

VALUES IN CONFLICT: NEW YORK CITY'S PLANNING AND
IMPLEMENTATION OF SCATTER-SITE PUBLIC HOUSING
AND A HIGH SCHOOL IN FOREST HILLS AND CORONA

by
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ABSTRACT

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With the growth of population in the Borough of Queens in New York City, it became necessary to build a new high school. Coincidentally, in 1966 the new administration of John Lindsay, faced with the threatened loss of federal funds for 7,500 units of public housing, decided to embark on a new program combining vest-pocket low-income housing in the slums and scatter-site low-income housing in white middle-class areas that were relatively better served with city services. In Queens, bringing this social policy strategy for racial and economic integration into physical reality was hindered by the competition of these school and housing needs for a scarce large parcel of undeveloped land. The site difficulties were compounded by rigid technical standards, political differences of values (partly influenced by a large real estate developer) and engineering foundation requirements that made realization of the original architectural public housing designs difficult to achieve within the cost limits set by the federal government.

Passage of time saw changes in prevailing social attitudes on race relations, community control, ethnic neighborhoods, and environment. Problems of information dissemination and communication both within the government bureaucracies and between government and communities exacerbated citizen opposition to both projects. Confusion about the reasons for the changes of sites for the housing project and school and about the process by which these changes were made raised questions about the motives of those involved.

In Corona, people fought against their homes being town down for a high school and athletic field. After four years the city made the unprecedented offer to return some of the homes already acquired both by reducing the school site size and by physically moving some of the old houses to new lots. But this did not resolve the matter - the community was split, it took two years to get state legislation authorizing the compromise, and to this day the needed school remains unbuilt as a result of changes in values among school planners in the Board of Education and the consequent time delays needed for architectural redesign and bureaucratic conflict resolution over capital budget funding.

In Forest Hills opposition to a housing project that local people had assumed to be dead grew from small proportions to an issue of city-wide and - eventually - national impact. Media stressed the racial and Black-Jewish aspects of the controversy, but many other issues were also involved. These included citywide housing production goals; people's fears of welfare recipients, increasing crime, and changing patterns in the ethnic and racial composition of the whole public school system's enrollment; provision of city services and overcrowding of the transportation system; the scale of buildings in a neighborhood; economic class integration as well as racial integration; and the principle of government following through on a decision once it had been made.

In tracing the history of the Forest Hills project, this paper emphasizes the role and activities of government agencies, the positions they took relevant to these issues, and the interrelationships with the activities of particular individuals, both in and out of government (including that of the author in the process that led to the halving of the size of the public housing project in 1972). It examines the problems created by the taking of ideological positions, rather than making decisions based on the individual history and goals of the particular project. The paper concludes by making various observations about the effects of bureaucracy, information flow, time, and specialized value structures on the achievement of larger social goals.

Thesis Supervisor: Tunney Lee

WILL

FOREST HILLS DEMANDS COMMUNITY CONTROL!

PHOTOGRAPH 1



108th Street - 102nd Drive Area

A DEVELOPMENT OF NEW YORK CITY HOUSING AUTHORITY

- JOHN V. LINDSAY, MAYOR, THE CITY OF NEW YORK
- FORD A. GARELIK, PRESIDENT OF THE COUNTY BOARD
- ALBERT S. ... CE-CHAIRMAN
- DOUGLAS ... PRESIDENT
- ... BOROUGH OF ...
- ... ARAMIS GOMEZ, MEMBER
- ... HAM D. BEAME, COMPTROLLER
- ... NEW YORK CITY HOUSING AUTHORITY

These Homes are being ... with Federal financial Aid under the Low Rent Program of the Department of Housing and Urban Development.



But there are much more difficult questions.

Like bussing and scatter-site housing and minority employment in the unions.

The flash points.

The cutting edges.

Where the two groups collide, interests compete, tempters are frayed and fears arise.

This is the real challenge for our Party. To find a way to harmonize the competing interests. To serve the poor without crushing the middle-class. And while doing this - to make clear to the middle-class that it isn't our intention to crush them. It can be done - if we remember what Burke and Webster and John F. Kennedy tried to teach - that social truths in these hard areas are not painted in pure black and white - that while principles may never be compromised, issues may.

- Mario Cuomo
Address to the New Democratic Coalition
of New York City in his campaign for the
nomination for Lieutenant Governor.
May 11, 1974



FOR CONTINUATION OF ROUTES
IN LONG ISLAND
SEE REVERSE SIDE

FOR DETAIL MAP OF MANHATTAN
SEE REVERSE SIDE

MAP 2



NEW YORK CITY AND VICINITY

Issued Annually in the Spring 1974-75 Edition
AAA WASHINGTON, D.C.

Scale of Miles
0 1 2 3

ONE INCH EQUALS APPROXIMATELY 1.6 MILES

ROUTE NUMBERS	LEGEND	HIGHWAYS
Interstate	(Shield)	Controlled Access
Federal	(Shield)	Multi-lane Divided
State	(Shield)	Two Lanes
County	(Shield)	Four Lanes or More
Mileage Diamond	(Diamond)	Divided
Mileage (shown between diamonds)	(Line)	Nearing Completion
AAA Club	(Star)	Paved (All Types)
Places of Interest	(Star)	Connecting
State Boundary	(Dashed)	Under Construction
County Boundary	(Dashed)	Interchange
Roadside Park, or Rest Area	(Star)	Partial Interchange
Major Commercial Airport	(Airplane)	Interchange Under Const.
Golf and Country Club	(Golf Club)	Interchange Number
River or Stream	(Blue line)	Passenger Ferry
		Automobile Ferry

AAA RECOMMENDED LODGING AND DINING FACILITIES
CAN BE LOCATED BY CHECKING TOUR BOOK LISTINGS
FOR COMMUNITY NAMES PRINTED IN RED ON THE MAP.
The area of this map is in the Eastern Time Zone

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INTRODUCTION

To housing planners, social planners, and politicians the words "Forest Hills" in 1971 meant not the famous tennis courts but white middle class resistance to the construction of public housing in their "suburban" neighborhood. The proposed Forest Hills - Rego Park development, part of New York City's scatter-site, low-income housing program, attained a level of national notoriety matched by only one other public housing project in recent years - St. Louis' Pruitt-Igoe. As a symbol which people around the country could point to as the epitome of what they did not want, the perceived image of 24-story buildings rising amidst a single family home area was as disturbing as the network television films of buildings being deliberately demolished at Pruitt-Igoe. Media coverage of people marching around the site as a protest against alleged government insensitivity to their Jewish neighborhood struck a responsive note in many people's minds. For although there were some differences - such as the identity of the protestors - it seemed to constitute a continuation of what had been heard for years in citizen battles against unresponsive government intrusion into central city neighborhoods with urban renewal and interstate highways, battles which academic social scientists later joined. But more importantly, the Forest Hills conflict was seized upon by planning professionals as something to be used in general policy discussions as a code-word for middle class white racism,

just as "the West End" came to represent the inequities of urban renewal in professional discussions after Herbert Gans wrote The Urban Villagers.

With this sense of the growing importance of the Forest Hills project and controversy, Sylvia Chaplain and I decided in 1972 to write a case history of it. We hoped that the chances of implementing future scatter-site housing would be improved if planners understood the mistakes made in this much-publicized one - a liberal bias of ours toward scatter-site housing that underwent much soul searching as the study proceeded. Our hypothesis, based on what we had heard and read in the national media (articles by both professional reporters and academicians), was that we would find many basic mistakes made by planners and politicians, since the conditions being reported seemed to be incompatible with a reasonable planning and political decision-making process. We thought we would find such things as 1) an insensitivity of physical planners to neighborhood scale - for how else could one explain the three 24-story buildings? 2) a failure of the governmental system to talk with community leaders when the project was being planned - for our previous experience with government made it easy for us to accept in advance a "theory of incompetency" in this case, and 3) a lack of appreciation of the ways of "bribing" a community with a school or other public services as a way of countering the traditional argument that any additional housing for families would overload public services.

But we found much more than we expected. We discovered it was necessary to go back through a very tortuous and complex history to 1966 in order to understand how the decision-making process logically arrived at a result that might, and did, appear absurd to many of the uninitiated. Furthermore, our hypothesis proved to be at least partially incorrect. The published articles at best told only a fraction of the story and at worst reinforced previous misconceptions. It was not a case of decisions made quickly with little forethought about the consequences. Rather we found a set of actors whose decisions often were virtually forced by the context of a larger system they could not control, such as federal cost limits on construction and the political power realities of a semi-centralized and semi-decentralized governmental entity in the form of the City's Board of Estimate. In some cases we found that the people who foresaw the dangers of what might happen if a certain course of action were taken were overruled by others with a different set of values. We discovered, much to our chagrin, that the Forest Hills conflict was closely intertwined with the roots of the second of the three major community conflicts to occur in New York during this six year period - the struggle of the old Italian homeowners of Corona to save their houses from condemnation for a high school athletic field, and it was affected by the third conflict - the Oceanhill-Brownsville school decentralization dispute and teachers strike, and the subsequent change in community racial and religious attitudes. We found that the project was a small but politically crucial part of the city-wide strategy to build 7,500 units of low-income housing: scatter-site in middle-income areas and vest-pocket in slum areas.

As we conducted our research the influence of Forest Hills continued to expand. Its effect on national politics increased when it became a factor in John Lindsay's poor showing in the Florida and Wisconsin presidential primaries and to a lesser extent, in the shift of Jewish support toward Richard Nixon in the 1972 presidential election. After the project was reapproved in "compromise" form by the New York City Board of Estimate in the fall of 1972, it remained as an issue affecting the 1973 New York mayoralty race and the perceived "shift to the right" of the electorate.

Although this paper is essentially a political case study, it is written from the viewpoint of the planner by taking the original concept as conceived in 1966 and tracing it through the web of political, legal, architectural, and financial obstacles that must be overcome if a proposal is to evolve from a social policy idea to brick and mortar reality. For the Forest Hills project exemplifies the interrelationship between planning and political philosophy by showing the types of conflicts that can occur when the underlying social philosophy of an operating agency, the Housing Authority, is challenged by a new social philosophy. This new attitude was that public housing should be distributed throughout the city in order to help achieve a more heterogeneous society, racially and economically. This ran counter to the implicit social conservatism of the Authority's previous modus operandi, that of producing a maximum number of low-income units per year by locating large projects in areas where political resistance would be either absent or (if present) ineffective, i. e., in slums, ghettos, or environmentally undesirable places.

The direction that this change took is especially interesting to note in view of the comments made in 1963 by Banfield and Wilson in their book City Politics. In discussing the rise of a reform wing within Manhattan's Democratic Party and the increasing power these middle and upper class liberals were starting to acquire, they state that "what substantive program the Manhattan reformers would offer if they came to power is not at all clear."¹

Scatter-site housing and Forest Hills provide part of the answer, and it is therefore important that planners and other observers of the urban scene not misconstrue what happened in this case. Obviously, much that occurred involved planners versus politicians and politicians versus each other, as will be true in any major dispute over city budget and land use policy. But it also involved planners versus planners, as 1) liberal goals and values collided in the search to implement both school integration and low-income housing dispersal and 2) technical planning standards were applied so rigidly that broader objectives were forgotten, thereby producing undesired social and physical results. As this case will show, the dominance of the specialist planner and the very detailed standards which have been created for administrative and economic efficiency, as well as a guard against corruption, can be self-defeating. They can lead to an isolation from the reality of the area being planned (especially when there is little personal contact) and the substitution of relatively unimportant details for the larger need to strengthen the social bonds between different class and racial groups so that there will be peace and a viable "social contract" among the many residents crowded together in a large city.

