**Albany's Threat to New York's Planning**
By ADA LOUISE HUXTABLE
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New York has a double-edged sword hanging over it now: the Governor's Urban Development Corporation for the rebuilding of city slums. The awesome capacity of this monumentally important agency to spell future or finis for the city is not easy to grasp, but the hard reality is there, written into law.

The state's right to move into the cities unasked and to build without restriction of local law or sentiment, its veto power over local plans—all intended as a means of giving impetus to stalled renewal programs—could be the greatest danger New York has yet faced in handling its own urban problems. It could plunge the city right back into the Bulldozer Age, into repetition of the assorted disasters of the past that have led to painful reassessment of renewal aims and essential changes in planning.

But it could also be the tool to propel those painfully learned lessons into planning and building reality. Not the least important instrument would be money. In spite of the current flak between Mayor Lindsay and Edward Logue, the tough, intelligent, battle-hardened former renewal administrator of Boston and New Haven who was picked to head the state corporation, the potential for the city is unlimited. But that potential is overshadowed by the dread of an authoritarian state paternalism with arrogant powers and no guarantee of the requisite sensitivity to local needs.

This feeling is reinforced by a record of state insensitivity on many city issues, and the fact that planning and renewal in New York, at last moving in the right direction, are almost immobilized by economic and social crisis. The question of promise or peril, therefore, hangs in extremely delicate balance. In spite of the fear of breach of home rule and the threat of circumvention of local zoning and building codes that have been stressed (the city would often like nothing better than to ignore code regulations itself) the basic fear is of a kind of planning sabotage.

Although it is not obvious to the average or distant eye, and Albany is distant for this purpose, New York has belatedly reached a point of aware, planning professionalism. It is finally a city of qualified hope. It is beginning to combine a proper response to neighborhood problems with a working (not perfect, but working) machinery for community involvement in planning and governing processes that has started to produce results.

## Hopeful Results

They are tentative and tender results, to be nursed ferociously, such as the humanization of vest pocket public housing about to go into construction in Bedford Stuyvesant and the South Bronx under the Model Cities program; self-help groups building with the city as in Metro North in Harlem; the recognition of a new approach to open space and linkage design to make a city a viable environment; a new sense of the social importance of neighborhood character and of local planning; and the hardwon cooperation of people and administrators in a search for the kind of solutions needed for problems from community to "street corner" scale.

## Framework of Understanding

These lines of understanding are the functional and planning framework of a city, and of any renewal program. They worked conspicuously to knit the city together in the tension after the King assassination. What is happening in New York now is critical, and it cannot be measured by traditional methods. Success cannot be calculated, yet, in building starts or room counts. But it could be, with state help.

Certainly the state has no conscious aim of sabotage. But whether it has any real understanding of the role it must play is a serious question. There is much to suggest it does not.

The Governor, fortunately and unfortunately, likes to build—witness the Albany Mall and his embattled scheme for Battery Park City, which had Rockefeller and Lindsay at loggerheads for over a year. Both Rockefeller schemes represent the kind of impersonal, grand scale, formal concepts popular forty years ago that leave today's socially oriented professionals cold. Both have been dear to the gubernatorial heart.

This was never clearer than in the struggles over Battery Park City, which was superimposed, as could be done now with any state program without a struggle, on New York's own, more progressive lower-Manhattan plan. A state-city accommodation has finally been reached, with an exemplary panel of architects to develop a mutually satisfactory compromise design. Under the state legislation that panel could be legally bypassed—one indication of the hazards involved.

It must be assumed, in fairness, that the state legislation is committed to the side of the angels, although there is also the factor that building programs make splendid campaign propaganda. The Governor has not been unaware of this in the past, and the temptations to come up with a whopper or two, in an election year, can be strong.

But with a city being run, for the first time, with some planning vision and a sense of its own humanity, and a state agency headed by one of the most experienced men in the urban business, the possibilities for positive collaborative achievement are enormous. If the risks are real, the options are still wide open.

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*ADA LOUISE HUXTABLE is architecture critic of The Times.*