

# Planning for Greenery

New York's City Planning Commission has been demonstrating an exceptional sensitivity to the factors that make a city a decent and even a desirable place to be. The tool of zoning is being used with unusual skill to achieve this end.

The two latest zoning innovations continue to seek objectives far beyond the conventional limits, and they are as diverse as the city itself. The first would create Special Nature Area Districts, to preserve the city's remaining natural features, such as the Staten Island greenbelt, which are largely in private ownership and vulnerable to development. The second deals with ways to turn congestion to social advantage in high density sections.

New York is a city so synonymous with concrete that the very word nature sounds like an anachronism—even Central Park is largely an artificial creation. But the city—yes, this city—still has its lakes, ponds, creeks, rock outcroppings and beautiful clusters of trees. Except for state-protected wetlands, they are at present totally susceptible to speculative destruction. While landmark legislation exists, there is no nature legislation to cover what are still spectacular geological, aquatic and topographical features.

Under the new proposal, all development plans within the Special Nature Area Districts would have to be submitted to the Planning Commission for approval. That kind of review is increasingly essential. The city must chart and coordinate the most desirable development while keeping what is left of a precious natural heritage.

The second proposal, concerned with changes in what are called "bonusable open space plazas," focuses on New York's most congested areas. Present zoning gives builders larger structures for the inclusion of plazas and arcades. These have often become formula devices that fall far short of the original intention of creating places for people to enjoy the "urbanities" of the city.

In practice, it has been found that mandatory open space may get nothing more than blank walls, slightly widened sidewalks and luxurious loading docks. The new regulations would "reorder" the way the open space is to be provided—more useful plazas in better locations, with more trees and seats, and shops and building entrances on the plazas. They would encourage "outdoor rooms" and through-block "corridors" and even small, Paley-type parks nearby rather than on the actual building site. Enhanced city life, not drafty sterility, is the aim.

One of these plans represents foresight, the other, hindsight. Both are essential parts of the planning process, which is a perpetual learning process, as well. But the significant fact is that the City Planning Commission is one of the few agencies that has had continuity under the present administration, and it is racking up repeated advances based on uninterrupted policy, study and initiative. That is of no small concern to the people who live here.