

tion of its immediate environment; two of the buildings on the developers' plot have already been demolished on the Fifth Avenue front. The empty space that has thus been created, facing the museum across the avenue, would be a suitable location for a small sculpture garden. Perhaps the owners could find a tax-deductible way to donate it, or the museum itself could make a purchase of urban and artistic significance.

Saving the 82d Street group is, however, only a first step in the larger job of urban environmental protection. The alternative is an impoverished city.

# The Houses on 82d Street

The hearings on landmark designation of the houses at Fifth Avenue and 82d Street raise issues far beyond their individual architectural value. The controversy surrounding the buildings—whether a developer should be free to demolish them for a luxury apartment house or whether they should be preserved—is only the tip of an environmental iceberg.

The problem that is at present focused on this block is endemic on the Upper East Side. There are still many side streets, or parts of streets, and a few parts of avenues, graced by stands of turn-of-the-century and later townhouse elegance. As groups, the buildings give this section irreplaceable qualities of scale, solidity and style, and a notable beauty. They are a superb kind of “street architecture” characteristic of New York at its best. They are the New York of a time when richness of detail and superiority of material were not beyond cost or craftsmanship. In an area of high land values, their particular brand of excellence is constantly menaced by creeping, shoddy high-rise construction. Their protection is dangerously overdue.

The issue at stake on 82d Street now, and potentially on all of the city's finest side streets of handsome town houses, is how they are to be protected from speculative destruction. Their French and Gothic graces are only superficially secure. The issue is also the quality of building that replaces them, all too predictable in esthetic and economic terms. The city is increasingly cheapened by the unblushing mediocrity of structures that demand unblushing rents. Beyond that, circulation and services suffer as low-rise buildings are replaced by high-rise towers and residential densities increase.

In the case of the 82d Street buildings, the nature of the approaches to the Metropolitan Museum has also been a matter of serious consideration. That institution has been singularly unresponsive to neighborhood appeals that it demonstrate some concern about the destruc-