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PLANNING PROGRESS : 1959

City Planning Commission
Department of City Planning
City of New York

SUMMARY OF PLANNING ACTIVITIES

New Zoning Proposal

The major undertaking of the Planning Commission in 1959 was the preparation of a comprehensive revision of the City's Zoning Resolution. In February, consultants to the Planning Commission - the architectural firm of Voorhees Walker Smith and Smith - presented to the Commission their recommendations for rezoning based on two years of intensive study and block-by-block surveys of every street of the five boroughs. The Planning Commission's own proposal for rezoning was made in December, following detailed study and testing of all features of the consultants' report, after seven days of informal hearings including a hearing on the maps in each of the five boroughs, and after consultation with hundreds of individuals and citizens, homeowner, business and professional groups.

Numerous changes were made in the consultants' recommendations including several score of changes in the text, and 366 map changes affecting some 500 districts. With the release of the official proposed Zoning Resolution, the Planning Commission scheduled seven dates for public hearings in March of 1960, after which the Resolution will be submitted to the Board of Estimate.

The Planning Commission unanimously agreed that the Resolution will not take effect before July 1, 1961. Even after this grace period, the effects of the new zoning will not become immediately apparent except perhaps in Staten Island with its large tracts of vacant land and its promise of rapid new development following construction of the Narrows

Bridge. However, as new development takes place and the City continues to rebuild itself, improvements in living and working conditions will take place as a result of the new regulations. The new zoning will result in:

- . Less overcrowding and congestion by restrictions on residential conversions and on the number of apartments that can be built on a given piece of land.
- . More open space around residences, offices and industries.
- . Protection of homes from undesirable industrial and heavy commercial nuisances.
- . Protection of industrial sites from intruding residences and other developments, and more choice of larger industrial sites adequate for modern horizontal industrial plants and their required parking and loading spaces.
- . Deeper, more compact districts zoned for business and modern shopping centers with space for parking and loading, resulting in a better competitive position for commerce.
- . More flexibility of building type and architectural design possible for the builder.
- . Simpler, more easily administered regulations for the developer of large-scale projects.

- . More interesting pleasant neighborhoods with a wider variety of building types, thus more stability in neighborhoods which will provide for families of all sizes and ages.
- . Neighborhoods of more predictable size, facilitating the more accurate planning of schools, hospitals and other facilities.
- . More off-street parking spaces in all parts of the City except the concentrated central business districts.
- . Less blighting of neighborhoods, better living and working conditions, better sites for industrial and commercial development, and higher overall land values.

The proposed Resolution is designed for convenient use. Detailed indexes and tabular devices facilitate reference to the various regulations. A simple one-map system combining use, bulk, density, and parking regulations in 62 different districts replaces the present cumbersome three-map system in which over 1,000 different zoning combinations are possible and 286 are actually mapped.

New and increasingly effective tools and procedures have been developed in recent years to assist in the gigantic task of improving run-down areas in the City. The West Side and Flatlands renewal projects utilize these implements.

But in making use of new tools, those that are already in existence for preserving and assuring good housing and good neighborhoods must not be forgotten. Zoning, which is such a tool, has been on our books for over 40 years. It urgently needs drastic overhauling. Our extensive and costly efforts to rebuild and renew slum and blighted areas will be seriously hampered unless our antiquated Zoning Resolution is revised. The New York zoning ordinance - the first in the country - was a brilliant new conception when it was first adopted in 1916, but it no longer fits our modern ways of living, working and doing business.

If the City does not properly control the development of new and renewed housing, new industrial areas and other new construction as they are built, the elements which helped to cause many of the slums of today - congestion, overcrowding, inadequate light and air, mixture of housing and factories to the detriment of both, inadequate space for industry - will again trigger the processes of blight and deterioration in new areas as well as those existing areas which are still healthy. Sound zoning to fit the needs of New York can be a major ally in rebuilding today and preventing slums and blight tomorrow.

New Housing for New York

Twenty-two public and publicly-aided housing projects containing 14,751 dwelling units were approved by the Planning Commission in 1959.