The idea for this project was formulated jointly with Ms. Sylvia Chaplain, for together we had a range of personal contacts which made the project feasible. Some of the interviews and research were also conducted jointly. However, I am solely responsible for the writing and content of this paper.

This document is not the definitive study of the Forest Hills project. No major items have been omitted, though certain aspects could have been gone into in much greater depth. Because this study started as a paper for a graduate course, many of the people interviewed were told it would be kept confidential, and they spoke freely under that belief. Since it has become a thesis which must go into the M. I. T. archives and cannot be kept confidential, and since there is no time to go back to all these people to obtain permission to attribute quotations directly to them, I am forced to withhold the names of the people interviewed. This means that quotations in the paper that are attributed to a particular individual and are based on an interview cannot be assumed to be first hand sources, unless the footnote specifically indicates otherwise. This clearly detracts from the value of the paper to the reader, but I see no other way to resolve the problem at this time.

I therefore cannot give thanks by name to all the past and present government officials, private citizens, and officials of organizations who gave so generously of their time and were willing to be so candid with their thoughts and knowledge about a situation which, for many of them, was still a "live" political issue at the time they were interviewed. To

all of them goes my sincere gratitude. I found them all to be fascinating people, and I am glad to have had the opportunity to have met and talked with them.

Thanks also must go to Dr. Frank Kristof, and all the other people at the New York State Urban Development Corporation who were so kind to me while I was there.

To Mrs. Betty Griffin goes the credit for the typing and correction of the manuscript, as well as for having the patience to endure the very awkward logistical situation brought about by my being in New York City while she worked in Waltham, Massachusetts.

Finally, deep thanks to Langley Keyes, Jay Ostrower, Tunney Lee, my mother, father, and stepmother, for without all of their encouragement, patience, and suggestions, this paper never would have been completed.

CHAPTER I - 1966 - A NEW POLITICAL ERA DAWNS

On the day in 1965 that John V. Lindsay announced his decision to run for Mayor of New York City, a young lawyer active in Reform Democratic politics sent him a note asking if he would like to talk with the 'loyal opposition.'

The following day, as the young lawyer was helping his wife and three sons prepare for a weekend trip to their Dutchess County retreat, the telephone rang. The weekend trip was never taken. The author of the note, Donald Harrison Elliott, had been enlisted in the Lindsay campaign.

At its successful conclusion, he was named counsel to the Mayor, and on Nov. 28, 1966, he was named chairman of the City Planning Commission.¹

January 1, 1966 was a day of hope for many concerned about the future of New York City. A coalition of liberals - Republicans, Democrats, and Liberal Party members - had elected John Lindsay as Mayor of New York. His opponent, Controller Abraham Beame, had represented the 'old guard' of machine politics, while Lindsay represented a new wave. Young, with a solid liberal Congressional image, he was seen as being in the forefront of a new type of mayor for American cities. Here was a person who could continue the progress that was hoped for in the Kennedy tradition of idealism - progress that was being proclaimed at the national level by Lyndon Johnson with his "Great Society" proposals, resulting in a plethora of social legislation which a heavily Democratic Congress was passing. These included the 1964 Civil Rights Act and the widely heralded Model Cities program announced in that same January of

1966. Although the Vietnam War had been an issue on some college campuses for two years, troop levels were still going up, and the nation had not yet been caught up with its moral and fiscal consequences.

Against this backdrop came the harsh realities of New York City on that January 1. Mike Quill and his Transport Workers Union went out on strike, and the subway and bus systems were shut down. A mayor who had proclaimed himself against the "power brokers" discovered that trying to change the rules of the game involved serious consequences when the stakes were so high. One could not make statements personally antagonizing to people like Mike Quill and then expect them to be "reasonable." As a number of people said, former Mayor Robert Wagner and Mike Quill would play the game of strike threat up to the last minute, knowing they would settle with no strike. "Of course, the workers got screwed, but the system kept working."²

Into this atmosphere came those reform supporters of Lindsay who were interested in housing policies. And the day-to-day problems in running the housing programs in a city of 8 million, along with the inevitable daily crises, it must be remembered, are time consuming enough for regular city officials. Long range planning is a luxury both because it does not give immediate political rewards and because it is more difficult. It is also not as exciting as "fire-fighting" a crisis or rushing to secret top-level meetings.³ And there were plenty of housing crises for the Lindsay administration to deal with. Summaries of the New York Times show that there were such scandals as housing foundations sinking into marshes

in Staten Island after they had been approved by inspectors of the Building Department and secret fee-splitting between sponsors and contractors on Mitchell-Lama subsidized housing developments, which was discovered in January. There were also the more legitimate pressing problems to be dealt with, as illustrated by Mayor Lindsay's March, 1966, request that the City's ability to borrow funds for Mitchell-Lama middle and moderate-income housing projects be raised by \$225 million in order to allow the City to continue that particular housing program.⁴

However, a few people in the incoming administration were concentrating on changing overall housing policy while the rest of the structure dealt with daily problems. The foundations for their work had been set before the mayoral inauguration with a number of studies on housing policy and government reorganization by an official blue-ribbon commission (I. M. Pei, Charles Abrams, Ed Logue and others, with a staff which included Edward Robin and Eugenia Flatow) funded by the Ford Foundation through the non-profit Institute for Public Administration.⁵

After Lindsay's inauguration some of these same people were appointed to positions of power, and an interagency task force on housing was created. As one of its members explained, it was easier to change policy in the early days of the administration because just 4 or 5 top people, knowledgeable of each other's activities, could sit down together and set policy. This becomes more and more difficult, this official continued, as the life of an administration lengthens. More people achieve niches of power and have to be considered or consulted.⁶ Additionally, as the end

of the mayor's term approaches, concerns for his re-election change both power relationships and policy considerations.

This Housing Task Force discovered several areas of concern with regard to public housing: one was that, contrary to popular conception, the Housing Authority's administrative application of admission criteria had made public housing virtually "antiseptic"⁷ in comparison with the social characteristics of the low-income population of the city which needed housing. * Another concern was that a federal reservation of funds for 7,500 units of public housing would be revoked and redistributed to other cities (under a federal policy of giving priority to cities which

* This gets into the complicated areas of housing management, the role of tenant selection in determining the character of a housing development, and the different set of social criteria and pressures which government should be responsive to in providing housing but which private landlords can in many instances ignore. The desire of management to screen out potentially undesirable tenants hinges on an ability to use criteria, either explicit or subjective, that in fact can predict who will be a "problem" tenant. Whether such a social indicator(s) exists, however, with a sufficiently high accuracy so as not to be considered arbitrary is in question; and unlike the case of persons with higher incomes, people who are rejected or evicted from public housing have nowhere else to go in New York that can provide that kind of quality housing at an affordable rent. During the 1966 era the Authority's admission criteria tended to exclude such persons as unwed mothers, families with a female head of household, anyone with any kind of arrest record, etc. Needless to say, these and other criteria came under attack as being racially discriminatory in their effect and not being the kind of socially undesirable behavior which either should be barred per se or could, in fact, be legally barred.

But whereas the private landlord can simply turn these people away, there were those in the government, especially the liberal reformers, who felt that it was better to try to be responsive to the housing needs of these people and to try to deal with whatever problems that might create in the housing projects than to let the present practices continue by default.

could demonstrate an ability to use the money) if New York did not find sites for the housing by June 30 of that year. Further, they found that the previous Wagner administration had not taken any action on planning for these sites.⁸

To rectify the first set of problems, as well as to correct some of the other difficulties the Authority was experiencing, efforts were made both to make the Housing Authority more flexible in its policies as well as to ease certain legal restrictions that hampered administrative flexibility. Legislation was introduced in late January in the State legislature to allow the Housing Authority to raise the upper income limits for tenants in its buildings that had been constructed with New York State money so that the same set of income limits would apply to tenants in State or federally funded public housing. Also, on January 31, it was announced that the Authority would run an experimental program that aimed to "ban economic, social and racial segregation"⁹ by having "500 low-income families move into privately owned middle-income apartments with the aid of Federal rent subsidies."¹⁰

As stated earlier a new administration made it easier for a few people to decide policy. Three of these key people were Donald Elliott, Edward Robin, and Eugenia Flatow. All were a part of the Reform Democratic movement on Manhattan's Upper West Side, the location of a massive urban renewal project conceived in the 50's and still being built today. Elliott, at first counsel to the Mayor, was appointed Chairman of the City Planning Commission and Director of the City Planning Department in late

1966. He occupied that post until 1973, one of the last three to leave office out of the original 60 Commissioner-level persons Lindsay appointed in 1966. * Edward Robin, a close associate of Don Elliott's for many years, was his number two man at both the counsel's office and at the Planning Department. Eugenia Flatow, originally appointed as a program planner for the Housing and Redevelopment Board, later was the first director of New York's Model Cities Agency, and was a special assistant to Don Elliott for about nine months during 1970-71 before returning to private practice.

The philosophy of the reformers in charge of the new administration's housing policy was that public policy could not continue the segregationist patterns of the city's ghettos and that the tremendous need for housing in the city had to be met in such a way as to end de facto segregation in the city. In this way they were continuing a particular thrust of the Civil Rights movement that was prevalent at the time. For example, it was from March to July of 1966 that Dick Gregory and Martin Luther King were leading marches in Chicago to protest housing conditions and the treatment of blacks by the city and its mayor, Richard Daley.

This integrationist philosophy was consistent with the addition perceptions that one had to get away from both the "cookie-cutter" massive housing projects of 2, 000 to 3, 000 units that the Housing Authority had built

* His successor as Chairman was John Zuccotti, a lawyer who had been a member of the Commission for about two years, and who had previously been a staff member for one of the Congressional housing committees.

in the past* and also away from the bulldozer tactics of urban renewal, which involved massive relocation problems. (See tables on following pages for public housing project and household characteristics.) At the same time, there was the immediate need to avoid losing funds for the 7,500 units and a recognition that smaller sites could be located more readily than large ones. From these views there evolved what became known as the scatter-site and vest-pocket housing programs of the new Lindsay administration.

* Because of the long history of support for public housing in New York City and State, with financing for public housing coming not only from the federal government - as was the case in most of the rest of the United States - but also from the city and state, there was in fact a wide variety of sizes and types of housing projects built at various times. What was built depended on what was considered important at the time, and in the more immediate past the emphasis had tended to be on large sized projects and on high rise buildings. One can cite many factors: the desire for minimum per unit cost, the popularization of the superbloc concept with large open spaces - for play and increasingly for parking spaces, etc.

TABLE 1

Occupancy Characteristics by Percent
New York City Public Housing Projects
January 1, 1965

	White	Negro	Puerto Rican	Other	Total
Number of families	39.8	40.6	19.6	-	100.0
Number of persons	34.0	42.9	23.1	-	100.0
Percent of household heads age 62+	33.0	10.0	7.0		
Percent of broken families	10.6	24.0	15.2		
Percent of families on welfare	5.4	13.3	16.3	10.7	

Source: New York City Housing Authority
Confidential material

Note: Although these tables are for 1968, they provide a fair indication of what the overall situation was like for the immediately preceding years, given the low turnover and construction rates in New York public housing.

