

No Curfew on Planning

What New York needs now, in addition to money, is planning in the broadest possible sense. A growing attitude that this is something for more halcyon times misunderstands what planning is all about; it confuses cosmetics and the luxury of Olympian goals with preservation and promotion of the city's basic assets and amenities.

Planning deals in survival. It is a process, not a set of diagrams, by which the city is strengthened and renewed, using whatever resources are available. It is not limited to expensive building schemes. It involves vision, organization, priorities and management, all of which are conspicuously lacking right now in a city buffeted by disaster.

This is the proper time for a perspective on New York's assets and liabilities, for the kind of programmed analysis and evaluation that is the only logical blueprint for the future. It may be difficult to think in these terms when the city is faced with cutting its services, institutions and humanity to the bloody point of no return. Yet even in adversity, this city retains the creative energies that set taste, innovation and leadership in everything from merchandising to corporate style. These forces are its generator of money, ideas and vitality. Although it is more common to measure economic health by construction starts, these factors provide the strongest magnet for new investment and the greatest potential for recovery. They are the New York advantage.

This dynamic and profitable mix of art and business ranges from fields drawing directly on the city's unique resources, such as art, design and communications, to the traditional attractions for the corporate community.

The threat now is that these advantages are being canceled out by the disadvantages of increasing and inequitable taxation and worsening conditions in housing and services. Obviously, money is not the whole, or only answer. It is essential now to set the city's priorities, coordinate its programs and devise laws and administrative procedures for everything from life-saving goals to street amenities. In short, to conceptualize the future. The quality of life in New York will be responsive to every action its officials take, or do not take, today, and in the end, so will its economy. Bankruptcy of vision is as dangerous to the future as default.