The projects include:

- . Ten public housing projects with 7,325 new dwelling units.

(Three other developments previously approved were revised in 1959).

- . Ten middle-income developments - nine under the State Limited-Profit Housing Companies (Mitchell-Lama) Law with 2,608 units, and one under the State Redevelopment Companies Law with 158 units (plus three projects previously approved under Title I and recorded elsewhere)-

- . Two Title I projects with 4,660 units.

The Commission also approved 878 applications for tax reductions granted for the elimination of unsanitary and hazardous conditions in substandard multiple dwellings.

Planning Schools and Community Facilities

The Commission was particularly active in the field of school planning during the year. In cooperation with the Board of Education and other members of the Mayor's Committee to Expedite School Construction, estimates of the future need for schools in the 69 statistical districts of the five boroughs were made in connection with the 1960 Capital Budget.

Sites were selected for schools which had been included in the 1959 Capital Budget, and for schools for which construction funds were allocated in the 1960 Capital Budget. Forecasts were made of future school enrollments to aid in determining school needs in different areas

of the City. Specific locations of schools were determined by studies of traffic, accessibility of site to children, surrounding land uses, costs, and relocation from the potential sites.

Changes in Street System

Among the 187 street changes in the City Map recommended by the City Planning Commission and approved by the Board of Estimate last year, the most significant one was the amendment of the lower Manhattan section of the Master Plan of Arterial Highways and Major Streets. The amendment is in line with proposals by the Downtown-Lower Manhattan Association for redeveloping downtown Manhattan, and was made only after careful study by the staff of the Association's recommendations.

Following preliminary studies by the Planning Commission of problems of traffic congestion in the Garment District, the Board of Estimate awarded a contract to consultants to study the physical and financial feasibility of providing public off-street loading areas in the District.

Utilization of Vacant Land

A preliminary inventory of marshes and lands under water was published. The Department also worked with the Department of Parks and the Borough President of Richmond in developing a plan to preserve vacant space in Staten Island for future recreation use. The study was made in anticipation of the accelerated development which is expected on the Island

with the construction of the Narrows Bridge.

Research as a Basis for Planning

In order to determine the present and future needs of the City and of the various groups and areas of the City for land, for housing of different types, for streets and transportation facilities, and for schools, recreation and other community facilities and utilities, studies were made of changes and trends in industry and business, and movements and changes of population in the City. Studies made this year include the following:

Housing Studies

- . Analyses of new residential construction in the City during three building waves - 1921-33, 1934-45, and 1946-58.
- . Collection and analysis of data on tenant relocation by the five public agencies concerned - New York City Housing Authority, Committee on Slum Clearance, Department of Real Estate, Triborough Bridge and Tunnel Authority, and Port of New York Authority.
- . Determination of significant factors affecting demand for housing in Manhattan through study of families in two large-scale cooperative housing projects - Morning-side Gardens and Corlears Hook. The study analyzes data.

for both present and former dwelling, on apartment size, rent, and number of persons per family, and data on family income, occupation, and place of work.

Economic Studies

- . Initiation of a continuing inventory on volume of construction and demolition of non-residential buildings, including quarterly tabulation, by block and lot, of number of buildings and amount of floor space constructed and demolished in office buildings, factory and loft buildings, warehouses and stores.

- . Continuation of analyses of economic developments in the City and in each of the five boroughs, including trends in number and size of establishments, value added by manufacturing, and employment.

- . Continuation of analyses of employment trends and business mobility.

Population Studies

- . Cooperation with the Bureau of the Census in the formulation of plans, techniques and methodologies for the 1960 Censuses of Population and Housing. Extensive boundary changes were made of Census Tract and Health Area Districts resulting from superbloc creation, highway construction and other street-closing and street-opening projects.

- . Studies by local areas of trends in size of household, proportion of persons over 65 years of age, and proportion of foreign-born white population, and the relationship of these factors to each other and to development and growth of minority-group areas.
- . Analyses in selected communities of changes in total population and in racial and age composition as these movements relate to availability and quality of housing and problems of home ownership.
- . Estimates of net migration for the City by age, sex, race, and ethnic group from 1940 to 1950, and 1950 to 1957. Studies of net migration for the City's 352 Health Areas are proceeding. Preliminary revised population forecasts will also be made for local areas for a twenty-year period.

