

New City at the Battery

Developments of the scale of Co-op City and Battery Park City are accepted by New Yorkers, accustomed to outsize marvels, either as perfectly ordinary phenomena or as world-of-the-future dreams. They are neither. Co-op City's towers have risen like a mirage out of Bronx flatland to house 60,000 people. Battery Park City, unveiled last week, will increase Manhattan's population by 3 per cent and totally change the configuration and use of the lower West Side shoreline. These are the city's real physical frontiers.

Battery Park City's billion-dollar cost and its potential for jobs and housing are impressive even by New York standards. But most impressive of all is the sophisticated professional planning that combines a complete range of services and pleasures with massive amounts of construction and the optimum use of waterfront for a superior quality of New York life.

The scheme is flexible, despite its excellent basic guidelines; it will quite properly be debated in many areas. Indeed, it is already being subjected to the New York process of divide-and-defeat through a court challenge by the International Longshoremen's Association, angry over the prospective disappearance of rotting downtown docks. An even more controversial issue will be the proportion of luxury, middle- and low-income housing it will contain.

Planning, like politics, is the art of the possible. The remarkable reconciliation of Governor Rockefeller's original proposal with Mayor Lindsay's independent Lower Manhattan Plan and the cooperation among city and state officials, architects, engineers, lawyers and economists have transcended what could have been conceived of as possible in New York. What is also possible, however, is that the proposal can sink in the river without a trace unless constructive discussion moves it ahead.