

Lincoln Blockbuster

In what some members of the City Planning Commission have called "a carefully orchestrated shell game," the developers Paul and Seymour Milstein have bounced plans for a building for the Lincoln Square area back and forth between the commission and the Board of Standards and Appeals. The builders' purpose is quite clear: they are after a variance that will give them a structure 33 per cent larger than anything legally permitted in the Lincoln Square Special Zoning District. That kind of blockbuster means appalling density. It is also quite clear that the whole city loses if the Milsteins win.

The developers apparently have no intention of building what the commission has approved. They intend, instead, to bounce the plan right back to Standards and Appeals (where they had it before) for a "hardship" decision and the right to build a 43-story tower with no design controls.

The "hardship" argument is a particularly dangerous one in this case. The Milsteins are claiming that the design restrictions of the special district, even with its bonuses, make it impossible to build profitably. Maybe other builders in the Lincoln Square district know something the Milsteins don't. At least they seem to ignore the fact that four similar buildings are being constructed there under the necessary regulations, with no claim of hardship at all.

The effect of granting a variance to the Milsteins under these circumstances would then inevitably be to put all of the special zoning districts in jeopardy and threaten the city's basic right to plan. This is a shell game all right—of carefully orchestrated cynicism and greed.