

The Public's Buildings

The city is always the last to know. It has taken a privately sponsored study by the New York Landmarks Conservancy and the Columbia Graduate School of Architecture and Planning to find that more than 18,000 buildings in New York City are publicly owned, and that the city itself owns over 90 percent of them; the rest are state and Federal structures. Of these, 760 are noted as buildings of architectural merit, from listed landmarks to lesser gems and curiosities.

What has been happening to these buildings? This year, twelve were sold as surplus at public auction. Some continue in use, and some are abandoned. No one knows whether they are preserved, altered or demolished; no one is concerned about what their best functional, cultural and economic uses might be.

The Conservancy's study, therefore, makes two valuable contributions. It provides, for the first time, a systematic inventory of an important body of public property that can and should be used as the basis of a constructive and consistent policy for the management and disposition of city-owned real estate.

It also makes it clear that specific, practical programs by qualified private groups can be extremely valuable to a city that must set its priorities by the limited funds and personnel available. The Conservancy plans to follow up this survey with a pilot rehabilitation project. This is a better way of dealing with the city's future than by the wringing of hands.