TABLE 2
Public Housing Projects by Borough
New York City, 1968

	Number	Percent
Manhattan	53	34.0
Brooklyn	45	28.8
Bronx	34	21.8
Queens	15	9.6
Richmond (Staten Island)	9	5.8
Total	156	100.0

Source: Margaret Webb Latimer,
Tenants of the City: The Present, Potential, and Former Occupants of Public Housing in New York City,
New York: Columbia University, 1970
(Unpublished Ph. D. Thesis), Table VI-2

TABLE 3
Households in Public Housing by Borough
New York City, 1968

	Number	Percent
Manhattan	47,526	30.8
Brooklyn	49,290	31.9
Bronx	36,440	23.7
Queens	16,490	10.7
Richmond (Staten Island)	4,530	2.9
Total	154,276	100.0

Source: Margaret Webb Latimer,
op. cit., Table VI-5

TABLE 4

Average Size of Public Housing Projects by Borough
New York City, 1968

	Number of Dwelling Units
Manhattan	897
Brooklyn	1, 095
Bronx	1, 072
Queens	1, 099
Richmond (Staten Island)	503
New York City	989

Source: Derived from Tables 2 and 3

TABLE 5

Public Housing Households by Ethnic Group
New York City, 1968

	Number	Percent
Black	65, 487	42. 5
White	56, 038	36. 3
Puerto Rican ^a	31, 635	20. 5
Other	1, 116	0. 7
Total	154, 276	100. 0

^a Head of Household born in Puerto Rico

Source: Margaret Webb Latimer
op. cit., Table VI-6

TABLE 6

Percentage of Public Housing Households by Borough and Ethnic Group
New York City, 1968

	Manhattan	Brooklyn	Bronx	Queens	Richmond
Black	41.9	48.3	39.1	40.1	21.0
White	25.4	37.2	37.3	52.5	75.3
Puerto Rican	30.8	14.4	23.4	7.1	3.5
Other	1.9	0.1	0.2	0.3	0.2
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source: Margaret Webb Latimer
op. cit., Table VI-9

But there was a more positive philosophical basis for the scatter-site program than just a desire to promote racial integration and to avoid massive concentrations of public housing on sites of old slums by selecting vacant sites in what may be considered the "sub-urban" portions of New York City. The best description that I have seen of this philosophy was written by Roger Starr^{*} in his 1972 article, "The Lesson of Forest Hills."

If it has always been hard to find a clearly stated rationale in writing for scatter-site housing, one could get at some of the reasons behind the policy in conversation with the New York City officials who were responsible for the original development of the program in 1966. These officials held the view that a neighborhood which contains people with a wide variation of incomes is better than an economically homogeneous neighborhood; and they further believed - as apparently federal housing officials have also come to do - that government has the right and the duty to foster the development of such heterogenous neighborhoods.**

The enthusiasm of New York's officials for scatter-site housing did not rest simply on the effects they expected it to have on the mostly non-white poor people who would be moved into more prosperous neighborhoods inhabited mostly by whites. They believed that scattering low-rent units in middle class areas would also have a healthy effect on the middle-class residents of those areas who would perforce become more tolerant and more worldly - more, in short, like residents of the West Side of Manhattan, from which the key figures in the Lindsay administration's early housing program themselves largely came. 11

* Roger Starr had been active for many years in housing and planning issues of New York City as the Executive Director of the Citizens' Housing and Planning Council of New York, a post he held at this article's writing.

** The legal mandating of scatter-site public housing by a Chicago Federal Court of Appeals did not take place until September, 1971, in the Gautreaux case.

Having decided upon an objective, the administration found that its effectuation would require change in the accepted ways of doing things, and this slowly began to be made clear to all involved, both the public and government officials.

The first outward sign of a change in policy came when the City Planning Commission held a legally required public hearing on proposed public housing sites on April 20th and listened to residents of 6 middle-class areas attack the Housing Authority for submitting them. What was to become a familiar complaint was voiced - that the areas were already overcrowded.¹² This was duly reported in the New York Times on page 35, a not unusual spot in the paper for its reports on public hearings of City Planning Commission and the Board of Estimate.

Then, on May 5th, in a front page story in the New York Times, the magnitude of the situation being dealt with was brought to public awareness. It was announced that the Housing Authority would buy 2,000 - 3,000 units in publicly subsidized Mitchell-Lama (moderate to middle-income) cooperatives (not yet selected) and then rent them on a standard public housing basis. It was also stated that to make up the rest of the federal allocation of 7,500 units for the fiscal year that about 4,000 units would be built in middle-income areas of the city, eleven sites for which were already being processed by the City Planning Commission, (the six in April plus five scheduled for public hearings in a week). None of the sites were mentioned by name, nor were any details of this aspect of the program given.¹³

Although the wording of the article was along the lines of "the Housing Authority announced . . ." in fact the person who was quoted extensively in the article describing the details of the program was the deputy counsel to the mayor, Edward Robin. No one from the Housing Authority was referred to at all, and this in fact was indicative of where the initiative and thrust for change was coming from. Yet, for at least some at a staff level in the Housing Authority who did not like either the programs and/or the interference from outside the agency, it also sowed the seeds of distrust of the City Planning Department and the belief that planning in New York was not professional, but political. The invalid belief that such an absolute distinction can be made - arising out of a desire of professional technicians to elevate their social status and to mask the social value judgments inherent in any technical decision - is satisfying to many in government service. Furthermore, it can color a civil servant's behavior pattern and manner of cooperation with persons in other agencies.

On May 11th the New York Times printed what in retrospect proved to be a revealing and remarkably accurate assessment of the situation's political ramifications. The page 29 article, "City Hall Ends Veto by Borough Presidents Over Housing Sites," also noted an incident involving the Queens Borough President which may have been an harbinger of things to come:

City Hall is no longer giving Borough Presidents the chance to veto public housing sites proposed for their boroughs. This new policy is necessary, officials said, if the Lindsay administration is to plan its program "in the best interests of the city as a whole."

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In the past the Housing Authority chose a site and submitted it to the Borough President concerned before it was made public. Although the Borough President had no power beyond his vote on the Board of Estimate, "borough courtesy" gave him the right to kill the plan if he did not approve.

Under the new system the sites are selected by a special interagency committee headed by Edward Robin, the Mayor's deputy counsel.

Consultation Planned

'The Borough Presidents have a legitimate knowledge and concern about their boroughs and we intend to consult them regularly,' said Donald H. Elliott, counsel to the Mayor. 'But they can't override our final decisions. Public housing has citywide implications and we have to have an over-all plan for its development.'

In at least one case a Borough President was not even consulted about a site. Borough President Mario J. Cariello of Queens learned that two sites had been proposed for his borough when he saw them listed on the City Planning Commission calendar, according to his deputy, Sidney Leviss.

The Commission will hold hearings on the sites today, and Mr. Cariello will probably appear as a witness. 'We are very angry,' Mr. Lewis said.

City officials said that Mr. Cariello was not informed because of a 'bureaucratic snafu.' However, he explained that the incident was symptomatic of the problem the city faces in planning public housing.

When Mayor Lindsay formed the inter-agency committee to select housing sites last March, he said it should follow two basic guidelines:

- Concentrate new construction on vacant land and underutilized areas in outlying areas of the city.
- Stress rehabilitation and small, vest-pocket projects in the densely populated areas that have already received most of the public housing projects.

Integration to Result

Since most public housing tenants are Negro and Puerto Rican, and most vacant land is in predominantly white areas, the policy would have the effect of integrating previously segregated neighborhoods, the officials noted.

The policy could not be implemented if the Borough Presidents retained their veto, officials declared. They said that Queens and Staten Island had lagged behind other boroughs in public housing because of the opposition of small home owners, whose hostility has been mirrored by the Borough Presidents.

The success of City Hall's strategy rests primarily with the attitude of the Borough Presidents. Each one has two of the 22 votes in the Board of Estimate, which has final authority to designate housing sites. An alliance of the five Borough Presidents and either the Controller or the City Council President, each of whom has four votes, could block Lindsay administration plans.

Both Controller Mario A. Procaccino and Council President Frank D. O'Connor are Democrats. The only Republican Borough President is Robert T. Connor of Staten Island, who could not be reached for comment.

Stark Gives Views

Borough President Abe Stark of Brooklyn said 'the Borough President should play the most important part [because] who knows better what the borough needs?'

Mrs. Constance Baker Motley, Borough President of Manhattan, and Herman Badillo, the Bronx chief, strongly backed the City Hall plan.

'It is important to disperse the nonwhite population throughout the city,' Mrs. Motley, a Negro, declared. 'Integration, and more importantly, the quality of education, is inter-related with housing patterns.'

The city has been allocated 7,500 units of public housing by the Federal Government for the fiscal year ending June 30. Fourteen sites that will have about 3,500 units will be considered by the Planning Commission by June 1.

The rest of the available Federal money will be used to finance the rehabilitation of several thousand units and the purchase of several thousand others in middle-income cooperatives that will be rented by the Housing Authority to public housing clients. ¹⁴

That same May 11th at a Planning Commission public hearing homeowners opposed proposed public housing in one area of the Bronx and in Woodlawn and Flushing in Queens; the effort by the city to get sites approved in time to meet the federal deadline was in full swing.¹⁵ By June 2nd 4 sites had been approved by the Board of Estimate, 2 were under consideration, and the Planning Commission had just approved three more for the Board to consider, even though there was much local political opposition.¹⁶

But with one month to go complications began to develop. At the June 1st hearing of the Planning Commission proposed sites in Corona and Howard Beach in Queens, and Kingsbridge in the Bronx, were denounced, as middle class residents said they were overcrowded. In the Bronx case the State Senator and Assemblyman led the opposition, and in Queens it was Borough President Cariello who asked that the matter be postponed until fall. "' Suddenly and without notice four or five housing proposals were placed on the commission calendar, ' Mr. Cariello said. ' We have not had time to study these proposals, and if you don't continue the hearings you will in effect deny our right to be heard. ' "'¹⁷ When this was denied by Chairman Ballard because of the possible loss of federal funds, "Mr. Cariello expressed the belief that the Government ' would not shortchange New York' if the hearings were postponed, but Mr. Ballard stood firm, "'¹⁸ though he agreed to continue the hearings on the Queens sites and 3 other postponed sites two weeks later. In fact, this was all "a ploy" by Cariello, because "we (the administration) had been negotiating with him for 2 months. "'¹⁹

On June 7th the City set in motion the machinery for the other part of its strategy, when the Planning Commission met in special session to give the required 2 weeks notice for a public hearing on sites for 4,000 units of "vest-pocket" public housing. These had been announced by Mayor Lindsay that same day and were to combine with the 3,500 scatter-site units to make the 7,500 unit total (the totals in each program kept changing as details of various sites changed).

The next day, under a headline of "Housing in Slums to Avoid Towers," the public read:

The towering public housing projects that forest the ghettos and are seen by some poor people as symbols of second class citizenship will no longer be built by the city.

Instead it will construct low income apartments in rehabilitated buildings and small new structures averaging six to eight stories, or about half the height of older projects

Most of them will be concentrated in four slum ridden sections

About 3,500 units in middle-income neighborhoods, where high rise buildings will still be built, have already been proposed

The low-income projects will be combined with a campaign to encourage private property owners and non-profit groups, such as churches, to renovate houses in the neighborhood for middle-income families (by encouraging use of the Municipal loan fund and the 221d3 federal program)

The aim of the campaign, as in the scattering of public housing in middle-income areas, is ethnic and economic integration, according to Mrs. Eugenia M. Flatow, assistant for program planning to the Coordinator of Housing and Development 20

Unfortunately, two things were happening to foil this strategy. In the long run, there was the misunderstanding by most people of the term "scatter-site." It was generally considered to refer to the same type of physical design as the vest-pocket housing program, a connotation which one sentence in the above article clearly states is not true, but one which nevertheless came to be inferred by most people. The Times articles describing the scatter-sites being opposed did not mention the number of units or the size of buildings being proposed, a fine point that only years later would become an issue; they only described general statements of opposition.

In the short run certain events were taking place behind the scenes that would make it impossible for the Lindsay administration to get its total program approved unless it made a political deal on the proposed Corona site. But to understand the factors that created the shape of the deal, one must first understand the role which the borough of Queens played in the historical development pattern of New York City.

