

State of the City: Planning the Future

With New York's immediate problems, the long view may seem like a luxury. But the quality of the city's future depends greatly on the quality of its planning. Today planning means hard decisions about policy and goals; it is a determination of the city's optimum destiny based on its assets and liabilities.

The old notion of a Master Plan that would neatly plot an ideal and orderly physical future in static land-use diagrams has turned out to be a chimera; what has followed is a good deal messier and more confusing but infinitely more aware and humane. Abstract dogma has been replaced by the concept of process planning, which allows for flexibility and change, recognizing the physical environment as the definitive factor in the way we live and work.

Planning is one area in New York in which municipal vision and action have been joined to the perception of problems. But New York's plans and the planning process, like so much else, are in crisis now. From the need for housing and parks to the realization of city-size, multi-use developments such as Manhattan Landing and the comprehensive Harlem Task Force plan, they are linked to the general state of the economy and the city's fiscal straits. What is ultimately affected is not only New York's function and appearance, but its existence as a viable metropolis.

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