

# ***Architectural Study Says City Gets Poor Service at High Cost***

**By ADA LOUISE HUXTABLE**

A 20-month study by the Urban Design Council of New York has concluded that the architectural services rendered to the City of New York fall far short of the highest standard and recommended a radical revision of building processes.

Architects have alleged that the city receives the poorest design at the greatest cost and with the longest delays through building processes that almost seem to be conceived as an obstacle race to excellence or economy.

In a report to Mayor Lindsay made public yesterday, the council put the blame on unrealistic plans and budgets, a cart-before-the-horse system of

design and site selection, delayed and multiple reviews, wasteful a posteriori programs with expensive changes, contracts full of inequities that force architects to skimp design and conform to mediocre norms, poor and late payment and chaotic construction practices.

The reasons given are the nature of the city's building practices, including time-consuming, duplicatory procedures that militate against creativity or efficiency, and a fee scale to architects lower than that paid by other governmental agencies or in the private sector.

A spokesman for Mr. Lindsay said that many of the council's recommendations "have already

**Continued on Page 45, Column 4**

# Study Rates City's Architectural Services as Poor

Continued From Page 1, Col. 3

been implemented through the Mayor's Board of Construction, under the direction of the Municipal Services Administrator, Milton Musicus."

He said that the Mayor has asked his administrators "to continue their review of the recommendations of the report and to work with the Urban Design Council in attaining the highest possible standards for the city's capital construction program."

The report calls for the appointment of a City Architect to coordinate city agencies and outside architects and to control the entire building procedure from beginning to end. It advocates the revision of the "Basic Services Contract" now in use, for its fundamental inequities, and reform of the methods of payment to architects. Repeal of the State Multiple Contracts Law requiring separate bidding and contracts by the construction trades is also recommended.

The Urban Design Council, headed by William S. Paley, is a task force of leading citizens and professionals set up by executive order in 1967 to act as an advisory group on the city's planning and design.

Since municipal construction accounts for 33 per cent of the total construction dollar in New York, and the volume of this kind of work is estimated at about \$15-billion for the current decade, what is built and how it is designed is, in the council's words, "of central importance to the city's future."

The report is a response to a February, 1970, directive from the Mayor that asked the council to review the way in which public works projects are initiated and carried out. The comprehensive study, which consists of 50 criticism-packed pages, is called "Report on the Working Relationships of Architects and the City of New York." It attempts to analyze and correct a system that New York architects refer to as a "can of worms."

According to architects who have had city commissions, the system insures frustration and guarantees no better than a "break-even" job. They contend

that they are penalized for working for the city in terms of meeting the highest professional standards of design and of earning a fair profit on their services. Frequently, the report says, architects lose both money and any desire for city work.

In an attempt to speed the capital construction process, the city has already instituted some reforms, which predate the report.

Among these are the establishment of a Board of Construction consisting of the Controller, the Director of the Budget and the Administrator of the Municipal Services Administration, which contains the Department of Public Works, and a new Office of Construction operating directly out of the Mayor's office.

Consolidation and speed-up of review processes have expedited the design stage of some buildings from an average of 60 to 25 weeks, although total project time from initiation to completion of construction still involves many years.

Architects' salaries within city government have recently been raised to parity with the private sector, but fees to outside architects are still below the scale recommended by the American Institute of Architects and accepted by many other cities. Even those cities below scale are 15 per cent under, compared to New York's 25 per cent.

The report goes beyond existing reforms to a complete analysis and overhaul of city procedures. It compares these with procedures in 13 other large American cities, from Boston to Los Angeles, and with recommendations made by the American Institute of Architects.

The construction dealt with is restricted to those New York agencies that use the city's standard architects contract and processes: the Board of Education, the Board of Higher Education, the Parks, Recreational and Cultural Affairs Administration, the Economic Development Administration, and the Municipal Services Administration.

These agencies produce about

\$1.5-billion of construction in the form of libraries, police and fire stations, courthouses and schools. This does not include the production of autonomous or semiautonomous agencies such as the Housing and Development Administration and the Housing Authority.

The report lists 11 factors that are "undermining the working relationship between the city and the architectural profession."

In addition to the deficiencies of the Basic Services Contract, it cites such procedures as unrealistic preliminary programs and estimates that become frozen in the capital budget years later, so that design or budgetary adjustments cannot be made.

Other factors listed include: ¶The lack of priority of good design, functionally or environmentally, because it is easier to process a "formula" solution.

¶The "routinizing" of architectural selection and the meaninglessness of the city's architectural selection list, which usually excludes new, young, or small, talented firms.

¶Excessive changes of building programs in later stages, inadequately compensated for.

¶Unnecessary and negative review procedures concentrating on minutiae rather than concepts.

¶No provision for architectural on-site supervision and inadequate construction coordination.

¶Slow processing of payment vouchers. Even with present improvement, they take six months beyond the time they are due.

¶Unfair post-auditing processes on the part of the Controller.

## New Office Proposed

The recommendations made are intended to improve design and costs and provide fairer compensation for architect services.

They are based on two factors — contract improvements, and the fact that the architect must be able to deal with a single individual or office, representing the city as the "client," who has the authority to make planning or design decisions

and is responsible for budgetary controls.

This would be done by the creation of the Office of the City Architect, within the Municipal Services Administration. The City Architect would centralize and expedite design and construction on higher professional terms than presently. Eventually, the council feels, the construction projects of all agencies should be transferred to this office.

The unwieldy Multiple Contracts Law, which requires separate bidding for electrical, plumbing, mechanical and general contracts, should be repealed by the State Legislature. Meant to reduce costs, it often increases them and results in on-site chaos.

Post-audit procedures should emphasize contract commitments only, verifying that competent work has been done on an agreed time schedule.

A previous study by the Urban Design Council, "The Troubled City," issued in 1967, suggested the creation of an Urban Design Group. This recommendation was subsequently acted on by the city and has resulted in design and zoning changes such as the special theater district.

Members of the council are Mrs. W. Vincent Astor, J. Richardson Dilworth, Philip C. Johnson, George N. Lindsay, I. M. Pei, Walter N. Thayer, Franklin A. Thomas, Louis Winnick, Mr. Paley, chairman, and Charles Reiss, director.