

# **Controversy Widens on Design Of Development in Washington**

## **Fine Arts Commission Battling to Prevent Approval of the Watergate Project— Session Here Fails to End Dispute**

**By ADA LOUISE HUXTABLE**

A battle that has been raging in Washington for the last six months moved last week to New York. The controversy is over the design of one of the Capital's largest new building projects, the ten-acre, \$50,000,000 luxury Watergate development for the Foggy Bottom Waterfront.

The architect members of Washington's Commission of Fine Arts, Ralph Walker and Douglas W. Orr, met in Mr. Walker's office at 101 Park Avenue with representatives of the Watergate project. The sought to resolve the differences that have arisen between the commission and the development's architects and sponsors.

These differences have been almost as striking as the project itself, which, if it goes ahead, will mark a radical change in Washington's architecture. The project is planned for the land adjacent to the proposed National Cultural Center on the Potomac River. It would consist of a group of large apartment houses, smaller maisonettes, a hotel, an office building, shops and restaurants. The design calls for a sweeping arrangement of boldly curving forms and projecting balconies of a kind that Washington has never seen, and never will see, if the Fine Arts Commission has its way.

### **Height Point of Conflict**

The conflict has arisen over the 130-to-165-foot height of some of the buildings, the possibility of their conflict with the not-too-far-distant Lincoln Memorial and the necessity of zoning changes. The amount and kind of open space provided, the planned population densities, and the suitability of the radical design to the Washington scene are also points of issue.

The land is owned, and would be privately developed without government funds, by an Italian investing firm believed to have Vatican ties, the Società Generale Immobiliare, which is also proceeding with a minu-

mental building project in Montreal.

The American managing partner of the Italian firm is Nicoloas M. Salgo of New York, president of the sponsoring corporation, Island Vista, Inc. The unconventional design is by a well-known Italian architect, Luigi Moretti, in collaboration with the Washington firm of Corning, Moore, Elmore and Fischer.

Watergate's sponsors call the plan 'a showplace for Washington.' The Fine Arts Commission, rejected it formally at an April 18 meeting, after warming up with objections before the zoning commission on April 13.

In recommendations to National Capital Planning Commission last February, the fine arts group called it "an invitation to chaotic disharmony" that "will begin to erode and destroy the qualities that give Washington its particular beauty."

### **Three Steps Are Taken**

At the meeting here, the Watergate sponsors guaranteed that the Italian architect, Signor Moretti, would be willing to meet with the commission to discuss the design changes that the commission considers necessary for the site.

Mr. Walker and Mr. Orr affirmed their objections to the buildings' height, and took a firm stand against the population densities that would result from the proposed land coverage.

To those who are for the Watergate scheme, which includes much of the Washington press, these decisions will seem like an impeding action that may preclude "progressive development" with private funds of a deteriorated area, where housing and other facilities are badly needed. The proposal has already been accepted, after hot debate, by a split decision of the 'national Capital Planning Board. It is still awaiting zoning board approval.

To those who oppose the project, the meeting represents a step toward saving the capital from what might prove to be an architectural catastrophe on a scale so grand that the city's character would be irretrievably damaged.