

# ... Dodge Site

The solution to the development of the Dodge site on Fifth Avenue at 61st Street is a far more complex and troubling matter. The second proposal for an apartment house and professional offices now before the City Planning Commission corrects some of the drawbacks of the first scheme and offers some distinctly better features.

But the zoning amendment that is required for this better plan changes a low midblock density to higher density, and also zones the block for commercial parking for 150 cars. This is indefensible at just that point where Fifth Avenue is tied in a perpetual traffic knot, and where increased pollution would be insupportable. Any New Yorker can refute any traffic survey on this point.

The commission is faced with an even more serious and basic problem. It is obvious that the higher density being asked for is symptomatic of a common speculative practice in which exorbitant price agreements are made for the purchase of land, on the gamble that the zoning can be broken. Thus the whole idea of zoning becomes a fragile house of cards to be toppled by exactly the forces it was meant to hold in line.

The city faces a trade-off between controlled design plus a park contribution (the site is part of the park district) and the possibility of a variance with no controls at all. It is an unenviable choice. In any event, the rezoning for a commercial garage in this block would be an abdication of planning responsibility, and if it is an economic necessity for the developers, it suggests that indeed too much money is being paid for the land. This zoning contains dangerous precedents.