CHAPTER II - THE BOROUGH OF QUEENS

To heighten the imageability of the urban environment is to facilitate its visual identification and structuring. The elements isolated above - the paths, edges, landmarks, nodes, and regions - are the building blocks in the process of making firm, differentiated structures at the urban scale

Edges as well as paths call for a certain continuity of form throughout their length. The edge of a business district, for example, may be an important concept, but be difficult to discover in the field because it has no recognizable continuity of form. The edge also gains strength if it is laterally visible for some distance, marks a sharp gradient of area character, and clearly joins two bounded regions. Thus, . . . the clear transition from water to land . . . (is a) powerful visual impression. When two strongly contrasting regions are set in close juxtaposition, and their meeting edge is laid open to view, then visual attention is easily concentrated . . .

An edge may be more than simply a dominant barrier if some visual or motion penetration is allowed through it - if it is, as it were, structured to some depth with the regions on either side. It then becomes a seam rather than a barrier, a line of exchange along which two areas are sewn together. ¹

- Kevin Lynch, The Image of the City

[In 1867] the Times . . . described the [proposed Brooklyn] bridge as a sort of grand long needed pressure valve that would do much to alleviate New York's two most serious problems, crime and overcrowding. ²

- David McCullough, The Great Bridge

The rallying cry that is still bringing together the community civic groups (there are more than 200 of them in Queens) and community planning boards is 'We don't want to be Manhattanized.' This is sometimes followed by: 'We are the forgotten borough.' ³

"Queens: Bastion of the Middle Class,"
New York Times, April, 1972

New York City is a collection of five boroughs - four of them separated by major natural barriers of water - that in 1898 agreed to consolidate under the name of New York City, a term that until then referred only to the island of Manhattan. To help make that union possible four chartered towns agreed to join Long Island City to form the Borough of Queens, the largest of all the boroughs with 115 square miles. Its population of 153,000 was spread over numerous small towns and farmland, with the industrial center in Long Island City across from Manhattan.⁴ Though many people in all boroughs were opposed to consolidation, a sufficient number were convinced by the objectives of promoting mutual economic growth and using the financial base of Manhattan to pay for both the construction of bridges to link the boroughs together and the improvement of municipal services - such as replacing, over time, the numerous volunteer fire departments in Queens and Staten Island with the paid New York City department.

As the data below show there ensued tremendous population growth in the City, with Queens, the fastest growing borough between 1920 and 1960, overtaking Manhattan in 1960 to become the second most populous borough (see Table 7).

As was predictable, the investment in bridges, tunnels and other transportation facilities led to land speculation, especially in the 1920's; and construction of the Grand Central Parkway, the Triborough Bridge, the Belt Parkway system, and the Bronx-Whitestone Bridge in the 30's and 40's gave further impetus to this growth.

TABLE 7

Population, New York City and Boroughs, 1890-1970
(All numbers rounded to nearest thousand; numbers in thousands)

	1890	1900	1910	1920	1930	1940				
New York City	2,507	3,437	4,767	5,620	6,930	7,455				
Bronx			431	732	1,265	1,395				
Brooklyn			1,634	2,018	2,560	2,698				
Manhattan			2,332	2,284	1,867	1,890				
Queens			284	469	1,079	1,298				
Richmond (Staten Island)			86	117	158	174				
			-----1970-----							
			Minority Races							
			Negro							
			% of							
			Total							
			Number							
			Total							
			Other							
			Land							
			Area							
			Sq.Mi.							
			Popu-							
			lation							
			Per							
			Sq. Mi.							
			-----1960-----							
			Total							
			%Negro							
			Total							
			Number							
			Total							
			Other							
			Land							
			Area							
			Sq.Mi.							
			Popu-							
			lation							
			Per							
			Sq. Mi.							
New York City	7,892	7,782	14.0	7,895	1,668	21.1	178	299.7	26	
Bronx	1,451	1,425	11.5	1,472	358	24.3	33	41.2	36	
Brooklyn	2,738	2,627	14.1	2,602	656	25.2	40	70.3	37	
Manhattan	1,960	1,698	23.4	1,539	380	24.7	69	22.7	68	
Queens	1,551	1,810	8.1	1,986	258	13.0	33	108.0	18	
Richmond	192	222	4.4	295	16	5.3	2	57.5	5	

Source: Statistical Abstract of the United States, U. S. Dept. of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, 1951 (p. 53), 1963 (p. 23), 1972 (p. 23).

There are two topics which are of concern - the physical pattern of land use which emerged and the ethnic patterns of population distribution which occurred. Physically,

(t)he development of western Queens generally occurred around existing communities. Development in eastern Queens following World War II occurred rapidly on large vacant tracts and was spurred by mortgages insured by the Federal Housing Administration and the Veterans Administration. Orchards and truck farms vanished, entire new communities appearing where once there had been only rural villages. The new communities invariably adopted the names and many of the values and traditions of these rural villages which explains to some extent the strong community identification that exists today.⁵

What the City Planning Commission's proposed Plan for New York City, from which the above quote was taken, does not say - perhaps because it would needlessly antagonize the present residents - is that the growth of Queens was uncontrolled urban sprawl, with the profit-motivated forces of the real estate market determining the pattern of growth. The zoning ordinance of 1916, being the first in the country, was no real obstacle: it would have allowed a total population of 50 million people in the city. Thus, it was the developers' perception of the market, not the zoning, that was the factor behind building low density housing in most of the growing areas. Furthermore, New York City does not have a subdivision ordinance. Rather it relies on the official "City Map" to govern where streets are built. Control of the map for many years rested for all practical purposes with the civil engineers in the offices of the Borough Presidents, though changes legally required approval of the City Planning Commission after that body was created in the 1930's. So, with the prior example of the 1811 commission that mapped Manhattan, a standard grid-iron street pattern, con-

ducive to real estate transactions through simplified legal lot descriptions and creating a very simple street and lot numbering system but ignoring topography and streams, was the result for the other boroughs as well.

Furthermore, it became virtually impossible to change the pattern after land speculators subdivided and sold off parcels, even if they were not built on, since 1) every small lot owner on a "paper" street now had a legal right of access that could not be taken away from him without compensation, 2) even if one person owned all the frontage for blocks, any change had to be approved by a lengthy City process (an "all-agency conference" that can take years) which was controlled by "old-line" bureaucrats and 3) all engineering and survey costs for a new street pattern had to be paid for by the applicant, a cost that most small developers could not afford anyway. Thus, private street systems that the City did not design historically took effect anyway.

When one combines this with 1) the City's inevitable failure to provide urban services on time - often involving a 20 year delay -

2) the ineffectiveness of the City Planning Commission as an innovative force during the 1930's, 1940's and 1950's (it only had about 100 total employees in one lower Manhattan office to deal with the entire City);

3) the dominance of Robert Moses over the City's public works program;

4) the administrative power of Borough Presidents in the governmental structure before the new City Charter of 1961;

5) the political influence of real estate interests, who to this day constitute a powerful political lobby and source of campaign contributions; and

6) the failure of most people to foresee the impact of post World War II growth on the social structure of the country; one cannot really be surprised at the way Queens developed.

In the post World War II period, Queens, and more recently Staten Island, had the commodity which the private developer finds most easy to build upon - vacant land to which people can "escape" - a totally new environment whose physical problems only become apparent after it is built, and whose social problems may never become fully apparent to the residents themselves. For, as the census data show, while total New York City population stayed the same, there were significant shifts on a borough basis, with Brooklyn and Manhattan declining, Bronx staying about the same, and Queens and Staten Island (Richmond) significantly increasing, both absolutely and on a percentage basis. In 20 years, 1950 - 1970, Queens increased its population by about 400,000 (about 25%), and this was in addition to an increase of 200,000 that occurred primarily between 1946 and 1950. In both of these boroughs virtually all of the housing units being built during this time when land was abundant and cheap were being built by the private market for sale or rental at market rates. Public housing still was cast in its role as either taking otherwise undesirable sites or being built in conjunction with slum removal programs that were a part of urban renewal projects.

This process had two consequences of particular importance for Forest Hills and this study. First, because the new housing market until

the mid-sixties was largely racially segregated, it was possible for the upwardly mobile white lower middle class to flee the physically deteriorating older parts of the city - with its problems of racial and economic change and declining school quality - secure in the knowledge that not only were they going to a new area, but one which would in all likelihood be almost all white. Secondly, a large enough demand for housing was created for developers to shift from building single family detached units to building large apartment houses, a type of development which opens the door to the larger developers of the City, men like Sam Lefrak, who are more skilled in dealing with the governmental system than the small builder who constructs 50 - 100 units per year. Indeed, with Sam Lefrak, one was dealing with the "largest individual builder-landlord in the City, if not the country." He is "landlord to a quarter of a million people, mostly middle-income residents of Brooklyn and Queens, . . . and a quarter million more, mostly [in Brooklyn] . . . live in buildings his father built and sold between the First and Second World Wars."⁶

Within the context of the above general history of development in Queens, the social characteristics of the two neighborhoods involved, Corona and Forest Hills, deserve elaboration, for they are a picture of contrasts in many ways. Yet they both share the common condition that the popular image associated with the historic name of the area is no longer valid. The geographic area which the name is used to cover is no longer a homogeneous collection of people with a common community of interests, either ethnically or religiously. The fact that there is so great a contrast in the popu-

lar historic images - the one a blue collar working class area and the other an expensive upper middle class area - makes it somewhat of a surprise for one to realize that they are next to each other. This feeling of separateness is encouraged by the physical nature of what is accepted as the common boundary, the six-lane Long Island Expressway, with a pattern of medium-high density development occurring along some of its right of way. (The present zoning allows about 140 dwelling units per acre; prior zoning allowed more.)

Corona

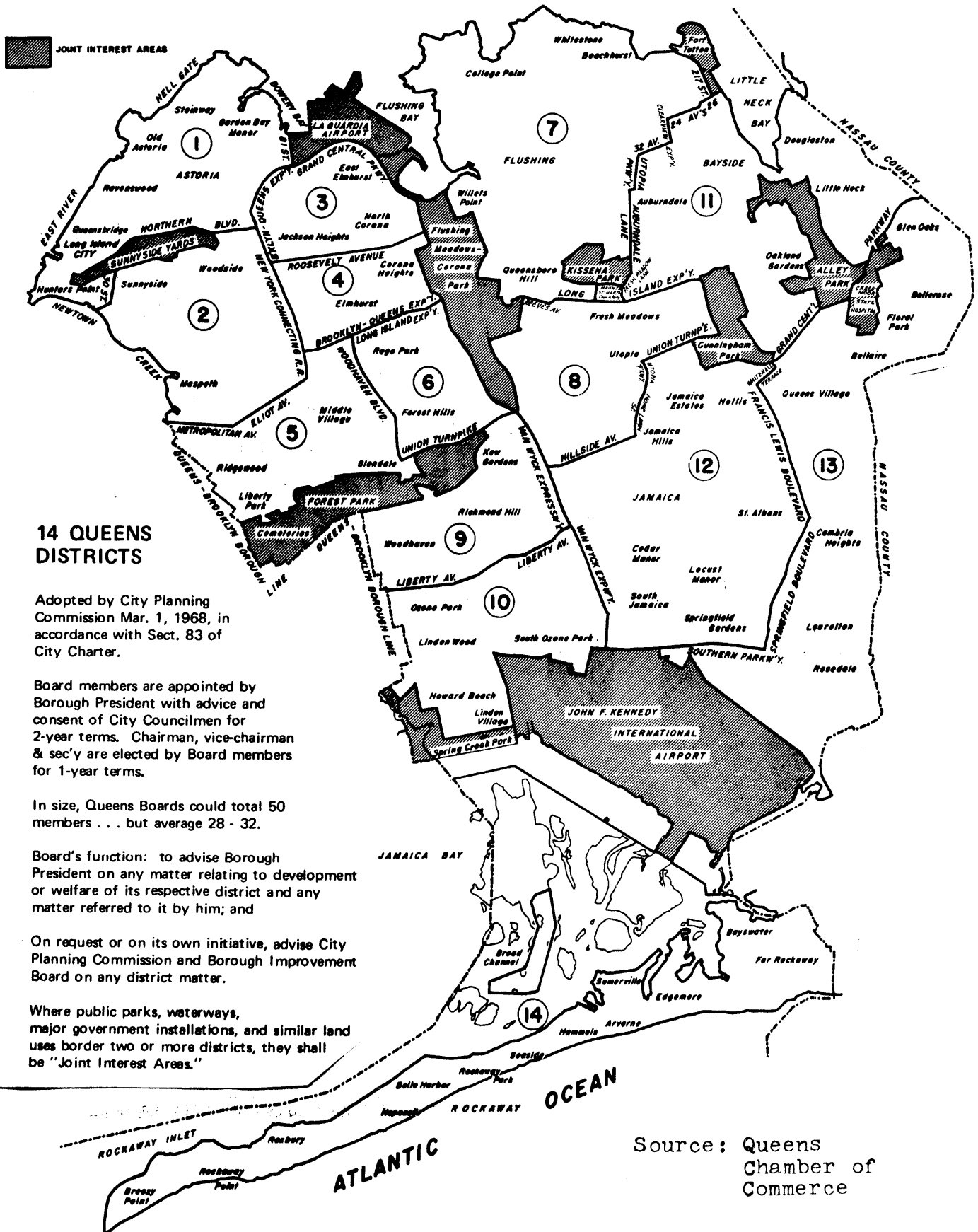
As described in 1969 by the Plan for New York City, it is within Community Planning District 4 (see map following) and is

