

# Save the Side Streets

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change it now undoubtedly entails serious legal and financial complications. But the issue is environment, not economics, and the latter, alone, will never keep a city alive or worth living in.

# Save the Side Streets

No one really seems to know how the area from 86th to 96th Street between Fifth and Park Avenues got to be zoned solidly "R10," but that is how it turned out in the revised zoning law of 1961. To translate numbers into buildings, this means that the very large apartment houses permitted on the avenues are also permitted on the side streets in these ten blocks. Below 86th, the side streets are zoned "R8," which preserves "valleys" of smaller structures and lower densities between the avenue blockbusters.

Translating buildings into neighborhoods, this mixed zoning of "R8" type also means Manhattan's characteristic balance of small and large, high and low, and the "side street style" that is its notable virtue and ambience. The pattern has created an area of special residential amenities that include sun, light, scale, architectural and environmental variety and simple humanity. Exactly those things that make the area desirable would be wiped out by the destruction of the side streets for high-density apartments. This is one case in which it is not possible to have one's cake and eat it.

Translating neighborhoods into people, the side streets contain sound, older housing where it is possible to live for less than the going new-building luxury rate of \$125 a room. Community groups have asked the City Planning Commission to save the side streets from 86th to 96th by rezoning them to match the prevailing lower densities to the south.

It is difficult to accept the developers' argument that it is proper and desirable to wipe out good middle income housing that cannot be duplicated and to build instead a stereotyped upper-income ghetto. It is more difficult to accept their claim that unless new luxury apartments are located in this narrow range of the upper East Side where executives prefer to live, corporations will not come to New York, eroding its national headquarters position and its tax base. The further erosion of the middle class is a dubious and dangerous tradeoff.

The basic zoning dilemma that New York faces goes much farther and deeper than these ten blocks. It is citywide and almost insoluble. Virtually every attempt to provide higher density housing in order to meet the housing shortage is in direct conflict with the preservation of the dwindling quality of the city's life and the narrowing margin of its supporting services. New York's interlocking problems make it resemble nothing so much as a house of cards.

In the case of this curiously mutant uptown zoning, the 1961 designation is obviously destructive. To