

Plan's 'Total' Concept Is Hailed

By ADA LOUISE HUXTABLE

AFTER two years of collaboration and compromise, the city and state have labored and brought forth a mountain. Battery Park City, the joint proposal that has grown out of a melding of schemes made independently by Governor Rockefeller and New York City for the future

An Appraisal of lower Manhattan, is an outstanding effort to establish comprehensive guidelines for desperately

needed housing and commercial development within the framework of a totally planned community set into the larger city.

The Governor's original Battery Park City is barely recognizable now. It has taken on many of the characteristics of the city's official Lower Manhattan Plan. The admirable results have grown out of protracted and often painful negotiations among the members of the top team of participating architects—Harrison and Abramovitz for the Governor's plan, Conklin and Rossant of the city's Lower Manhattan Plan, and Philip Johnson and John Burgee as architectural marriage brokers.

The Lower Manhattan's Plan's emphasis on an attractive and usable waterfront is there; the monumental office towers of the Rockefeller plan cluster at the scheme's southern tip; and masses of desperately needed housing for which the miracle mix of high, middle and low income will be violently debated fill the major portion of the land. Supporting all this is a continuous "spine" of utilities and services.

Plan Called Progressive

Battery Park City is a progressive, sophisticated and promising development of the kind called, in professional parlance, a linear city. It is not just housing or offices. It is a strip almost a mile long, to be built like a super seven-layer cake. Those layers would contain the urban functions and amenities—shops, restaurants, schools, parks, rapid transit, utilities, public and recreational facilities—that make a real community. Most important, they make it work.

It is what it calls itself: a city. It begins by making its own land. This landfill is not a straight-edged grid of speculative blocks to put buildings on; it is a series of

parks and inlet coves along the shore meant for pleasures and people, coordinated with the building locations, laid out to preserve inland vistas of the river.

This is site planning, as well as marketable real estate. Site planning is a community feature that Co-op City, another city-size development, never clearly understood; it was only dragged in by the heels at a very late stage.

The service spine that runs the length of Battery Park City as a partly glassed-in, partly open, multi-level "corridor" is the project's lifeline. The buildings are "attached" to it.

One of the plan's most remarkable features is that all of its basic specifications are written into the lease and contracts between city and state, and will be binding on developers. Those specifications are spelled out, from the functions restricted to carefully designated levels, to the massing of buildings to complement the famous lower Manhattan skyline.

At the same time, the plan is not locked in. It can be changed or adjusted as necessary.

This is the exact opposite of the traditional New York way of building. Conventional speculation scatters apartment and office blockbusters by a kind of gunshot economic distribution, according to no plan at all. It compounds chaos by dropping them on already inadequate or decaying services and circulation. Neighborhoods are maimed by a process that is as archaic as it is ineffectual in solving problems or meeting needs.

Solid Backing Cited

This is a real plan; a professional plan for the city's future backed by solid legal and procedural preparation. Esthetic evaluation is pointless at this stage, except to note that the huge, clustered hexagonal office towers that dominate the project and are half the bulk of the World Trade Center could be brutal unless handled with consummate skill and quality control. The program is schematic at present, and it is the planning guidelines that count.

The questions that will be raised concern the housing mix, density and transportation.

The density is the city's highest, and this is where it belongs, in a context designed specifically for it. It does not belong along Manhattan's side streets, where builders are campaigning to break the zoning to permit densities that can only be destructive. Concentration, handled correctly, with transportation back-up, is a proper urban answer, not an unqualified enemy of the human condition.

But New York is a strange place inhabited by an eccentric race of urban primitives who behave as if they were still living on New Amsterdam farms. Planning, until very recently, has been only a "talking tool." Nothing less than design on this scale, and of this completeness, however, can deal with the shortage of New York land, the scale of New York problems, and the unmet housing and commercial needs and essential supporting services to make the city operable.

Is this any way to plan a city? You bet it is.