

Architects Unit Endorses City Master Plan -- With Qualifications

By ADA LOUISE HUXTABLE

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After 10 months of study, the New York chapter of the American Institute of Architects has issued a qualified endorsement of the city's Master Plan.

The architects' group stated yesterday that it "supports the plan as a vital, organic framework capable of change and growth" and recommends its acceptance by community boards and citizen groups with the proviso that certain sections be revised and strengthened.

Chief among these sections is the "critical issues" volume, devoted to a general exploration and summary of problems and goals.

A statement based on special reports by seven committees concludes that the six-volume Master Plan is "an admirable beginning for the development of a citywide planning process." It offers its criticisms in

"a constructive spirit."

The Master Plan, as issued by the city in 1969, was meant to be subjected to at least a year of critical scrutiny, and then revised.

The most controversial part of the plan—the promotion of the continued expansion of Manhattan at even higher densities as a central business district or "national center"—is endorsed. But the endorsement is qualified with a warning that there must be "simultaneous improvements in transportation, housing, environmental amenities and recreation."

The suggested office and residential expansion plans for lower Manhattan and west Midtown are praised as ambitious attempts to relate growth and services. They are called "forward-looking proposals that should be expedited."

The architects summarized their conclusions by judging the Master Plan an "invaluable

compendium of facts for community planning boards and citizens, setting forth existing conditions and many projected goals."

Particular praise is given to the city's special zoning districts, as "pioneering accomplishment in developing new zoning techniques for the achievement of amenities through incentives to developers." These include the theater, Lincoln Center and Fifth Avenue districts.

While general objectives and planning actions such as zoning districts are lauded, strong reservations are expressed about "a lack of priorities for action, or realistic political strategies," and an absence of regional planning relationships.

Among the plan's most serious shortcomings, according to the architects, is its failure to give guidance to community boards and citizens as to how master planning can be used as the basis of public decisions. It

also deplores the scarcity of specific physical plans, as opposed to general goals.

Dealing with the "critical issues" of housing, transportation, education and environment, the A.I.A. report makes the following comments:

¶Housing objectives are well expressed, but solutions have barely been indicated. The rate of housing deterioration has increased since the plan was issued. The city should fight for constructive changes in the tax structure, zoning and code provisions, to further industrialize construction.

¶Transportation facilities are inventoried, but little is done to tie them together as a coordinated system. The report questions whether higher commercial density in Manhattan will be adequately serviced. It would like to see greater emphasis on the "human" aspects of travel—the environment of the station, the train and the bus.

¶Concern is expressed over high transportation costs, and lack of circumferential routes. Policy guidelines, such as might have affected decisions about truck lanes on the West Side Highway, are missing.

¶Education should be further decentralized in terms of building schools. The architects agree with the plan that the present centralized approach is founded on the "myths of economy in bigness and efficiency through sameness." Schools should be experimental and serve as year-round, individualized community facilities.

¶Parks and recreation should be related to larger planning concepts and raised recreational standards.

¶Environmental problems require more study. Such factors as the effects of additional power generation and communication services required by the new commercial expansion need analysis.