

Villard Houses . . .

The time has come to stop looking for giveaways or ghosts under the bed in the matter of the existing Villard Houses and the projected Palace Hotel. The long and painful negotiations carried out by the city, the owner and the developer have resulted in an admirably worked-out solution to the problem of landmark preservation on a prime commercial site in terms that balance the city's architectural heritage against present realities.

The studies of the Villard exterior and interiors prepared by the Landmarks Commission for the City Planning Commission are exemplary in their sensitivity and thoroughness, and in the specific recommendations made for every stage of the preservation work. This procedure has set a remarkable standard for any city dealing with a similar dilemma.

The compromises that have been made are reasonable. The design of the hotel has been much improved and the agreements, which include binding covenants on this and future owners, guarantee survival of the outstanding Villard rooms—no mean accomplishment with New York's real estate economics.

Of great importance is the fact that the proposed amendment to the zoning law that is part of the solution covers all cases in which a landmark occupies part of the property to be developed, or the site is part of a historic district. If the idea of a controlled bulk bonus given to the builder is accepted as a basis for making amenity and preservation economically feasible, then this kind of zoning can be the answer for more than the Villard Houses. In this case, negotiation and legislation have impressively coordinated public and private needs and goals.