

On the Waterfront

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New York can only envy, not emulate, the announcement of a major rebuilding project for Boston's historic Charlestown Navy Yard. With the exception of a small enclave at the South Street Seaport, New York has destroyed almost all of its 19th-century waterfront buildings for wrong-headed renewal and street-widening. This latest undertaking of Boston's astute planners calls for a large residential and commercial complex to be housed in handsome granite buildings once devoted to shipbuilding and rope-making, using \$200 million in Federal and city contributions plus funds from foreign investors.

What Boston has going for it is a lot more than five years of municipal effort and some fast political footwork; the city would never have attracted the required foreign capital without a revitalized downtown that is as stylish as it is economically sound. This brilliant reclamation of the old city, including a decaying waterfront, has been achieved through a combination of restored historic structures, new skyscrapers and public amenities. From the new Government Center to the

hugely popular recycled Faneuil Hall Market, Boston's character has been given new life. "Hopeless" properties have become "investment opportunities."

All this can be summed up in a word that is not particularly popular right now: planning. Planning saved Boston. It saved its real estate, its architectural heritage, its tax base, many of its institutions and its quality as a place to live and work. Planning has guaranteed its future.

In such a huge effort, there have inevitably been mistakes as well as successes. When Boston demolished its West End at a very early stage, the folly of bulldozer clearance was dramatized for the rest of the country; a current proposal for a waterfront hotel would destroy the scale and character so carefully created.

But, on balance, the Boston experience has combined superior urban design standards with shrewd marketing techniques for excellent results. By contrast, New York continues to be an ad hoc city, a giant happening, often inspired but basically unplanned.

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