. . . located to the east of Junction Boulevard [and] is now the core of a stable Italian-American community. The residents are mainly blue-collar workers who have purchased modest homes on small plots which they carefully maintain. The neighborhood has a village character, with older, well maintained homes and clean streets. Much of the local social and community life centers around the church. There is strong civic pride, and the community maintains its own volunteer ambulance service.⁷

The oldest part of Corona is south of the 44th Avenue railroad, where there is a mixture of some old industry, storage yards, and "a variety of old, well kept homes. The irregular street pattern helps maintain the tranquil character of the neighborhood by discouraging through traffic."⁸

It was this oldest area that was to get so much attention later, as residents fought to save their homes. And there were more than the usual reasons for their attachment to them. Not only had many of the families

MAP 3 QUEENS COMMUNITY PLANNING DISTRICTS



14 QUEENS DISTRICTS

Adopted by City Planning Commission Mar. 1, 1968, in accordance with Sect. 83 of City Charter.

Board members are appointed by Borough President with advice and consent of City Councilmen for 2-year terms. Chairman, vice-chairman & sec'y are elected by Board members for 1-year terms.

In size, Queens Boards could total 50 members . . . but average 28 - 32.

Board's function: to advise Borough President on any matter relating to development or welfare of its respective district and any matter referred to it by him; and

On request or on its own initiative, advise City Planning Commission and Borough Improvement Board on any district matter.

Where public parks, waterways, major government installations, and similar land uses border two or more districts, they shall be "Joint Interest Areas."

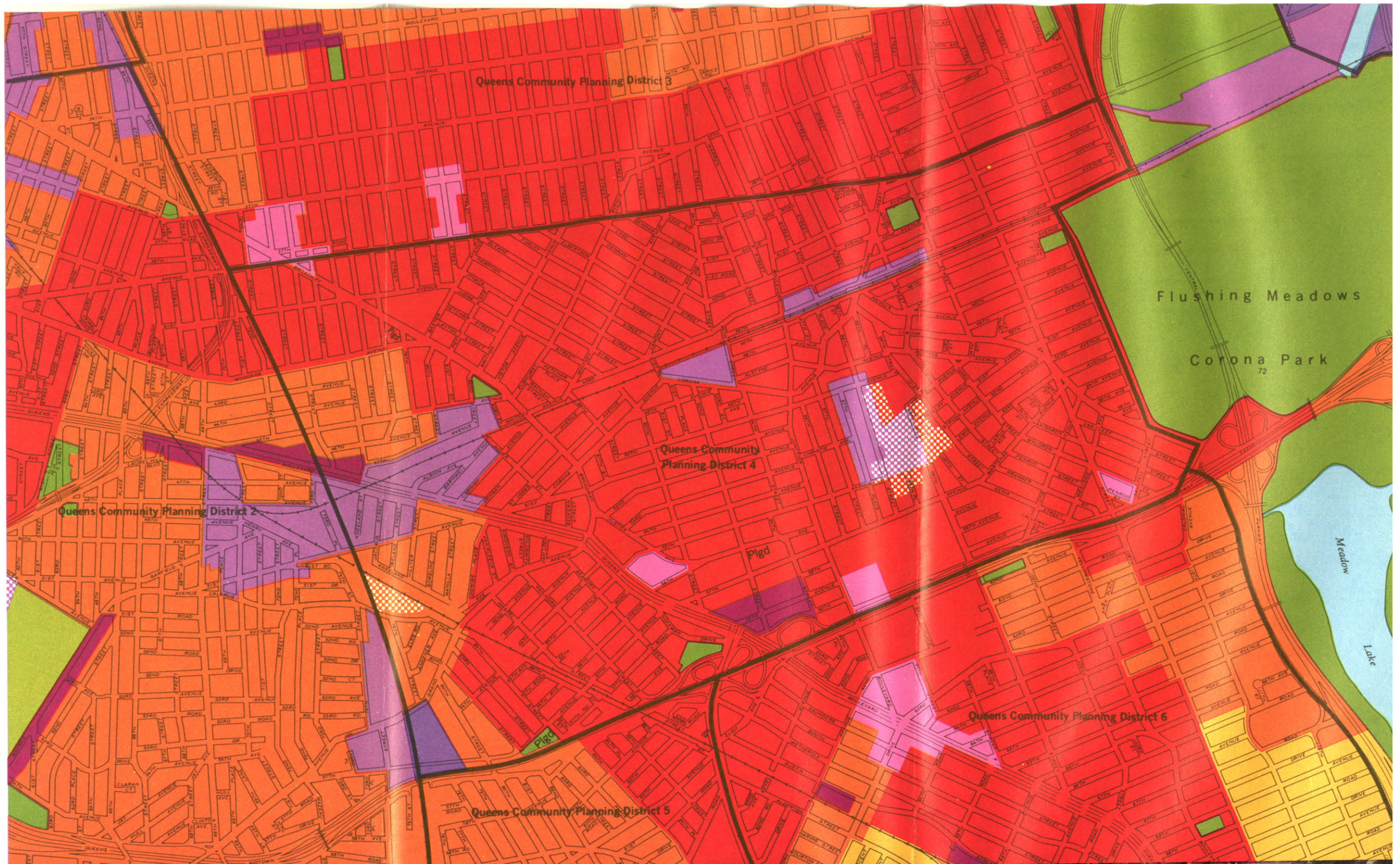
Source: Queens Chamber of Commerce

MAP 4

Queens Community Planning District 4

Land Use Policy

	Undeveloped Areas	Developed Areas
LOW DENSITY RESIDENTIAL		
Typical uses: single-family detached, two-story garden apartments, row houses, local commercial in designated areas, public and private institutions. Maximum densities: from about 4 to about 29 housing units per acre. Equivalent to R1, R2, and R3 zoning.		
LOW-MEDIUM DENSITY RESIDENTIAL		
Typical uses: two-story detached, row houses, garden apartments, apartments up to six stories, local commercial in designated areas, public and private institutions. Maximum densities: from about 40 to 63 housing units per acre. Equivalent to R4 and R5 zoning.		
HIGH-MEDIUM DENSITY RESIDENTIAL		
Typical uses: old and new law tenements, brownstones, high-rise apartments, local commercial in designated areas, public and private institutions. Maximum densities: from about 111 to about 141 housing units per acre. Equivalent to R6 and R7 zoning.		
HIGH DENSITY RESIDENTIAL		
Typical uses: high-rise apartments, local commercial in designated areas, public and private institutions. Maximum densities: from about 247 to about 435 housing units per acre. Equivalent to R8, R9, and R10 zoning.		
MAJOR COMMERCIAL CENTER		
Stores, service facilities, commercial recreation, and offices serving large sections of the City. Equivalent to C4 zoning.		
CENTRAL BUSINESS DISTRICT		
Major commercial activity centers serving the City and Metropolitan area. Office buildings, banks, corporate headquarters, cultural and entertainment facilities. Equivalent to C5 and C6 zoning.		
GENERAL SERVICE & COMMERCIAL AMUSEMENT		
Heavy commercial and service activities including warehousing, motor vehicle repair, amusements. Equivalent to C7 and C8 zoning.		
LIGHT INDUSTRY		
Light manufacturing, warehousing. Equivalent to M1 zoning.		
HEAVY INDUSTRY		
Manufacturing, warehousing. Equivalent to M2 and M3 zoning.		
PARKS		
Parks, playgrounds, and beaches; and marina districts equivalent to C3 zoning. "Undeveloped Areas" classification includes land-fill, marshes, and other areas presently unusable or inaccessible.		
CEMETERIES		
OUTSIDE NEW YORK CITY		
CITY OWNED VACANT LAND		
URBAN RENEWAL AREAS		



Note: "Land Use Policy" means current zoning

Source: N.Y.C. Planning Commission, Plan for New York City, Volume 5: Queens, New York: 1969

MAP 5
Queens Community Planning District 4

Community Resources

- Undeveloped Areas** (Yellow hatched)
- Developed Areas** (Green)
- Parks and Playgrounds** (Green)
- Publicly Aided Housing** (Red)
- Public Housing** (P)
- Project Name** (Red line)
- Under Construction** (Red dashed line)
- Approved, not funded** (Red dotted line)
- Historic District** (Yellow)
- City Owned Vacant Land** (Blue hatched)
- Social Services** (Person icon)
- Public School** (School icon)
- Parochial or Private School** (Church icon)
- College** (Building icon)
- Hospital** (Cross icon)
- Police Precinct Station** (Police cap icon)
- Fire Station** (Fire truck icon)
- Local Subway Station** (Subway icon)
- Express Subway Station** (Subway icon)
- Municipal Parking Facility** (P icon)
- Other Facilities** (Square icon)
- Urban Renewal Area Designated by Board of Estimate** (Red dotted line)

Scheduled Improvements

- In Capital Budget** (Red line)
- In 5 Year Capital Improvement Plan** (Green line)
- E-1347 Modernization** (Red line)
- P.S. 156** (School icon)
- *P-545 Park Development** (Green line)

Location for the following Capital Budget Projects to be determined by the Site Selection Board:



Source: Plan for New York City, Volume 5: Queens, op. cit.

lived there for several generations, but many of the homes were built by hand by the fathers or grandfathers of the present residents. One resident, Ralph Dellacona, said: "There was a city dump here when the Italians first came here in 1900. We took the worst land, * and we built homes with our bare hands. Because I want to live with my friends and keep my home, they call me a Mafia."⁹ Visiting another resident, Lillian Manasseri, in her home in 1972, I learned that the mortgages for some of the houses had been paid off with funds that the families received from the United States government for the deaths of their sons in World War II. So in a very real sense, these homes were a physical link between the present occupants and the sacrifices made by family members in the past.

