

Downtown Manhattan

The best laid civic plans are seldom made in New York; but when they are, in the words of the old saw, they often go astray.

The case in point right now is one of the best plans that New York or any other city has come up with in a long time: the redevelopment scheme for lower Manhattan released by the City Planning Commission in July. This solidly studied, soundly imaginative proposal has been hailed nationally by critics, planners and city officials for the thoroughness of its programmatic analysis, the quality of its urban design, including the reclamation of the waterfront, and its promise for the downtown community.

At the same time that work on the Lower Manhattan Plan was under way, a lesser plan for a smaller section of the area, restricted to a portion of the off-shore waterfront development, was proposed independently by Governor Rockefeller. Its scope and value are considerably below those of the city-sponsored study, and it is, in some ways, in conflict with the city plan.

It seems now that the Governor's scheme, which has the catchy name of Battery Park City, is to receive private financial backing and will go ahead. Meanwhile, the wheels of the city turn, and the Planning Commission's recommendations to the Mayor on the Lower Manhattan Plan are still a month away.

The city's demonstrably superior, long-range plan should have priority over the private proposal. The Governor would be far better advised to assist the city's program.

There is increasing official and public awareness of the scale of New York's urban problems and the need for the greatest skills to solve them. Plans are no longer to be pulled out of hats as political ploys.