

## New York Program: Planning

Planning is the vital, broad-range, long-term process that links needs to solutions, that tells a city where it is going and how best to get there. In New York, planners don't plan. They advise, and are often ignored or overridden. They work hard, they mean well, and they have a lot of good answers. But officially, nobody needs to listen.

Any of the Planning Commission's recommendations can be turned down by the Mayor or the Board of Estimate for any reason. In the most basic of matters, selection of sites that determine the coordination of a city's functions, the Planning Commissioner has one vote against five on the Site Selection Board. Obviously, planning in New York is not much more than wishful thinking.

If the Lindsay administration believes that New York deserves the benefits of logical development at a time of critical change and expansion, one of its first tasks is a research job. A systematic analysis of the legal, administrative and political background of the Commission's peculiar impotence—in spite of its excellent staff—would clarify the reasons for the constant tragi-comedy of planning errors.

The list of interdepartmental fumbles that become permanent physical mistakes in New York is endless.

Real Estate defies Planning as the sell-off of city-owned land in Staten Island continues unchecked while low-grade speculative development mocks New York's real growth needs.

Public Works and Parks cross signals on a major sewage plant designed with no relationship to the changing objectives of the Manhattan waterfront.

A Landmark Preservation Commission is appointed after Highways has replaced historic buildings and areas with parking lots and street widenings.

Superauthorities impose superhighways on neighborhood patterns; roadway spaghetti disrupts attempts at a coordinated civic center; public structures are pushed willy-nilly onto empty real estate lots while the city waits for a master plan.

Correcting and avoiding the kind of planning disasters built into the city's present setup will take more than good intentions. It may need charter changes. It certainly means the appointment of department heads of informed and sophisticated judgment who are capable of collaborating for mutually understood objectives.

But even if New York were presented with a solid gold plan tomorrow and all the tools to implement it, its buildings would still be dross. The City Art Commission has review rights only for projects on city-owned sites and standards have been far too low. New York needs a broadened architectural review board to insure the character and quality of its most important streets and squares. It could use a city architect, following British and Scandinavian examples. The process of commissions, authorizations and controls for city buildings results in Jello-mold mediocrity. In terms of planning and urban design, the Lindsay administration inherits a blank check for chaos and some of the most undistinguished new construction in the world.