* For many years the area had been next to privately owned dumps for the ashes and cinders from Manhattan's coal furnaces. After the City decided to take over the carting operations, the dumps and their mountain of cinders were acquired for park land in 1934. Robert Moses, saying as Parks Commissioner that the City could not afford to level the hill and spread topsoil and grass seed, used his power as head of the Long Island State Park Commission to build the Grand Central Parkway (connecting with the Triborough Bridge that he was building as head of the Triborough Bridge Authority) through the dumps. This enabled him to use the highway money to develop the Corona-Flushing Park, which included using some of the ash material to fill in low spots and Horse Creek.¹⁰

"Ironically, filling Horse Creek also laid the groundwork for an acrimonious dispute that broke out thirty years later. The filled area in the creek provided the site for the now notorious Forest Hills public housing project. If this had not been unstable filled land, private developers would have claimed it long before. If it had been more solid land the public housing foundation costs would have been greatly reduced"¹¹

Walking south a few blocks, one comes upon a very different type of urban development. In the portion of Corona immediately north of the Long Island Expressway and west of 100th Street, ". . . large tracts have been developed with huge apartment houses, an extension of the middle-income developments to the south of the Expressway in Rego Park."¹² Of the more than half-dozen developments, the largest is Lefrak City, with about 5,000 families in 16-story buildings.

The important thing to understand is the urban dynamics at work here, a dynamic not possible to know from aerial photographs or statistics. Rather, as Lewis Mumford said, "One has to go out and pound the sidewalks."¹³ The Plan for New York City accurately described the situation when it said:

There is little communication between the new residents of Lefrak City and the old, tightly-knit Italian-American community. Their different backgrounds, needs, and aspirations cause friction: the new apartment dwellers have higher incomes and more urbane tastes. The older residents are fighting to maintain the village character of their neighborhood. They feel threatened on two fronts: by a spreading pocket of decay on the north and by middle-income development on the south.¹⁴

It is in the planning policy toward these threats that political controversy is produced. In response to the fears of decay on the north, the planners say, "The various programs for the Northern Boulevard area, aimed to correct social problems and improve the physical environment, will help mitigate these fears."¹⁵ But with the latter threat, the planning policy reinforces the fear by saying, "The growth of new, higher density housing in the south is, in the long run, a desirable development,"¹⁶ one

which will cause a growth of population in Corona from 20,000 in 1960 to 30,000 in 1970. Whereas the Plan praises the high-rise towers as a "self-contained vertical city" with "highly developed local shopping and a full range of resident services,"¹⁷ another observer, Jack Newfield, wrote in November, 1970 that

You don't have to go to Harvard to know that Corona is a community, and Lefrak City is a depersonalized maze for those who run the rat race . . . The issue in Corona is the preservation of a special community, its protection from the glacier of plastic moving across the country. Instead of destroying the homes on 102nd Street, Lindsay should declare them a landmark, a shrine to dying folkways, and appropriate funds to keep them as they are.¹⁸

Part of the problem, as we shall see, is that the identification of these "newcomers" lay across the middle of neighborhood and community lines. In the geographic terms of neighborhood, they were in Corona, and thus would be referred to as residents of Corona. But in socio-economic class terms, they were a part of the community to the south of the expressway, a distinction that remains ambiguous to most New Yorkers who are not intimately familiar with the area but who rely rather on fleeting memories of past visits or on a few newspaper stories for their present day judgments.

Forest Hills

This problem of community identification with a neighborhood name continues as one goes south of the Expressway, a move which it should be noted takes one into a different advisory Community Planning Board, for the Expressway serves as a convenient administrative boundary line. Whereas the areas within Community Board 6 are called Rego Park and Forest Hills, with a 1970 population of nearly 120,000, again there is a

vagueness about where one neighborhood ends and the other begins. In general, the name Forest Hills tends to be used for a much larger area than Rego Park, and its historic image of single family homes is no longer applicable. Indeed, one of the first reactions by a staff member of the City Planning Department was that the "Forest Hills" project was in Rego Park. This definitional problem was seen also in Nathan Glazer's 1972 article on the Forest Hills project titled, "When the Melting Pot Doesn't Melt." He describes the area by saying:

Forest Hills is an amazing sight. * The last major subway line to be built in New York City, in the nineteen-thirties, ran through the area, which was then still, in large measure, empty lots and small communities of homeowners. Some apartment houses went up before World War II, but the great expansion of the neighborhood came after the war. The dominant building types shifted from the single family home and the six story apartment house to taller apartment houses. Queens Boulevard [12 lanes] became lined with great apartment houses, stretching back from the subway. The standard of density was, by any theory of city planning, outrageous. The standard of amenity was, by any theory of city planning, equally outrageous. Enormous freeways reaching out to Long Island cut up the area, introducing a permanent roar and stench of traffic. There were no new parks built; the only remaining open space was some windswept, leftover corners. The schools were consistently overcrowded, as the inadequate system for school building in New York City failed to cope with the flood of apartment dwellers. The public transportation was among the worst in the city. The single subway line that had been built to serve a few hundred thousand now served a million. The sewers could not accommodate the heavy rains and the area was regularly flooded.

* The tract for the project is not in the old Forest Hills, the section around the West Side Tennis Club, but a newer area northwest of that, in a triangle bounded by Queens Boulevard, the Long Island Expressway and Flushing Meadows Park.

With all this, people poured into Forest Hills from Brooklyn and the Bronx, which [Glazer claims] were less crowded, had better transportation, cheaper housing, less crowded schools, better drainage. Every site in Forest Hills that could be used for apartments was covered with them.¹⁹

















Glazer continues by saying that Lefrak City is in Forest Hills (see quote, p. 179), thereby further showing how what many would consider to be a clear definition of the neighborhood boundary between Forest Hills and Corona - the Chinese wall-like Long Island Expressway - can become an indistinct or blurred edge to others.

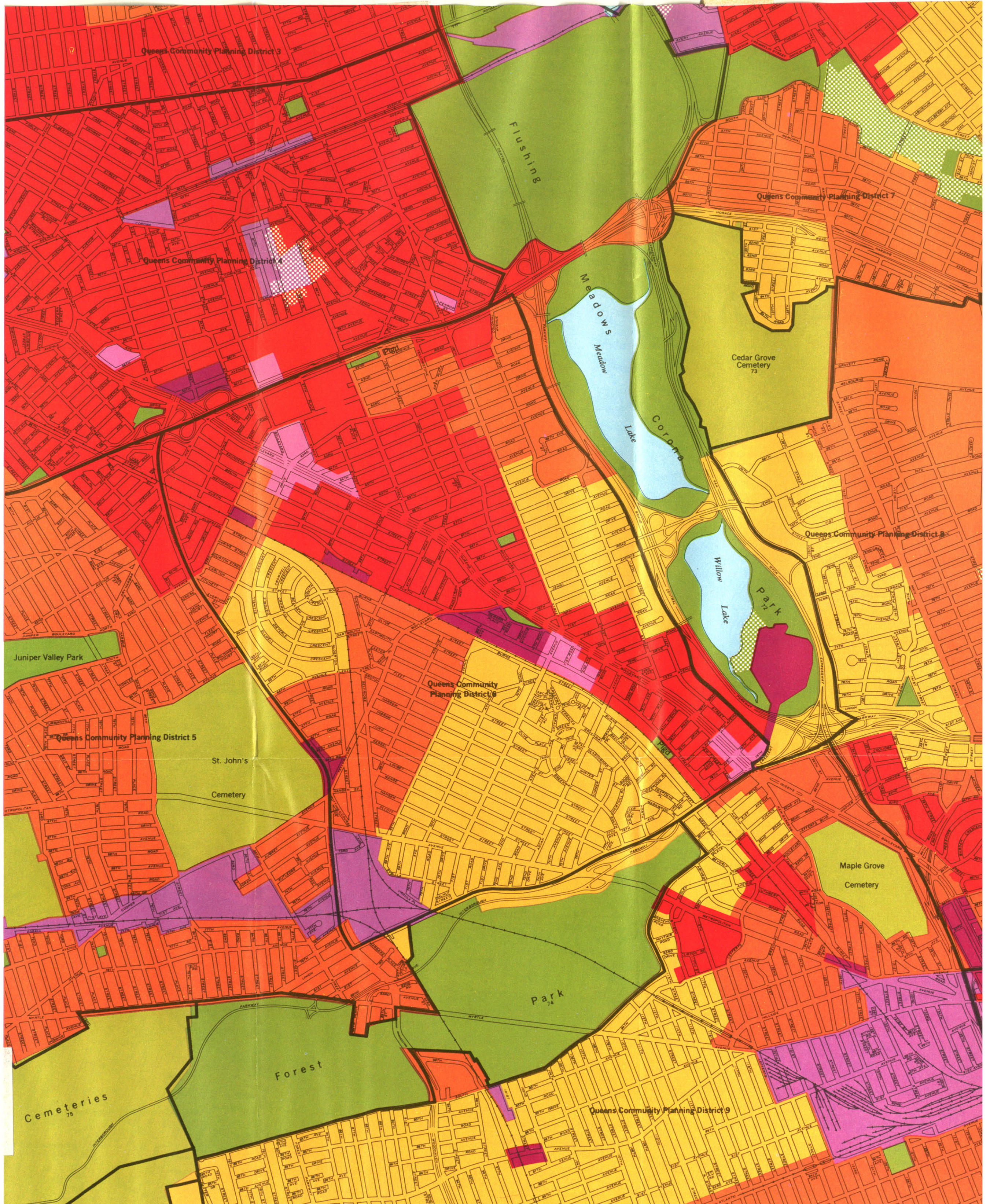
But the important point is recognized - the growth of large apartment complexes identical to what people identify as being a Manhattan-style pattern of development. Yet it is combined with a life style that is suburban in nature with its dependence on the automobile, the two-story department stores with their parking lots, etc. In short, it was a dream for suburbia that could only be half realized, given the economic limitations within which many of the people had to live.

With such an investment in large apartment complexes at stake, and with a successful developer's knowledge of what would encourage or discourage the marketing of his housing, it was therefore not surprising that Sam Lefrak would take an active interest in the proposal of the City to build a public housing project a block away from his Lefrak City complex under construction - a development of office buildings, shops, and apartment buildings for an eventual residential population of over 11,000 people. At the same time the residents of this and other new apartment

Queens Community Planning District 6

Land Use Policy

- Undeveloped Areas**  **Developed Areas** 
- LOW DENSITY RESIDENTIAL**  Typical uses: single-family detached, two-story garden apartments, row houses, local commercial in designated areas, public and private institutions. Maximum densities: from about 4 to about 29 housing units per acre. Equivalent to R1, R2, and R3 zoning.
- LOW-MEDIUM DENSITY RESIDENTIAL**  Typical uses: two-story detached, row houses, garden apartments, apartments up to six stories, local commercial in designated areas, public and private institutions. Maximum densities: from about 40 to 63 housing units per acre. Equivalent to R4 and R5 zoning.
- HIGH-MEDIUM DENSITY RESIDENTIAL**  Typical uses: old and new law tenements, brownstones, high-rise apartments, local commercial in designated areas, public and private institutions. Maximum densities: from about 111 to about 141 housing units per acre. Equivalent to R6 and R7 zoning.
- HIGH DENSITY RESIDENTIAL**  Typical uses: high-rise apartments, local commercial in designated areas, public and private institutions. Maximum densities: from about 247 to about 435 housing units per acre. Equivalent to R8, R9, and R10 zoning.
- MAJOR COMMERCIAL CENTER**  Stores, service facilities, commercial recreation, and offices serving large sections of the City. Equivalent to C4 zoning.
- CENTRAL BUSINESS DISTRICT**  Major commercial activity centers serving the City and Metropolitan area. Office buildings, banks, corporate headquarters, cultural and entertainment facilities. Equivalent to C5 and C6 zoning.
- GENERAL SERVICE & COMMERCIAL AMUSEMENT**  Heavy commercial and service activities including warehousing, motor vehicle repair, amusements. Equivalent to C7 and C8 zoning.
- LIGHT INDUSTRY**  Light manufacturing, warehousing. Equivalent to M1 zoning.
- HEAVY INDUSTRY**  Manufacturing, warehousing. Equivalent to M2 and M3 zoning.
- PARKS**  Parks, playgrounds, and beaches; and marina districts equivalent to C3 zoning. "Undeveloped Areas" classification includes land-fill, marshes, and other areas presently unusable or inaccessible.
- CEMETERIES** 
- OUTSIDE NEW YORK CITY** 
- CITY OWNED VACANT LAND** 
- URBAN RENEWAL AREAS** 



Note: "Land Use Policy" means current zoning

Source: N.Y.C. Planning Commission, Plan for New York City, Volume 5: Queens, New York: 1969

**Forest Hills
Rego Park**



Source: Plan for New
York City, Volume 5,
Queens, op. cit.

