

## Professionalism vs. Blight

It is particularly unfortunate that some of New York's best planning efforts have been attacked by a crippling zoning decision of the Board of Standards and Appeals—one the city has filed suit to invalidate. A variance issued by the board to the developer of a large plot opposite Lincoln Center could undermine not only the Lincoln Square special zoning district now under study but also the entire concept of control through planning and zoning of the city's light, air, densities, functions and character.

The Lincoln Square district is one of a series of special zoning district proposals, including the theater district, that are meant to protect particular neighborhoods—in terms of uses, appearance and amenities—by giving bonuses to builders for conforming to the city's long-range plans.

The variance virtually kills the excellent Lincoln Square scheme developed jointly and on a shared-cost study basis by the city and the Lincoln Square Community Council. It also gives what can be construed as a "windfall" award to the builder by permitting a much larger structure with much greater density than would be allowed under existing zoning or even under the more generous bonus provisions of the special zoning. The decision was made on highly debatable grounds of "hardship" to the owner. But the real hardship will be to the city, and specifically to the Lincoln Square area. The legal aspects of the decision will be argued by experts and it will be the court's responsibility to rule on these. We do not presume to pass judgment on them. But the planning and human aspects are already terribly clear.

The City Planning Commission and Department have entered a period of sophistication and expertise in practice and personnel of a kind essential to the complexity of today's planning problems. In this light Mayor Lindsay's appointment of Chester Rapkin to the commission is in the progressive tradition of professionalism that came late to New York under the Wagner administration and has been stepped up significantly in this one. Dr. Rapkin, a respected economist and urbanist, who is director of the Institute of Urban Environment at Columbia University, adds new distinction to the commission.