

# A New 'Rockefeller Center' Planned for Battery Park

**A**nyone who has been around long enough to have lived through the saga of Battery Park City can view the world with Panglossian optimism. Nothing could have started worse, taken longer, had so many strikes against it, or finally ended better, than this stop-and-go (mostly stop), large-scale urban dream. Last week, the New York State Urban Development Corporation released the architectural designs and construction schedule for six-million square feet of commercial space in a cluster of dramatic new skyscrapers for the long-vacant waterfront landfill just west of the World Trade Center, and the happy ending finally seemed in sight.

The announcement by U.D.C. and the project's developer, the Canadian firm of Olympia and York, confirms that an apparently hopeless situation, which included near-default on Battery Park City bonds, has been turned around. If all goes according to schedule, New York will get a coordinated and architecturally first-rate urban complex of the standard, significance and size of Rockefeller Center, that will add a spectacular new beauty to the New York skyline. There has been no large-scale development of comparable quality since the 1930's. This is just as important as it sounds for New York's economic and architectural health and style.

In this city, of course, to speak of happy endings is to cross one's fingers against disaster — such as the remote possibility that Manhattan's current commercial building boom might suddenly go bust, as it did in the late 1960's, or some occurrence that could unhinge the developer's plans. Barring unexpected catastrophies, Olympia and York expects to start construction this fall, with all of the buildings

underway within three years, and an optimistic schedule for completion by 1987.

This centrally located, commercial complex will cover 14 of Battery Park City's 92 acres. It will include four very large office towers, 33 to 50 stories high, with floor areas averaging 40,000 square feet; these are immense buildings, even measured by the adjacent World Trade Center. They will be faced in a combination of granite and reflective glass, with the proportion of stone to glass greatest at the bottom. As the towers rise, the stone grid will become more delicate and the glass more dominant; at the top, they will be glittering, crystalline shafts. The buildings will be capped by simple, geometric crowns of varying profiles that will be lighted at night.

Two lower, domed, octagonal structures, only nine stories high, will mark the main entrance at Liberty Street. They will be linked to create both a portal to the river, and a gateway to the city. A second structure is planned as an arched, glass "winter garden" or indoor public room, with an interior as large as the concourse of Grand Central Station. All of the buildings are to be joined by a three-acre, tree-shaded plaza, with a formal terrace stepped down to the river's edge and a mile-long waterfront esplanade. Bridges across West Street, or Westway, will provide access and connections to Lower Manhattan at Liberty and Vesey Streets.

The scheme is outstanding in the annals of New York development in several ways. It is the combined effort of