

## Gramercy Park and Murray Hill

The erosion of New York continues, and there are subtler and more dangerous methods of destruction than the bulldozer. One of the most insidious is the zoning change. Right now requests for revision of zoning are threatening two of the city's most attractive and historic neighborhoods—Gramercy Park and Murray Hill.

Both are old residential areas distinguished by a recognizable past, a special architectural character, open green space and those increasingly elusive qualities in this megalopolis: humanity, urbanity and beauty.

By a curious and ironic coincidence, the disruptive force in each neighborhood is a church. The Lutheran Church, which owns and occupies the J. P. Morgan mansion in the Murray Hill district, wants the block rezoned from residential to commercial use so that it can demolish the Morgan house and erect a high-rise office building. The Society of Friends has sold its century-old meeting house on the south side of Gramercy Park to a developer who plans to build a large apartment house and has applied for a corresponding change in zoning.

Neither zoning change is desirable or justifiable. Neither institution is looking beyond its immediate financial well-being to the interests and values of its neighbors, a surprising reversal of the church's traditional community role. There are other ways to meet the needs of the Lutheran Church within the Murray Hill area without the further commercial erosion of the neighborhood. The erection of another high-density apartment house overlooking Gramercy Park is inexcusable mishandling of a landmark square of irreplaceable amenity.

There are enough people in New York concerned with investment profits. The City Planning Commission, which controls zoning changes, should be concerned with planning. Zoning is an instrument of protection; its reason for being is to keep exactly this kind of thing from happening. The Planning Commission must consider the city's dwindling excellence and the greater public good.