

## New York Program: Housing

Mr. Lindsay takes over a city in which housing shortages for families at lower income levels are more acute than ever, urban renewal has failed to touch the hardcore slums, and planning remains a polite charade. More than one-third of the population of a metropolis frequently billed as the greatest in the world lives in an unsound environment.

Housing involves much more today than the satisfaction of its classic criteria of a safe, sanitary and decent place to live. It is concerned at the same time with integration and neighborhood preservation, to cite two typically conflicting ends. It is a necessity for both the middle-class family that pays city-supporting taxes and for the multiproblem family that consumes those taxes. It is an essential part of the city's economy as a yielder of revenue. All of these complex and opposing aims are wrapped up in something larger called environment, or the quality of living and of the urban landscape.

A definitive report the other day made clear what every New Yorker already knew: the people who need housing most are not getting it and the areas that must be cleared remain unchanged. The private developers of urban renewal programs will not build in slums. The city has shown neither conviction nor courage in utilizing urban renewal or other government aids to do what desperately needs to be done but has largely settled for what builders would do anyway with the available tools and benefits—the provision of middle-income and luxury housing in so-called “fringe” areas that are basically sound for profitable private investment.

There have been three notable failures in New York's housing program. The first is a failure of leadership at the top. The second is the failure to begin to deal effectively with the problems of people. The third is an appalling failure in housing design.

Reorganization of the city housing bureaucracy is a prime necessity. Government assistance and technical tools of all types must be more efficiently applied to the most urgent needs. The housing advisory board already appointed has to become a more active partner in framing policy. The watchdog housing groups and the experienced people in housing jobs should be more fully utilized. In the private sector, large foundations need to be persuaded to follow the leadership of small foundations in initiating pilot projects or concrete programs.

Housing alone cannot cure all social ills. The problem families and the “left-behinds” of the lower-income groups can only yield to massive social programs. But decent housing can help.

Nor is there any need for New York to continue to hold the uncontested booby prize for housing design. There is no reason for a giant new project such as Co-op City to go up in the stereotyped mediocre mold. It is time for the city and those who traditionally interest themselves in housing to understand that design is not “art” to be added as an “extra” to a standard formula. It is a creative approach to finding better ways for people to live. New York has the best design talent in the world, largely untapped. This is a failure of imagination.

The question that must ultimately be asked is what price environment? The price New York is paying now, as a society and a city, for ills of body, heart and eye, is far too high.