

A Landmark Project . . .

It is to be hoped that New York's notorious death wish does not extend from the local community board to the Board of Estimate in the matter of the Villard Houses and the projected Palace Hotel at Madison Avenue and 50th Street. If approval of this project meant that the city was endorsing new construction at any cost, there might be real reasons to hold up the plans for the hotel.

But it would be hard to match the care and concern with which the city has operated, through the Landmarks Commission and the Planning Commission, to integrate the new building with the Villard Houses, while improving the design of the hotel and keeping the integrity of the landmark. In addition to the preservation and public re-use of the mansion's best features and the assurance of its continued existence, there is new zoning which contains guarantees of landmark protection and maintenance.

The kinds of specific compromises that have been necessary for the ultimate objective of keeping the Villard Houses alive have been constructive and knowledgeable, with gains for the landmark all the way. To ask for more, or to stalemate the project now—as the community board would do—is to ignore the realities of the situation, from the cost of midtown land to the limitations of the landmarks law.

The city has set a record for skillful negotiation and sensitive results. The quality of the solution is high, as the Board of Estimate should recognize. Obstructionism serves no purpose now.