

Planned Tomatoes

There is a direct relationship between the quality of life and the quality of a city, and much of it has to do with the quality of planning. When highway approaches to a stadium take precedence over the city's last remnant of a farmer's market, and its disposition left to the tender mercies of private development—as in the case of the Yankee Stadium renovation—it is obvious that the plastic and commercial in food and life has taken over.

Take the tomato. Thanks to so-called modern methods of breeding and marketing, the inedible, indestructible, totally tasteless rubber tomato achieves efficient commercial distribution. A tomato can be indicative of a whole spectrum of private and public values, and a lost universe of good and natural things.

There is nothing good about the kind of planning that phases out the real and the pleasurable and makes it obsolete. Local communities have learned the lesson painfully, frequently fighting the planning process to a draw in the name of a tree, or a tomato, or a few streets of intimate scale and familiarity that give a neighborhood stability, humanity and a sense of place. You might even say a soul.

What continues to be sabotaged in those tidy development maps with their snappy traffic flow patterns is much of life itself, if life is defined as places fit to live or food fit to eat and those things that nourish mind and body in the urban poverty that planners all too often deliberately create.

No one is knocking baseball. But the planners struck out on this one, and even more so on the whole market relocation program, which guarantees, in the pragmatic name of progress, a decline in good food and an increase in its price. Someone ought to be able to tell the difference between a tomato and a foul ball.