

# 'Master' vs. 'Mini' Plan

It is simple common sense to recognize that a community, familiar with its own problems, may often know what is best for it. The City Planning Commission's neighborhood "miniplans" are a logical step toward acknowledgment of that obvious possibility. But this approach does not nullify the value of the badly misunderstood "master plan" of the Lindsay administration. Planning as a process responsive to community input was initiated in the Lindsay years and is bearing welcome fruit now. The Beame administration has not suddenly been blessed with planning omniscience, as has been implied in recent discussion of the "miniplans."

The so-called master plan was given that misnomer because city groups and the City Charter called insistently for something by that name and in a form that had already been proven to be inflexible and outmoded by the European experience of the previous decade. It is to the credit of the men who prepared the city's version, under Donald Elliott, that they were aware of the error and unreliability of such Olympian and doctrinaire documents that attempted to map a rigid future.

What they prepared several years ago—and what every city must be constantly in the act of preparing—was an extremely valuable research and background document that set objectives for the city's growth and development by defining the kind of place New York should be. The "master plan" attempted to do so in terms of its economic base, its essential services and its human qualities. It would have been foolish to adopt it as a cut-and-dried blueprint; but it would be equally foolish to ignore it now.

Moreover, it would be a serious mistake to believe that "master planning" and "miniplanning" are mutually exclusive. They are mutually essential. A city must constantly evaluate its large picture in terms of trends and aims and values, and relate special neighborhood requirements to it. That is the only way a city grows constructively and creatively. "Miniplans" are a commendable step in this direction. But a city is both the whole and its parts; we are only beginning to understand that now.