

Don't Slice Up Central Park!

Central Park is obviously no good for anything except to make the city beautiful, give it room to breathe, and offer New Yorkers physical and psychological relief from urban pressures and asphalt chaos.

It does all this because it is in one big—we were going to say inviolate—piece right in the middle of Manhattan, a miracle of country-in-the-city beyond measurement or price. But now Real Estate Commissioner Lazarus has proposed using part of it for housing, and also sites in Mount Morris and Morningside Parks. The Commissioner is not against parks, although to many of his brethren in the real estate fraternity the only beautiful land is “developed” land and the beauty of the vision relates directly to its value. He has even suggested a trade which seems to him eminently reasonable—small parks in Harlem, where the need is great.

This is specious and dangerous reasoning. It is specious because the constructive intent—better housing for the Harlem community with less painful relocation—would have such a destructive result: the mutilation and loss of irreplaceable open land of inestimable value to the entire community. It is false, too, because we need those small parks in addition to, not in exchange for, existing parkland.

It is dangerous because it is one more example of the constant nibbling away of the park for all manner of “good” purposes. No good cause justifies such disastrous results. We do not accuse Newbold Morris of crocodile tears, for his distressed reaction to Mr. Lazarus’s proposal was obviously sincere; but his solemn oath “to preserve the parks” did not include an effort to keep out the gratuitous Huntington Hartford cafe. Nor did the city demur at the use of part of Morningside Park for a school, one more short-term answer to a long-term planning problem.

The urgent need for housing and services must be met, but this is no way to do it. It is a sure, simple step to the death of a city through the destruction of one of its greatest amenities. Those small parks in Harlem are needed, and needed badly, as they are needed in other crowded tenement areas in many sections of New York; but not at the expense of Central Park, or any part of it.