Budgeting Capital Improvements

The City Planning Commission initially prepares the Capital Budget, in which plans for permanent public improvements such as schools, hospitals, piers, transit, and parks are related to the City's available funds. The Capital Program projects such needs for the following five years.

Following requests from City departments for funds, study was made by the Department of City Planning of the relation of proposed capital projects to the anticipated and proposed development of the various parts of the City, relative age and obsolescence of structures needing

replacement, utilization, and effect of improvements on the expense budget. Departmental hearings were held in August to obtain further specific information on which to base priorities.

A tentative Capital Budget was published in early October and served as a focus for three days of public hearings in October. The Commission formally proposed the Budget for 1960 on October 31, including an additional \$45,100,000 for school construction dependent on passage of the \$500 million school bond issue. Defeat of this bond issue which the Commission said "would result in irreparable harm to the City" made it necessary to defer ten of the 15 schools covered by these funds to site acquisition and planning status. Even with defeat of the exemption, the largest part of the Budget as finally adopted by the Board of Estimate and the City Council was for education.

Two breakdowns of the Budget follow:

	<u>Additional Funds</u>	<u>Renewals</u>	<u>Total</u>
Within Debt Limit	\$289,427,627	\$151,683,377	\$441,111,004
Exempt Funds	36,464,406	75,378,914	111,843,320
Other Funds ¹	<u>26,917,191</u>	<u>4,778,891</u>	<u>31,696,082</u>
Total	\$352,809,224	\$231,841,182	\$584,650,406

¹Private, State, Federal and Housing Authority funds.

By Functional Groups

Schools and Colleges	\$151,244,848
Transit	128,957,709
Sanitary Services	68,354,489
Piers	41,136,574
Public Safety	32,446,239
Public Buildings and Bridges	26,594,477
Hospitals and Health	17,058,201
Other Purposes	<u>118,857,869</u>
Total	\$584,650,406

URBAN RENEWAL

Community Renewal Program

At the end of 1959, the City submitted a preliminary application to the Federal Housing and Home Finance Agency for a grant to enable the Department of City Planning to make an overall study of the need for renewal in the City. This grant would enable a completion of the identification and measurement of the total need for renewal in the City; the use and adequacy of available tools - conservation, rehabilitation, code enforcement, and redevelopment; and the establishment of City-wide renewal priorities. The size of New York makes the local community an appropriate unit for renewal studies - there are some 70 to 80 residential communities in the City averaging about 100,000 in population. New York is expected to be the first city in the country to undertake such a study under the National Housing Act of 1959.

The Planning Commission last year amended the "Plan of Sections Containing Areas Suitable for Development and Redevelopment," reflecting the expanding scope of renewal to a many-pronged instrument for carrying out broad planning for all types of areas - deteriorating as well as deteriorated, non-residential as well as residential.

Renewal for Better Living

Progress on the 20-block West Side Urban Renewal Project advanced rapidly during the year. An entirely new approach to renewal is

being applied in this project. In the past we have bulldozed whole areas which had sunk beyond repair. This area, though blighted and run-down, is essentially a sound one. The objective of the present program is to reverse the trend of deterioration and to restore the area to its rightful place as a sound and stable residential community by the use of all the techniques of urban renewal; substantial portions of the area will be conserved; others will be rehabilitated to suitable uses and occupancy; and those portions of the area which contain buildings unsuitable for reclamation will be cleared and redeveloped.

A Preliminary Plan for the area completed in 1959 by the Urban Renewal Board was approved after public hearings by the Planning Commission and Board of Estimate. The Final Plan which is now being prepared by the Urban Renewal Board, will be widely distributed for study and discussion in the area before hearings by the Planning Commission and Board of Estimate, and submission to the Federal government. Acquisition of property and relocation will start immediately following approval by these three bodies.

