

How to Tame a Bulldozer

It has taken the city an exasperatingly long time to see the obvious defects of the bulldozer approach to redevelopment. The official agencies charged with these responsibilities should set the pace and standards in the field, not lag behind professional opinion and well-founded public criticism.

Now the Housing and Redevelopment Board proposes three new procedures in urban renewal—all necessary, and all overdue. Blueprints for renewal areas will from now on be set up by the board and followed by developers, who at present submit the plans, subject to the city's acceptance or rejection. A mixture of high and low buildings will be encouraged within a single development, in an attempt to overcome deadly "project monotony." And, finally, worth-while older structures will be considered for preservation and integration into the new schemes. At last the crying in the bulldozed wilderness has been heard.

Obviously developers, whose interest is primarily profit, should not be the plan makers. Now that the City Planning Commission is well along in its neighborhood Community Renewal Plan studies, the fruits of these studies should be the basis of the rebuilding projects sponsored by the Housing and Redevelopment Board. The use of mixed high and low structures is a commendable gesture toward variety in renewal areas, but success will depend more on the architectural quality of the buildings than on differences in height.

Ironically, the board intends to apply conservation techniques not to the areas that really need them but to the Seward Park Extension on the lower East Side, which, except for a few isolated structures, contains nothing worth saving. By contrast, the Brooklyn Bridge South redevelopment—covering an area that includes one of the last stands of New York's oldest remaining buildings of architectural merit—is based on total razing.

Of course there are problems in this more sensitive kind of urban renewal. What is to be gained? Only a sense of history, of cultural continuity, of civic enrichment through cumulative architectural styles, of neighborhood individuality through retention of a heritage. What is to be lost? Nothing but the depressing, blight-inviting monotony of standard redevelopment.