

ON MORNINGSID HEIGHTS: Columbia University, already dominant feature of the scene, is planning \$150-million in design and construction

Expansion at Columbia

A Restricted Vision and Bureaucracy Seen as Obstacles to Its Development

By ADA LOUISE HUXTABLE

Plans for 14 major academic urban planning as a process, or and residential buildings to be as a source of superior design. constructed by Columbia Uni- If the present system and versity as part of its \$200-mil- standards continue, they pre- lion expansion and improve- dict that the next 10 years will ment program make clear in produce a great deal more of dollars and cents what the the same.

Morningside neighborhood has. With the exception of the always known and feared—that new Law School, which gets A Columbia is the maker and shaper of a considerable chunk of the urban environment. With this appraisal program, it will be shaping its surroundings to the tune of almost \$150-million worth of planning, design and construction, of which \$75-million will come from the massive fund-raising campaign announced last Monday.

Since Columbia is obviously in the large-scale planning business to stay, the question arises as to the quality of the university's planning and building record to date, and its physical promise for the future of the area.

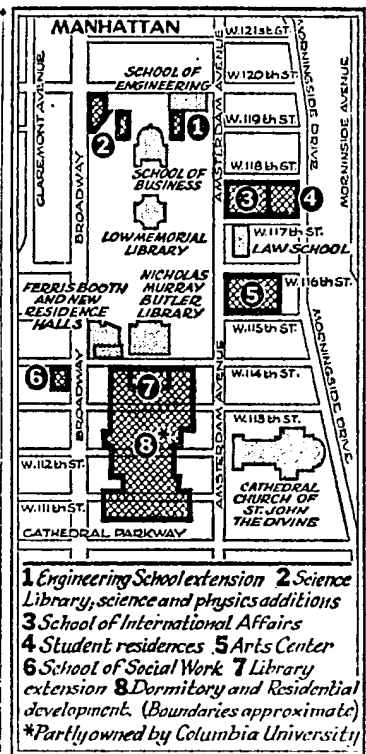
Results visible now, after almost a decade of construction, are so uncoordinated and undistinguished that they suggest to critics a kind of do-it-yourself planning based on a lack of administrative understanding of

Reactionary Building

The School of Engineering, an uninspired brick box, displays none of the dramatic engineering advances that have brought about a 20th-century revolution in architectural esthetics. Allan Temko, a leading urban and architecture critic and a Columbia alumnus, asks, "How did a school working on the frontiers of applied science ever get such a reactionary building?"

He calls Carman Hall a "mean building, like a Victorian reformatory," and scores its awkward masses and crude detailing as having the appearance of being "drawn up in haste by bureaucratic hacks."

Other additions to the campus



The New York Times Nov. 5, 1966
Planned buildings shown by the cross-hatched areas.

have been picketed by students and denounced by members of the architecture faculty.

Since 1957, the university has built four important structures on its six-block campus, in relatively noncontroversial territory. They are Ferris Booth Hall, Carman Hall, Uris Hall for the School of Business and the Seeley W. Mudd Hall for the School of Engineering, at a total cost of \$55-million.

Across Amsterdam Avenue,

Continued on Page 34, Column 1

Expansion at Columbia

Continued From Page 33

a new "east campus" is being created from 115th to 118th Street, with the \$9-million Law School already complete, and a \$12.8-million School of International Affairs about to rise. Student residences will follow.

A faculty apartment house has been built at 125th Street and Riverside Drive.

One of the most controversial buildings is a \$9-million gymnasium to be constructed in Morningside Park. It is under attack as park encroachment and as inadequate for promised community uses.

This is the kind of relentless growth, with demolition of frequently sound, low-rent housing stock, and explosive problems of race and relocation, that the neighboring community has learned to dread.

Even more explosive is the proposed "south campus," to extend from 114th to 111th Street between Broadway and Amsterdam Avenue. Except for an addition to the library, this is envisioned by the university as a dormitory and residential area. Because the university is still in the process of assembling sites suitable for large-scale construction, it anticipates "sporadic and piecemeal" development.

Five commercial blocks are in early study stages above 125th Street.

Interracial Problems

The smoldering, inter-racial, town-and-gown problems in these blocks and other peripheral areas are to be the subject of \$10-million of the \$35-million Ford Foundation grant that was also announced Monday. That amount is to be applied to the resolution of "urban and minority" affairs.

All this adds up to a large planning package of radical physical change. But Columbia's vision of planning is a curiously restricted and unprofessional one. It operates as a purely administrative process with architectural afterthoughts.

Programing, or scheduling of needs, is mistaken for planning, or visualization of those needs in physical terms. At this early stage, when the university should already be translating its requirements into the most stimulating and suitable environmental concepts, it settles for lists, timetables and room counts, rather than three-dimensional ideas.

Without an accompanying architectural overview from the time the program is formulated, building inter-relationships are fumbled, and there are none of the insights into less-than-routine solutions that come from talented professionals. The professionals view the Columbia planning program as an amateur operation.

Under the process, a plan goes through the office of the Coordinator of University Planning, under Stanley Salmen, for programing of needs; to the Trustees Committee on Development for affirmation and site selection; to the dean of the school for which any specific building will be constructed for further programing; back to the Planning Office for schematics of the new building, and then to the Trustees Committee on

Building and Grounds for approval.

Not until this stage does anyone begin to think about a possible architect for the scheme. Once site and solution have been boxed in at an understandably uninspired level and the possibility of creative, coordinated planning gone forever, the package is submitted to an Advisory Council on Architectural Planning set up by the University.

The chairman of the council is Grayson Kirk, president of the university, and the vice chairman, Aldo Giugola, head of the Columbia School of Architecture. Stanley Salmen and Frederick J. Woodbridge, architect, are ex officio members. Other members are John Moore, Frank Rogers, Max Abramovitz, Jackson Smith, George Brown and Morris Ketchum, all New York architects.

The council comments and advises on the project and an accompanying list of architects' names. The Columbia School of Architecture is not consulted or involved in any way, beyond contributing a faculty member to the Council.

A revised list of architects goes to the director of the Office of Construction. A further reduced list is considered by at least six committees concerned with finances and construction and then sent to the president of the university, who makes the final recommendation to the Trustees Committee for Appropriations.

The results of this selection by bureaucracy have been called "safe" decisions, with the possibilities of excellence squeezed dry by the process.

Columbia's entire physical development program is handled in this fashion, on and off campus, from science labs to residences. It is the way that the new expansion program will also be carried out. It is a method, according to professional observers, that virtually guarantees the exclusion of superior planning and design.

Columbia officials ask for final judgment when the construction program is further along. Critics fear that multiplication of the present standards will only be a multiplication of failures.

As an illustration, they point to the handsome traditional centerpiece of the classic, 19th-century McKim, Mead and White campus, the domed Low Library, and compare it with the new Uris Hall, that challenges it on axis.

The two do not bear comparison comfortably. Low Library is a marbled pantheon of full-scaled dignity. Uris Hall, by either design or irony, since it is the gift of one of the city's largest builders, whose insensitivity to architectural standards has been matched only by his commercial success, enshrines the tin-type of speculative construction in Columbia's academic groves.

Even the groves have been disappearing rapidly at the north end of the site. But it is the proven inability of the university to see the environment as a whole and to recognize the need for the highest level of professional vision that threatens its development program, and the Morningside neighborhood, with planning disaster.