

# The Planless City

Yes, Virginia, there was an age of gracious living in New York. There was the Savoy Plaza, facing the city's loveliest open square, dedicated to the more luxurious things of life. There was the Sheraton East, formerly the Ambassador, which, with the Waldorf Astoria and its neighbors, gave Park Avenue its particular stamp of elegance.

Now there will be an office building on the site of the Savoy Plaza, and, where the bland, lovely lady of the Fountain of Abundance still holds sway, a new kind of abundance will be celebrated by a big automobile showroom. There will also be an office building on the site of the Sheraton East, which promises to be one more block-size behemoth stamped out of a typical commercial mold. And there will be an inestimable loss in the city's sophistication and character and in the practice of the dwindling art of living.

There are of course tremendous economic difficulties involved in the operation of older, luxury hotels. These realities must be understood. Neither building is an architectural masterpiece worth saving in itself. The real issues here are the larger and more important ones of land use, variety and style of urban functions and the design quality of the city's major construction on its most notable sites.

New York is the only internationally great city that is planned by the profits of the few, rather than the interests of the many. It is probably the only metropolis of comparable size and scale with no power of architectural or esthetic review for its finest streets and squares. It undoubtedly has one of the most impotent planning commissions in the world, paralyzed by departmental vetoes and lack of coordinated power.

Economic obsolescence and financial gain are the real shapers of this city. These are hardly the forces to guarantee urban balance, beauty or well-being. New York's physical future is one more giant-size problem for Mayor-elect Lindsay's lengthy list.