

'Avenue of Presidents'

The plan for rehabilitating Pennsylvania Avenue prepared by the President's Council is more than a blueprint for glory. It is a realistic and far-seeing redevelopment scheme that may be Washington's last chance to save its "Avenue of Presidents" from chaotic speculative rebuilding.

Two of the plan's most important facets are not immediately apparent in the impressive drawings of handsome grand vistas and splendid public spaces that illustrate it.

First, the plan's basis is urban renewal in its broadest and most necessary sense. The sickness of cities—paralysis by traffic, decay of neighborhoods, the death of downtown—is a critical problem that civic leaders are attacking everywhere. All our cities are in trouble, and no place needs help more desperately than Washington. The Pennsylvania Avenue proposal, far from settling for a veneer of monumentality, is a plan in depth. It literally digs under the city to deal with circulation and parking and reaches into the city to bring better and more profitable land uses to deteriorated areas. Its monumentality is only the measure of its practicality.

Second, this is a real plan, not piecemeal redevelopment governed by profit and expediency. Cities are "renewed" today by parceling out land to private developers who do pretty much as they please, and much of it is pretty bad. The Pennsylvania Avenue plan demonstrates the superiority of starting with an over-all design concerned with beauty and long-range efficiency. Private construction would account for half of the development, yet all of it would be within a preconceived framework of ordered excellence beyond the power of any individual contractor.

President Johnson spoke recently of the need for rebuilding our cities with beauty and grandeur. This is the way to do it, as Paris carved out its grand boulevards and Rome created its baroque magnificence. Should our society, and our capital city, settle for less? The rebuilding will take place anyway, for worse, if not for better. To combine essential redevelopment with the highest standards and style is an opportunity this Administration, and this generation, should not miss.