

# Opening City Space

The only thing that is rarer than a builder in New York today is one who, in the ordinary course of development, will of his own accord make the city a more beautiful or livable place. It has been the job of zoning to mandate amenities such as open space; most builders have become experts on how little can be done to make these spaces attractive or usable.

Last year the situation was corrected in part by a zoning amendment which will improve open space planning and design for commercial or office building plazas. A similar amendment is being considered now to deal with residential plazas, which have left much to be desired.

There are about 20 acres of this zoning-created open space in some of the city's most congested residential areas, ranging from welcome spot-refreshment to concrete desolation. Too often, the legal bonus has been used to produce either entrances to garages or waste space with walls. And in some cases, the plazas achieved for neighborhood amenity at the price of greater density have been illegally closed off from the public and the street.

The proposed new regulations go far beyond plaza size and location because it has become evident, in the light of the willingness of builders to plant token trees in inadequate soil or interpret open space as fume-filled driveways, that everything must be spelled out in clear detail. They deal in such things as sunlight, accessibility, wall and pavement treatment, recreational features, art and landscaping, and separate requirements for northern and southern spaces.

The only danger is in the fine line between regulation and overregulation, when specifications may become too rigid, as in the height and uniformity of signs or the exact nature of paving. Otherwise the amendment is admirably conceived to deal with open space in the only way that counts—in terms of its social, functional and esthetic uses. The city's streets and buildings are considerably better in many small and important ways because of New York's progressive zoning. This legislation, on which a hearing is scheduled today, would continue an essential process with skill.