

Civic Center

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price of damage has already been so high—so much spent on bad plans and wrong decisions—the damage must continue. But not even the best efforts of conscientious men will turn finger-in-the-dike design into a superior Civic Center.

Civic Center

The solution for New York's Civic Center can be called, at best, the most intelligent way of going ahead with a bad thing. Nothing could possibly erase the monumental mistakes in planning, siting and construction that have already been made in the City Hall-Foley Square area. As it exists now, the Civic Center is a kind of architectural Laocoön, with every error permanently ensnared by another error and any chance of order or distinction caught hopelessly in its toils.

The greatest triumph of the new, or compromise, plan, which combines the best features of a number of previous proposals, is the routing of Brooklyn Bridge traffic under City Hall Park. But the triumph is slightly hollow because traffic must reappear promptly three-quarters of the way through the park to avoid the Broadway subway lines. The unavoidable price for taking the heart of the center out of the sea of cars will be the unattractive necessity of exits and entrances within the park itself.

Far worse, however, is the siting of the police headquarters. With a newly added "city building" to compound this particular mistake, this structure is still placed on a somewhat expanded but atrocious spot behind the present Municipal Building, where it will require ramp connections over the automobile mess on Park Row. This wrong-headed, wrong-side-of-the-tracks location is forced by the fact that the city committed the much more logical Brooklyn Bridge southwest urban renewal area, rimming City Hall Park, to its present sponsors in the early, arbitrary Slum Clearance Committee days, with total disregard of civic center growth requirements or of any master plan.

As usual, talent and energy have been expended in trying to make the undesirable palatable. Fundamental errors have not been corrected, but their edges have been polished and their details improved. The process is based on the assumption that since the