

through the decreasing efficiency of the city's catatonic bureaucratic and economic systems?

So far, with the populist mood prevailing in New York, a sophisticated professional document is being construed as an elitist instrument against the poor. That is a tragic perversion of intent and result. This is the time when community boards and citizen groups should be improving, correcting and detailing the plan in the public interest. As the city points out, it is a beginning. It can be sabotaged by New York's savage politics of expediency, or it can be the beginning of hope.

The Master Plan

With the appearance of the Manhattan section, New York's master plan is complete. It is the most provocative, promising, frustrating, rewarding—and disappointing, uneven and hopeful—document to come out of the city in a long time. It could not possibly be less controversial than the city itself.

In one sense, it is a miracle. No great city has ever been more fragmented, more resistant to revealing itself in rational fashion. The job of simply putting it together so that the future can deal with it on the basis of unified documentation, the gathering of that data and its organization into a framework of community, the provision of an overview of the city today with all of its problems and diversity, is a notable achievement.

Unlike much of the long line of physical plans that have preceded it in cities here and abroad, it has a point of view. A planning point of view goes beyond decreeing land-use patterns. It states what goals and priorities a city should set in terms of its people and the quality of its life and environment.

Those priorities, or “critical issues,” can be debated. But they are not bland statements or pious generalities, as some have charged. They are essential guidelines for the city's future. It is easier and sometimes more impressive to dazzle with diagrams of short-term improvements and let the city drift. The New York plan substitutes direction for drift. It takes stands, and to take stands invites political trouble and fuses every potential conflict of interest—but without them there is no plan.

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The master plan is, therefore, basically sound. It is a progressive and fully professional document. Still, it is both provocative and frustrating. In moving from principles to problems, it swings from cosmic concerns to minutiae, not always without confusion. There is rich information in some areas, and a glossing over of soft spots in others. These lacunae are meant to be filled by discussion and the contributions of local planning boards. In light of the volume's expensive and exceptionally handsome format and finish, it is hard to remember that this is meant to be a first stage, or “draft” plan.

It is both rewarding and disappointing because when there are specific, trend-setting proposals such as those for Lower Manhattan and west midtown that fact is impressively clear, and it is equally clear that in other areas there is nothing at all. There are often more calls for programs than programs themselves. The job has a long way to go.

Can still greater concentration of construction and population in Manhattan be predicated realistically on the provision of services to match? Is there a way to stem housing decay, without which the Bronx and Brooklyn books are beautiful memorial volumes? Are the social action programs any closer to realization for appearing in print? Just what is the relationship of social to physical problems? Is there a method for moving any of this