

Topics

Discomania

The Platter Zone

When is a cabaret a disco, and when is a disco a neighborhood nuisance? That's easy, if you live in the neighborhood: It's when one person's entertainment becomes another's insomnia.

But as new discothèques open, and plans for others are announced, neighborhoods are finding that only the zoning expert knows for sure. The answer involves such technicalities as what is proper and permissible for an area classified as a "neighborhood retail" zone as opposed to a "heavy-use retail" zone — as well as how the neighbors feel about it.

At the moment, two New York City neighborhoods — one in the East 60's and one in the East 80's — are up in arms over proposals for discothèques. Both communities represent the dilemma of residential areas with a large amount of commercial activity, maintaining with difficulty a desirable and delicate balance between the two.

Discos in these neighborhoods would be misplaced and disruptive. The case against them is clear: the noise and crowds and late hours that are a standard part of disco operation are incom-

patible with residential life. They are also incompatible with the light retail activity permitted in many residential neighborhoods.

The intention of the law is clear. The problem is that the discothèque had not been invented when the "use" lists were framed. The arguments of the disco vendors, therefore, consist chiefly of skillful maneuvering to evade zoning category and some imaginative between-the-lines legal reading.



The City Planning Commission is in process of preparing amended definitions and controls that would differentiate among theaters, cabarets and discos, and make it clearer where they belong and where they don't. Specifications for noise insulation and indoor waiting rooms are also being studied.

Ultimately, the permits for discos must depend on a case-by-case review of their proposed design and neighborhoods. But explicit regulations will avoid a lot of the guesswork and controversy. No one wants to turn New York into a bluenose town. But it is the job of zoning to preserve and enhance the quality of life for those who would rather sleep than hustle.

A Glint in Soviet Eyes

To Jane and John Doe's hedges against inflation — the Kruggerand, the Maple Leaf and the British Sovereign — must now be added the Chevronets, a quarter-ounce Soviet coin of gold. Investing in gold is not easily squared with Communist theory; it produces nothing people can eat or use. The price of gold has nothing to do with the Siberian labor that produces it. Nor is it an entirely wholesome way of gaining wealth even by capitalist doctrine. To buy gold is to speculate, and these days it is to speculate on fear and the dollar's decline.

So here come the Russians, instructing us that the rich "have always liked to keep some of their assets in gold." Their ad in *The Times* also points out how practical gold is: You can carry it around in your pocket, "and at any time, you can divide your holdings for partial sale, for gifts, or for safekeeping in different places."

Once again a pragmatic and slyly exploitive foreign policy prevails in the Kremlin over mere ideology. All that is left of Communist virtue is the picture on the coin — a typical Soviet peasant sowing seeds. The Chevronets is socialist realism indeed.