

Planning Is Essential

With the dedication of Co-op City this week, the United Housing Foundation has given New York 15,328 badly needed units of low- and middle-income housing. The most important nonprofit producer of the best apartments for the least money in a city desperately short of housing that people can afford, U.H.F. has been singleminded in its insistence in all of its projects that the overriding objective to be considered is keeping costs low. This point is primary and it will remain so as long as there are families that cannot meet the free-market costs of a decent place to live.

At the same time, however, where at least 50,000 people will be accommodated on 300 acres, the sponsor is *ipso facto* building a new town. There is a lot more to a new town in terms of site planning, services and amenities than the housing itself. One cannot simply "leave room" for these things; they must be "designed in" at the start. When close to 90 per cent of the funds that make the housing possible is public money, it is equally basic that a positive attempt be made to include such community considerations in terms of environmental planning. This is not esthetics; it is also how people live.

But U.H.F. has little interest in environmental planning. It says it runs the cost of housing up.

The fact is that Co-op City, while still offering the remarkable scale of prices for excellent accommodations that are the U.H.F. specialty, is a great deal better in urban and architectural terms than anything the foundation has built before. The changes came out of a four-year tug-of-war with the city, which would not accept U.H.F.'s standard solution at the Co-op City superscale. As a result, there are many revisions of that standard scheme, all to the good, with no notable effect on apartment costs.

U.H.F. is quite correct in its complaints that the city moves slowly or not at all, that its regulations are crippling restrictive, the delays caused are costly, and that it is virtually impossible to coordinate city agencies for action. It is inexcusable that the city has lagged so badly on streets, schools and other essential municipal services. But, despite U.H.F.'s resistance to city planning pressures and its reluctance to accept proposed changes, the modifications at Co-op City demonstrate that alternatives are possible.

The United Housing Foundation is one of the city's most valuable contributors to its urban welfare. It is doing an indispensable job. As the organization that pioneered the progressive idea of cooperative housing in New York, it should not have to be backed into improvements now. Environmental design can no longer be left out of the housing picture. If subsidies are needed for planning costs and urban amenities for such projects, they should be approached by the city and U.H.F. together. Surely the foundation is capable of the same kind of breakthrough that it accomplished thirty years ago.