

Progress for the Past

The progress of the amendments to the Landmarks Law has been about as stately as some of the landmarks themselves, but the proposed revisions coming before the City Council today would eliminate loopholes in the current law and strengthen it considerably.

The real joker in present law has been the restriction of designation hearings to a six-month period out of every three and a half years, a provision that has given more protection to the bulldozer than to the city's heritage. The new proposal would eliminate that sop to speculators in favor of more rational hearing schedules.

Interiors would be designated for the first time, as long as they were accessible to the general public. Scenic landmarks, such as the city's great public parks, would make up a new and necessary category. And commission reports would be made public.

There are a few jokers left. Private interiors, no matter how notable, could not be designated, nor could church interiors, even though the loss of New York's last remaining Georgian examples would be irreparable. But even with their defects, the amendments represent a desirable step forward now.

What there is left of architectural quality and character in New York is not expendable. The losses can be slowed dramatically by speedy City Council action.