

State Capital

Albany's nearly-completed South Mall—Nelson Rockefeller's bid for architectural and administrative immortality while he was Governor of New York State—is already threatened by surrounding development pressures. As with all large new construction projects, the state capital complex is about to attract the usual quick-buck neighbors—fast food chains, parking and parasite enterprises. What is threatened in the immediate vicinity are attractive nineteenth-century homes and the city's historic scale. This is of particular concern to local residents, while a vista of honkytonk from their bureaucratic Versailles is of equal concern to the legislators.

The two groups have had the foresight to cooperate on an exemplary, forward-looking study for a joint preservation and development district abutting the Mall, with recommendations for regulatory zoning and strong design controls. It is unusual in that it defines areas for commercial building as well as preservation areas. It deals not only with keeping existing housing "of fine domestic urban scale," but with the need for new housing generated by the Mall's expanded jobs and calls for transportation studies for Mall-engendered traffic and parking problems.

The joint city-state proposals are more advanced, urbanistically, than the monumental complex they are designed to protect. The Mall itself, a circa 1910 Beaux Arts dream in Pop-Up Futurama style, is something that many find more surreal than stately.

This is an ambitious plan, but no more ambitious than the Gargantua that has made it necessary. Carrying out its progressive vision should have high legislative priority.