MAP 8

Queens Community Planning District 6

Community Resources

- Undeveloped Areas
- Developed Areas
- Parks and Playgrounds
- Publicly Aided Housing
- Public Housing
- Project Name
- Under Construction
- Approved, not funded
- Historic District
- City Owned Vacant Land
- Social Services
- Public School
- Parochial or Private School
- College
- Hospital
- Police Precinct Station
- Fire Station
- Local Subway Station
- Express Subway Station
- Municipal Parking Facility
- Other Facilities
- Urban Renewal Area Designated by Board of Estimate

Scheduled Improvements

- In Capital Budget
 - E-1347 Modernization
 - P.S. 156
 - In 5 Year Capital Improvement Plan
 - *P-545 Park Development
- Location for the following Capital Budget Projects to be determined by the Site Selection Board:
- *L-197 REGO PARK BRANCH LIBRARY \$540,600



Source: Plan for New York City, Volume 5: Queens, op. cit.

complexes adopted the same attitudes of self-protection as those in any new neighborhood, and in the process alienated the earlier wave of occupants in their one and two family houses, a group whose identity tended to become lost as they became a smaller proportion of the area's population. And out of this confusion of identification of just which interests were involved in the mix of community, neighborhood, and builder developed the controversy over the proposed public housing project in Corona.

CHAPTER III - THE SITE SELECTION BATTLE:

A HIGH SCHOOL VERSUS PUBLIC HOUSING

When the project was first conceived, it was intended for Corona and then it would have contained only 509 units. The project as so designed was aborted almost immediately after conception and the site was changed (for reasons that have never been fully and clearly understood by the public) to 108th Street. ¹

- Report to Honorable John V. Lindsay
of Investigation Concerning Forest Hills
Low-Income Housing Project by Mario
Cuomo, July 25, 1972
[Emphasis mine]

These reasons must be understood. It is because they have not been understood that passions eventually became so aroused. False perceptions of why the Forest Hills public housing site was selected caused people to get even more upset than the low-income housing itself would have caused. Furthermore, it would make it easier to understand subsequent decisions, as the governmental system continued the logic of the political agreements that had originally been made. It would also strengthen the argument that it was not the professional city planners who went awry with their "social engineering" but rather a political process that failed, not only at the administrative civil servant level, but also at the critical level of the elected officials, who reversed some of the planners' ideas.

As the years have passed and as the list of community versus government conflicts grows longer, there is a tendency to minimize the

conflicts of a more peaceful era. What is now remembered as a very quick change of site for the housing project from Corona to the Forest Hills 108th Street site was in fact a complicated political issue that took over six months to resolve.

To set the scene, it must be kept in mind that because the city tended to provide services after an area was physically developed, it was almost always faced with making the best of a bad situation in its search for sites for any public facility. Land that was vacant was left over by developers because it was in some way undesirable. Unless there was a junk yard or something similarly unattractive, something would have to be condemned to make way for the public improvement. The larger the site needed, the longer the lead time required to get a facility built; and the more desirable it was that the building be in a residential neighborhood, the more people the condemnation process was likely to affect.

This, of course, is exactly the description of a school site, and schools are also the issue which is most capable of galvanizing a large number of people from a neighborhood into political action, since so many parents and prospective parents tend to have strong feelings about such an important influence on their children's lives. The normal lead time for New York City to build a high school from the time that it is approved for inclusion within the capital budget by the City Planning Commission and the Board of Estimate, a decision which means starting the search for sites by the Site Selection Board, is seven years. A few private developers,

if they do not attempt innovations that involve city red tape, can easily build up a residential area before the city agencies have internal agreement that a school is needed enough to be included in an always tight capital budget.

The official looking for public housing sites for the City is faced with the same kinds of land use problems but for opposite reasons. If he wants to locate a public housing project in an expanding, desirable residential area where there is an active private market, then he finds himself faced with not only opposition from the local citizenry, who have just moved there to escape a deteriorating environment and see his proposal as a threat (both personally and to their property values), but he also finds himself faced with higher land costs. As a consequence the official also will find opposition from the local real estate industry, which doesn't want to see potential real estate values fall, and which by its own actions can make that a self-fulfilling prophecy. To make matters worse, he may even find that the only sites still vacant and "desirable" are wanted by other city agencies to provide services that the new residents want. This is a situation that a politically attuned bureaucrat in a city agency can capitalize on during the normal "horse-trading" that occurs between administrative agencies and politicians as a part of the daily process of running a city. Queens, as the previous chapter indicated, had all of these ingredients.

At its June 1, 1966 hearing on the Queens public housing sites, the Planning Commission had agreed to continue the public hearing on the

Corona site on June 15th. Although this appeased the community, it also gave the Commission and the Lindsay administration time to consider a new and more serious problem - a formal request written one day earlier, May 31st, by the Board of Education that it wanted the site. The letter from Adrian Blumenfeld, a long time and powerful figure in the upper level bureaucracy who was in charge of all school planning, had the following crucial passages:

It is of utmost importance that the Planning Commission give consideration to the plan of the Board of Education to construct an urgently needed comprehensive high school in this section of the Borough in order to relieve existing and increasing congestion at Newtown and Forest High Schools. The School Planning and Research Division has been viewing the general area between Radcliff Avenue and 57th Avenue and between 100th Street and 102nd Street as a possible site for the "New High school," Queens, which has been incorporated into the 1966-1967 Capital Budget with an appropriation for site acquisition. This location coincides almost exactly with the location of the proposed housing project and, consequently, poses a serious problem for the Board of Education. Our preliminary studies have underscored the fact that it will be extremely difficult, if not entirely impossible, to locate an alternative acceptable high school site in this section of the Borough. [Emphasis mine]

We respectfully petition the City Planning Commission to give sympathetic consideration to the school needs of this community with particular attention to the urgent need for high school construction resulting from the decision of the Board to shift from the present 3-year high school plan of organization to a 4-year organization housed in comprehensive high school buildings.² *

There was, however, one "slight" difference between this request and the Housing Authority's, a difference that was very quietly kept

* At this time I can only speculate about any possible pressures which may have been put on Mr. Blumenfeld by either Sam Lefrak or Borough President Cariello.

from public notice by its proponents. Whereas the 5.1 acre housing project would have required condemnation of not more than 4 homes, a 12 acre high school site, which is what the school system had in mind, would have required condemnation of 70-120 dwelling units, many of them not for the actual school building but for the athletic field.

For the next three weeks in June there were a series of discussions and meetings among the Housing Authority, Eugenia Flatow, Edward Robin, Adrian Blumenfeld, and the City Planning Department. Among the proposals advanced were a combination school and housing project on the large 12 acre site, which was accepted by both Blumenfeld and Flatow, but not very warmly by the City Planning Department's school section head, Richard Bader; placing the entire school in Flushing Meadow Park, which was adamantly opposed by Parks Commissioner Thomas Hoving; and an 8 1/2 acre site one-half mile north of the Corona site and directly across the street from Flushing Park, which would then be used for playground space, and which was also opposed by Commissioner Hoving on the grounds that other uses were planned for the area.³

While this was being pondered, several other things were happening. Some meetings were being held with community groups to discuss the housing project. It is extremely difficult to get an accurate picture of these meetings because there are apparently no written records, and one must simply find those very few people who were involved at that time to discover what happened. The off-the-cuff statement by a staff member of the Housing Authority's public information office six years later that "Of course there were community meetings; City Planning does that as part

of their job"⁴ is not sufficient. For at that time the Manhattan based City Planning Department had no offices in the outer four boroughs, and community groups simply were not as active in the planning process as they are today. Meanwhile, Sam Lefrak, whose Lefrak City was only partially built and was being heavily promoted, was trying to get the project moved elsewhere and to have a school placed nearby instead. He had the advantage that at that time "community approval" translated politically more easily into meaning approval by the local elected councilmen, assemblymen, borough president, etc., and not as much by ad hoc community groups. (The day of the Model Cities program and its "maximum feasible participation" had not yet arrived.) Obviously, the local politicians had to be responsive to local pressures, but the central city administration was more likely to let the local politicians work out their own arrangements with their constituents, campaign contributors, and local political clubs; and if the local politicians would "bite the bullet" the central administration took that as meaning the local community scores had been settled.

Simultaneously the city administration was putting together the other part of its political package for low-income housing. On June 7 Mayor Lindsay had announced plans for 4,000 units of vest-pocket public housing for four of the worst slum areas in the city and the push was on to get the sites for these units and the remaining scatter-site projects approved before the end of June. This detailed vest-pocket program was the same one which had been generally referred to in the Times article of

May 11 as being done in conjunction with the Mitchell-Lama middle-income cooperative program to meet the federal 7,500 unit total, but apparently as the weeks went by it was decided that the city would have to use just the vest-pocket and scatter-site programs to meet that fiscal year's federal allocation, so those two programs had to add to that total. Whether that merely meant the purchase of the public housing units in Mitchell-Lama co-ops was not going to be counted against the next fiscal year because it could not be implemented fast enough or was not considered as satisfying the federal conditions for that particular type of yearly allocation, I do not know. (During the ensuing several years, however, the Authority did implement the co-op units purchase program.)

On June 15, 1966, the Planning Commission again held hearings on the Corona and Howard Beach sites. Approximately 700 Queens residents opposed the placing of public housing in middle-income areas. During this raucous hearing, which Chairman Ballard finally had to threaten to cancel unless the disturbances were stopped, a number of my sources (governmental, newspaper reporters, and others) alleged that Sam Lefrak paid for the buses that took residents to these hearings, an action which could easily be defended by Mr. Lefrak as being his "civic generosity" to his tenants.

Vito Battista, chairman of the United Taxpayers Party and later to play a pivotal role as a State Assemblyman in the fight against condemnation of Corona homes for a high school, opposed the housing projects, characterizing the concept of public housing as "immoral." Borough

President Cariello continued his opposition, charging the Planning Commission with "'steamroller tactics' by holding hearings on all our Queens sites on the same day."⁶ City Councilman Donald Manes, later to become Queens Borough President when the Forest Hills project would be making national headlines in 1971, also spoke in opposition because he felt the public housing would encourage the flight of middle-income residents from the city. In support of the projects, William Booth, the Chairman of the Human Rights Commission, defended the scatter-site program as the "only hope to get people out of ghettos," and was greeted with boos.⁷ The loudest cheers of all during the ten hour hearing, at which 117 persons spoke, came, according to the Times, when a woman said, "We improved our lot by struggle. The Negroes want everything for free. How much can we take? How much can we pay? We'd be better off on relief." In contrast, "a middle aged Negro man addressed the crowd with tears in his eyes. 'I don't like to ask for something I have a right to,' he said amid a chorus of hoots. 'I don't want you to love me. I don't want it and I don't need it, but I want you to respect me.'"⁸

At its June 22nd hearing the Commission approved the last four scatter-site projects, including the one in Corona. It then heard testimony that day on the proposed 4,000 units of vest-pocket housing. Two days later, Bronx Borough President Herman Badillo, later to be the City's first Congressman of Puerto Rican descent, criticized the Lindsay administration for delaying the two Queens projects because of community opposition. Whether he did this merely as a protest for the Commission's

delay or, what is more likely, to put pressure on the administration because he knew about the problems that were developing is not known.

