

Yorkville Under Siege

Another neighborhood is being lost in New York—the Yorkville area around East 86th Street. The rapid erosion of the quality and character of one of the city's more interesting ethnic sections that has always served a strong neighborhood life is cause for citywide as well as local concern.

If left to its manifest commercial destiny, the same speculative forces that have already driven out so many of the residents will doom everything that makes Yorkville desirable in both human and urban terms. Not only are the local enterprises being sacrificed, but so are the residents and their needs. Not the least loss is the vital but intangible sense of community that is one of a city's most essential and fragile assets.

This ugly change is the result of a real estate conviction that Yorkville is a prime "development" area. The small specialty food and import shops and restaurants and cafes are being eliminated by jacked-up commercial rents; their replacements are discount drug-variety stores, banks and chain operations. Once strongly oriented to servicing a surrounding residential area ranging from luxury to lower income, Yorkville is threatened by a depersonalized honky-tonk that is alienating the locality whose functions it is destroying.

The need is for a zoning change, to be considered by the City Planning Commission today, that would create a limited special district, modifying zoning designations to decrease densities and encourage small stores, and instituting a number of urban design requirements to preserve existing character and promote more community-conscious growth.

The plan is a sensitive and appropriate scheme in the interests of all. It is also a testament to the sophistication, skill and concern of New York's local planning boards, which are increasingly providing an invaluable input of local awareness and expertise for the city planning process.