

Sensitive City Zoning

The line between the possible and the impossible in New York is often zoning. Just as often, it is the line between pleasure preserved and violated. There has long been a real estate axiom that it is impossible to keep trees or grass, or green woods or handsome hills, in the face of development pressures; brooks and rills yield to fill and concrete as inevitably as the "All New Country Club Living" signs follow the bulldozer.

It is possible to keep them now—when they still exist—as a result of New York's Special Natural Features Zoning District legislation, the most recent in a continuing series of sensitive zoning innovations that are making this city a model of progressive environmental controls. The first designation was exemplary, a 4,300-acre sweep of Staten Island's greenbelt, a superb spine of steep hills and gentle meadows, trees, rocks and wetlands. Constantly threatened by expressways and speculative construction, this unique natural feature will now be subject to planning review and restrictions.

If the prospect of unscarred hills were not enough, the City Planning Commission has added the lagniappe of unblocked views. The first officially designated Scenic View District is the vista of lower Manhattan from the Brooklyn Heights Esplanade. The day has finally come when an erratic boulder or a magic skyline is worth as much as an all-electric kitchen. At current Con Ed rates.