

PLANNER DEFENDS CARS IN MIDTOWN

New Chief of Commission, Sworn by Mayor, Backs Municipal Garages

By ADA LOUISE HUXTABLE

William F. R. Ballard, who was sworn in yesterday by Mayor Wagner as chairman of the City Planning Commission, may find himself at odds with some members of his own commission on one of the most controversial subjects of the city's future—the automobile in midtown Manhattan.

The planning group has taken a firm official stand, involving considerable wrangling with the Traffic Department against municipal midtown parking garages. In an interview, however, Mr. Ballard said he was not against the garages and he minced no words in stating so.

"The better and fuller life includes the free use of the automobile," he said. "Planners who try to discourage its use make me sick. I believe in direct transportation. The apartment house garages required by the new zoning haven't affected the streets. Our traffic still moves."

Begin Duties Today

Mr. Ballard, who begins his duties today, will serve at a new salary for the post of \$32,500. Previously the chairman received \$22,500. Last week it was announced that a similar increase would go to Bradford N. Clark, who becomes Commissioner of Public Works on Nov. 15.

Mr. Ballard, a ruggedly handsome architect of 58, still looks like the varsity man he was at Princeton in the nineteen-twenties. He will need all his team spirit and physical stamina for the new job, which is known as one of the city's toughest assignments.

He has proved himself professionally expert and politically adept in municipal housing positions and as the current president of the Citizens' Housing and Planning Council.

His technical competence was demonstrated by the studies his

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OUTSPOKEN PLANNER:
William F. R. Ballard, new
chairman of the New York
City Planning Commission.

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firm provided for rezoning New York in the nineteen-fifties, when Mayor Wagner was chairman of the City Planning Commission.

Theories Much Sought

But where he stands as a planner, in a field in which theories are hotly debated, how he looks on some of the city's more controversial planning issues, and what he has in mind for New York, have been the source of enormous speculation since his appointment by the Mayor last month.

Mr. Ballard is quite willing to tell. He disagrees with many professional planners not only on automobiles, but also on another of the city's running arguments, the giant Pan Am Building.

"I think it's great," he said. "I can't think of a better place to have a big building. It's at the focus of all midtown commutation and transportation; the best place for it."

"I don't think concentration as such is an evil," he explained. "It is the essence of cities; it can be a good thing. Architects don't pale at handling the problem. I don't see the disasters that the weepers and wailers predicted. A park there would have been an absurd idea. Rush hour? Nobody's been trampled yet."

Caution on Bulldozers

He offered some comments on the bulldozer approach to urban renewal:

"When you destroy an old neighborhood completely, you are wiping out something that, sentimentally, I think should be preserved, if it can. It may run counter to sensible planning, but that's one of the things that makes the whole operation of planning fascinating."

Mr. Ballard also discussed Jane Jacobs, author of "The Death and Life of Great American Cities" and the bête noire of his predecessor, James Felt, who was a victim of her successful campaign against urban renewal for the West Village.

"She is unnecessarily negative in wanting to preserve everything exactly as it is," he said. "This is a lack of imagination. But she is right about the loss of humanity in acres of identical housing. The solution is not to freeze things. You go ahead, enlivening, softening and humanizing the new plans. We're learning as we go along."

On historic preservation, he said: "Like food and drink, I'm all for it. I'm for landmarks legislation. I believe in preserving worthwhile monuments, but it's tricky to decide what's worthwhile and what's simply old. How much is sentimentality and how much is good sense? People are more important than old buildings."

On his own aims, he said:

"We need a master plan for the city. This is one of my first concerns. I don't know why we haven't got one — I speak out of innocence — but I intend to find out. It's the duty of the Planning Commission to produce one."

"We need specific things," he went on, "like more small parks. People should live closer to their work. In Manhattan, places to work should be in the center; places to live, along the rivers. A man should be able to walk to work."

Mr. Ballard is optimistic, persuasive, energetic. The vision emerges of a "bigger, better, more comfortable New York," based on planning theories somewhere safely to the right of center, involving a new kind of civic-togetherness.

"I would like to promote the interest of the whole community in its future, in New York's potential." He paused, to give a suggestion special emphasis. "Have you ever thought of the brains and imagination stored up in New York, and what it would mean to get it working for the city's future?" he continued. "I think there's a way to tap it. I want to bring these people into the planning picture."

He summed up his views with a statement few New Yorkers would contest: "This is the greatest city in the world."