The Preliminary Plan calls for conservation and rehabilitation of sound structures in the area, spot clearance of areas containing predominantly sub-standard and dilapidated buildings, and redevelopment of these areas with various types of housing, including new vest pocket public housing units. Play space for children, sitting areas for adults, and easily accessible local shopping centers are included. The Preliminary Plan provides for 1,000 units of public housing in new and rehabilitated

buildings and 4,200 units of middle-income tax-abated housing, in addition to 2,800 units of privately-financed full taxpaying housing.

Relocation of tenants and new construction will take place in three stages with sites turned over to developers only after relocation and site clearance have been completed. Thus most eligible tenants and businesses can be relocated to new buildings without the necessity of temporary relocation, with minimum disruption of neighborhood life, and more individual attention to each family involved. A central official relocation office in the area will be staffed by representatives of the Department of Real Estate, New York City Housing Authority, Department of Welfare, and Urban Renewal Board. Specialized assistance will be available for families with difficult relocation problems and for small businessmen requiring relocation.

Construction will start as soon as the buildings on a site have been vacated and demolished. Rehabilitation will continue throughout the seven- to eight-year period of construction. A pilot project is being set up to provide practical data on costs and design in brownstone rehabilitation.

Throughout the preparation of the Plan, the Urban Renewal Board worked closely with citizens in the area - with individuals, with existing organi-

zations and groups in the area, and particularly with the Park-Hudson Urban Renewal Citizens' Committee representing the larger Park West Community, and the recently organized Stryker's Bay Neighborhood Council representing the 20-block project area.

Total private investment for the renewal program is estimated at more than \$100 million - exclusive of the cost of rehabilitation and public housing - plus approximately \$15 million in aids under the several government programs. The Federal government has reserved \$4 million of Capital Grant funds for the program, and has received a request from the City for an additional \$6 million. The City's one-sixth share will be matched by the State which has reserved \$2 $\frac{1}{2}$ million of the funds recently authorized in its new Urban Renewal program. Conservative estimates indicate the new construction called for by the Plan would add \$3 million in tax revenues annually to the City.

Among other studies upon which the Plan was based was an analysis of the economic and financial problems of renewal of the area - "The Real Estate Market in an Urban Renewal Area" - which was published by the Commission in 1959.

Renewal for Better Industry

Following initial studies by the Planning Commission, the Urban Renewal Board has prepared a Preliminary Plan for the development of the 95-acre Flatlands Urban Industrial Park in southeast Brooklyn. The Plan, ap-

proved by the Planning Commission last year, was forwarded to the Board of Estimate. Upon approval by that body, the Renewal Board will proceed with the preparation of a Final Plan.

The Preliminary Plan, prepared by Tippetts-Abbett-McCarthy-Stratton - consultants to the Renewal Board - provides for over 70 acres of marketable industrial sites and ultimate employment of between 4,500 and 6,000 persons. A ten-fold increase in assessed valuation of the site is anticipated. A full return to the City of its investment in the project is expected.

The Park is the first large-scale industrial facility sponsored by the City. Its development is made possible by State legislation prepared by the Planning Commission and sponsored by the present City administration, which permits cities to acquire predominantly vacant blighted land for redevelopment.

The report of the Urban Renewal Board cites studies showing that in the past industries have left Brooklyn because of lack of appropriate industrial space, but calls attention to widespread and responsible interest in sites in the proposed new development by industrial developers, realtors, and a wide range of manufacturing, processing, and assembling industries.

The Plan calls for development of a closely built up urban character with compact economical arrangement of buildings, land and circulation.

Separation of truck and rail traffic from pedestrian and automobile traffic would be provided, with easy access of railroads, streets and highways to plants. Individual industrial sites would be of adequate width and depth for modern industry. Landscaped off-street parking areas, depressed below street grade, would reduce cost of landfill and partially screen cars from view. Attractive landscaped courts and walks would provide recreation space for workers and enhance the Park's attractiveness.

Industries in the Park would be limited to research laboratories, light manufacturing, warehousing, distributing, and similar uses, which will meet high performance standards controlling smoke, noise and other nuisances.