

A Little Zoning Is a Good Thing

New York Times (1923-Current file); Mar 2, 1977; ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The New York Times
pg. 16

A Little Zoning Is a Good Thing

Zoning is often interpreted by builders as a challenge to see how minimal their compliance with the regulations can be. In the case of incentive zoning, in which the builder is allowed bonus space in exchange for providing desirable public features, the assumption is that a bigger building will be offset by environmental benefits. Open-space zoning, in particular, has given builders 20 percent more floor area in return for a street-level plaza.

Unfortunately, what the city has often received in the guise of a plaza in residential construction is a decorated driveway or a bleak northern corner in permanent shadow. The "public" space has been closed off by walls, planted with token trees that promptly die, or left as ugly cement strips.

When such abuses appear, a change in the regulations is called for. Action on commercial plazas two years ago eliminated similar problems. Unfortunately, the amendment for residential plazas being considered by the City

Planning Commission today has erred on the side of over-regulation. Some specific requirements, such as the nature of decorative paving and the exact distance between trees, have been sensibly loosened. But we still question the desirability of putting rigid controls on such things as shop signs, or the need for "optional" amenities such as artwork (uncontrollable in terms of quality) and kiosks and game tables.

Sunlight, seats, greenery and accessibility can do the job, without the city entering the risky realm of dictating too many details. This genuinely progressive zoning should not be pushed too far into discretionary areas of design. As it stands, the amendment being considered by the Planning Commission treads perilously close to the edge of its proper jurisdiction. Still, the principle of this kind of regulation is sound and the need for corrective action is clear, if plazas are to be a genuine public amenity rather than a concrete con game.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.