

Heart of the City

Next Tuesday's "New York rally" will be held, not surprisingly, in Times Square, still symbolically the city's heart. Theater marquees will proclaim for the day "New York Is United" instead of advertising the habits of nymphets and other characters.

The gesture of unity may offer some questionable solace to beleaguered New Yorkers. However, a far more important gesture is taking place today at the City Planning Commission, with a hearing on zoning amendments that could be the start of the reclamation of the Times Square area.

These amendments deal with the kind of land-use controls that are clearly within the appropriate police powers of zoning. Physical culture and health establishments would be restricted in location, limited to interior spaces in hotels of more than 200 rooms or to community facilities with regulation-size sports features such as swimming pools or ball courts.

There would be a one-year phase-out period for non-conforming uses, eliminating at least 37 of the present 49 massage parlors and similar enterprises. In addition, a year's moratorium would be put on the opening of new massage parlors anywhere in the city while appropriate legislation was being prepared. While this doesn't take care of "adult" movies and bookstores—a category awaiting Supreme Court decision—it could contribute notably to a cleanup of Times Square without simply transferring the offending establishments elsewhere.

By acting within tested areas of zoning law rather than moving into risky infringements of the First Amendment, the city is abusing no freedoms and dealing legitimately with the public welfare. It would be worth a rally if the Times Square area could be returned to the whole New York community.