: Planning

The football season is on, and nowhere is the game being played with more intensity than down at City Hall. In a remarkable display of Board of Estimate teamwork last week, the five Borough Presidents kicked the city's planning programs right off the field.

The items they banded together to block or defeat were the coordinated development of Staten Island resources, low-rent housing in Queens, and Harlem renewal plans.

The issue, in the Borough Presidents' minds, was to show the Mayor that they could still call the signals, even if everyone went home with a broken leg. The real issue is whether obstructionist tactics, motivated by political self-interest, should be used against critical priorities of citywide importance. The Borough Presidents have made it clear that they have felt "snubbed" by some of the Mayor's direct executive actions; their retaliation is sabotage of essential city programs.

Mr. Cariello opposed the inclusion of low-income housing in a middle-income neighborhood in Queens. Mr. Sutton hoped to keep a locally favored Harlem residential project out of urban renewal or city planning boundaries. Mr. Connor was merely continuing his campaign against the Office of Staten Island Development set up by the Mayor's executive order last summer to correct sordid and scandalous land exploitation in Staten Island to which the Borough President has been conspicuously unresponsive.

Each vote was a blow against long-overdue, carefully considered, painfully instituted city planning policy, and against the city's future. The Office of Staten Island Development was created in response to a special City Planning Commission study which recommended the agency as necessary liaison for the Mayor, city departments and private developers, to encourage the borough's orderly and optimum growth.

Still another Planning Commission report, on housing strategy, had urged the placement of small, scattered low-income housing groups to avoid the massive ghettos of the poor that are not only the source of the city's hard-core slums but of many of its hard-core problems. The Logue report on Housing and Neighborhood Improvement last month pinpointed all of these crises and called for a crash program for large-scale ghetto, and Harlem, renewal.

The Borough Presidents' argument that they can take the planning responsibility for their own areas is not a valid one. It is refuted by the record.

As things stand now, the score is city, nothing; Borough Presidents, nothing; the people of New York, nothing. It may have been a slick game of political football-playing, but it set a record of sorts for fouls.