

Two Towering Votes for New York City

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The dramatic new office towers that I.B.M. and A.T.&T. are about to erect side by side on Madison Avenue, between 56th and 57th Streets, will be significant additions to the New York skyline. That skyline will always be synonymous with the vitality and prestige of the business community. The importance of these new skyscrapers, in fact, lies not in the number of jobs they will provide as much as in their declaration of corporate commitment to New York City. To build on this scale and at this cost, and with so much quality and style, requires a sense of permanence and of New York as a focus. It puts both money and symbols on the line.

These will be big buildings, considerably larger than the average commercial structure because of the bonus provisions of the current zoning. They will also be distinguished buildings, by two of the city's best architectural firms—Philip Johnson and John Burgee for A.T.&T., and Edward L. Barnes for I.B.M. The results bear watching for many reasons.

For one thing, they will offer much on the ground. I.B.M.'s 57th Street corner will be a "landscaped" pedestrian space rather than a conventional office lobby, with plantings by the New York Botanical Garden and

connections to other buildings and stores. It could almost be a covered park. A.T.&T. will have a glass-covered galleria and a street floor dedicated to movement and shops, lifting the lobby functions to an upper level. The block-through spaces of both buildings are being coordinated by the architects. Because the buildings are allowed increased size in exchange for these street amenities, their bulk and density will be high. Whether the improvements and attractions on the ground will offset the concentration of people in two such massive towers is still uncertain.

Two buildings do not make an office construction revival, and although other projects are on the way, the action is still slow. That offers useful time to test the incentive zoning of the 1960's, for such potential midtown densities are disquieting even though the potential jobs are not. A comprehensive zoning review, already begun, should be an early priority of the City Planning Commission's new chairman. For those responsible for the city's character and structure, these will be buildings to study closely. For those concerned with its economic health, they are good omens.