With the project now scheduled to go before the Board of Estimate one week later, June 28th, the behind-the-scenes activity increased. I find that the popular press erred in subsequent years in its analysis of the situation at this crucial juncture. Walter Goodman, writing in the New York Times Magazine in 1972, says

The Corona site was approved by the Planning Commission over community objections on June 21, 1966, with the understanding that a new high school, which everyone agreed was needed in Queens, would be built a few blocks away, across the Horace Harding Expressway, * in Forest Hills-Rego Park.⁹

The Village Voice, in its article of July 8, 1971, "Corona: Cause for a Day," wrote

Many people feel the City wanted the school there [in Corona] in the first place because it had been promised to Lefrak, and that it used the threat of public housing to soften up the residents into accepting the school.¹⁰

In fact, the Planning Commission knew the Forest Hills site was considered unacceptable for the high school by the school system because of the May 31st letter from Adrian Blumenfeld, Administrator of the Board of Education's School Planning and Research Division. What the Commission was really doing by passing the Corona site for public housing was avoiding the issue of the high school publicly while it and the administration

* The Horace Harding Expressway is the name for that section of the Long Island Expressway.

tried to resolve the problem; and this had the benefit of letting the city show the federal government that action was being taken and that the allocation for public housing funds should not be reduced. Indeed, as Don Elliott today admits, it was the failure of the City to find another site that would be acceptable to the school system that enabled the Queens Borough President to insist that the high school be placed on that Corona site. In his opinion there were two realities - "the moral imperative for scatter-site and the pervasive and accurate need for a new high school. The Queens high schools were on double session. We failed to produce a 12 acre site that met the geographical needs of the high school, and we thereby lost the moral imperative. "11

To the people in charge of the administration's scatter-site program the possibility of a high school on the Corona site was an anathema, not only because it would take away their housing site but because it meant there would be the destruction of 70 or more houses instead of 3 or 4. Yet, the pressure for the high school there continued to increase. A high administration official confirmed to me that there was personal pressure during the summer from Sam Lefrak to move the housing site. Lefrak had telephoned the official's father to try to exert pressure. In a second instance, Lefrak met the official for lunch at the Columbia University Faculty Club and "in effect offered to work out what I wanted in a Morningside Heights* problem he knew I was interested in if I would stop the Corona public housing, and I refused. "12

* Morningside Heights is an edge of Harlem next to Columbia University, an edge characterized not only by a black-white, residential-academic contrast, but also by a sharp topographic change.

The community meetings became a second battleground while these housing officials negotiated privately with Board of Education officials. Today, much misunderstanding exists over the role that residents of Corona played in determining the City's actions on the site. A large part of this can be attributed to the failure of the press to differentiate between the two different types of communities that exist in Corona — the old Italian culture and the new renters in the multi-story apartment buildings. For example, Walter Goodman said in the New York Times Magazine in 1972 that the Corona housing site,

vacant except for a swim club, was in a neighborhood of one- and two-family houses whose owners rose up against having four 14-story buildings with some 2,000 inhabitants imposed upon them. ¹³

Martin Tolchin, writing in the Times in 1971 on "The Housing Tangle," conjured up the same image when he wrote

In fact, the Forest Hills site originally was proposed for Corona, which had enough political influence to defeat the proposal, as did Maspeth, Queens, the site of another proposed low income project. ¹⁴

The New York Post, in a comprehensive five part series on "The Battle of Forest Hills" in April, 1972, reported that in Corona:

The mostly small homeowners there, however, raised a ruckus and the Lindsay administration made a drastic change in plans, switching a high school that was to be built on the Forest Hills site to the Corona site and the project to Forest Hills. ¹⁵

As various articles continued to repeat this line of argument, it tended to become accepted as fact by later writers, whereas the reality

differs markedly from that description. The small homeowners of Corona did not have much political clout, nor were they the most vocal. There were community meetings being held by various groups to try to raise support for the housing project. These meetings were admittedly not wildly successful, but they were not total losses, either. Eugenia Flatow went to five of them and recalls the one in Lefrak City as the worst, being "either stacked or composed of the most hostile people." At that meeting 350 people were in a room built for 200. These people, "to whom the project meant blacks," said, "Ours is a good integrated community," according to Flatow, who then adds, "There weren't any blacks in the room." Her summary of these meetings is "We didn't convert anyone at the Lefrak City meeting, but they felt guilty. Other communities were not happy, but they were not violent."¹⁶

This view tends to be supported by Lillian Manasseri, who later helped form and lead the Italian Corona "Fighting 69," and with whom I spoke. According to her, the members of their local civic organization were unaware of the housing project proposal because it did not meet during the summer months. Only the President of the Association knew what was happening. When she, the Secretary for the Association, did hear some rumors about it, she asked the president; he said no, that there would be a high school on the site. The "Fighting 69 Fact Sheet" produced by her states:

The management of Lefrak City hired buses for 1,000 people, asking the cooperation of the Corona Community, to go down to City Hall to protest the low income project. Seeing the large protest gathering, it was suggested that

instead of a housing project the land be dedicated for use as a high school. The Corona Property Owners Association, representing the owners of 64 homes located adjacent to the site, stated their approval of the school and the housing project was dropped. ¹⁷

Haskell Lazere, at that time executive director of the American Jewish Congress (now New York Director of the American Jewish Committee), substantially agrees. Judith Tuler of his organization, and Jane Benedict of both the Metropolitan Council on Housing and Congress of Racial Equality, were together trying to raise community support for the project. Lazere states that

. . . according to my information, the Corona thing was masterminded by Sam Lefrak, who convinced the people they needed a high school, and who had his public relations man shooting out press releases. The head of the Corona Homeowners Association was so cocksure of himself - he had been sold a bill of goods. ¹⁸

These community meetings took on extra importance just after the Planning Commission approval of the Corona site for housing, as a result of the June meetings between City Housing officials and the Board of Education's Adrian Blumenfeld. "We asked him if Borough President Cariello could stand the pressure of losing 83 homes if the high school was placed on the Corona site, and when he said, 'Yes,' we knew we were in trouble," a high Lindsay administration official privately stated. ¹⁹

Efforts at convincing the community not to opt for the school were redoubled. Haskell Lazere states:

-60-

Judith Tuller went to the Board of Education and found that the high school would take 65 to 70 homes. A tumultuous meeting in Corona voted overwhelmingly for the school. She got up and said, 'Don't do this. You'll lose your homes.' The head of the Corona homeowners said, 'You're a liar.' She said, 'Go down to the Board of Education.' This was rejected.²⁰

At about this time another event took place to which we were able to find only one obscure press reference but which was confirmed in several interviews. A small newspaper in 1971 reprinted an item from the Newsletter of the Metropolitan Council on Housing:

In 1966, the residents of Corona, Queens, were warned, in an Italian and English leaflet put out by Metropolitan Council on Housing and distributed door to door by volunteers, that proposed construction of a high school in their area would mean the demolition of at least 69 homes whereas construction of a low-income project could be accomplished on vacant land. They were given a telephone number^{*} to verify this information. Not one person called.²¹

Thus, this effort remained unsuccessful. On June 23 the Board of Estimate decided to postpone a decision on the site for housing, giving as the reason the request by the Board of Education for the site for a high school; from July through October the issue remained unresolved.

On October 27, 1966, a compromise decision was announced at the Board of Estimate public hearing, although the formal legal steps to implement it would take months. The executive assistant to the Mayor, Robert Sweet, stating that agreement had been reached with community leaders and the Borough President, said:

* It was decided to deliberately give the number of a rabbi rather than a government agency, to overcome people's hesitancy to telephone.

Lewis Avenue (Corona) is the only available site at which the entire high school complex could be constructed and that . . . (t)he new site for low rent housing is a vacant parcel a few blocks south of the Lewis Avenue site near Flushing Meadow Park located at 108th Street, 62nd Drive and 62nd Avenue. 22

Goodman, years later, observes that

. . . the uninstructed observer may wonder at the political strategy or simple good sense of switching from a plan that provided a housing site and a school site without the need for evicting anybody to a plan that necessitated the eviction of several hundred people. 23

Yet the Borough President, who normally would be expected to be closest to the residents' desire to avoid condemnation, said publicly:

This planning solution, which we have sought for so long, is a victory for everything that is good and visionary for the Borough of Queens. It protects the Flushing Meadow-Corona Park area, home of two World's Fairs and the major hope for family parklands that Queens so desperately needs, from the threats of encroachment as a school site.

It locates the new North Queens High School at . . . the only available land in the area which will provide all the space necessary, offer complete integration with the predominantly Negro Corona* and Elmhurst neighborhoods and predominantly white Forest Hills and Rego Park neighborhoods and relieve the overcrowded Forest Hills and Newtown High Schools.

It provides for a low rent housing project, also important in the planning of our community life in the same vicinity at 108th Street and 62nd Drive which is equally accessible to transit and other services . . .

I feel that this is a victory for proper planning for the entire area of the city and it has shown the tremendous interest in community activities once again by the citizens of the Borough of Queens. 24

* The area referred to is actually "North Corona" in Community Planning District 3, one mile north of the area of Corona with the site in question.

Clearly, there is a divergence of opinion that should be explained. What were political and social factors that caused the change from what Goodman and others feel was a reasonably good plan to what they feel is a bad plan? Why was the Borough President so enthusiastic and seemingly persuasive? Was it because, as Goodman and other writers speculate, the City believed the housing project would meet less opposition from the "more liberal" Jewish occupants of Forest Hills-Rego Park than from the "Italian homeowners of Corona"? Or were there more complicated motives, arising from the fact that the "good plan" never existed as a coordinated, agreed-upon plan among the agencies?

As already indicated one person who wanted a school instead of a public housing project was Sam Lefrak, for the normal reasons that any developer has. But he had no apparent influence with the new city administration, which at the time was beginning its "good design of buildings" emphasis rather than a production emphasis. Dr. Frank Kristof, a former high housing official for the City and now chief economist for the New York State Urban Development Corporation commented when queried as to whether Lefrak could force the city to shift sites, "Lefrak had no political credit in the Lindsay administration . . . although I would believe it in the Wagner administration."²⁵

One person who did have influence, though, was Queens Borough President, Mario Cariello, and his influence was much greater than would have normally been the case. For although the borough presidents had been denied their initial power of veto over sites by the Mayor's new inter-

departmental committee for site selection, there was still the vote in the Board of Estimate. The administration, recognizing the impossibility of getting the scatter-site and vest-pocket programs approved on a piece by piece basis with each borough president exercising his usual "courtesy veto" over all projects in his borough via the gentleman's agreement that borough presidents have among themselves in the Board of Estimate, had initially used the strategy of making the sites a "package" city-wide issue. This gave it the hope of putting together enough votes to put all the sites through because at least some borough presidents would accept something they didn't like if each borough had its share. The aim, in other words, was to create "widespread responsibility" or "hardship."²⁶

A high Lindsay administration official, on promise of anonymity, discussed some of the political implications of that time. First, they "knew the sites had to get passed by 1967 because of the 1969 election." Secondly, that "Lindsay came in as mayor with no political allies on the Board. For example, if Badillo was for something then (Controller) Procacino was against it." Because they didn't have the votes of the controller or the President of City Council Frank O'Connor, they needed to have the votes of four of the Borough Presidents. "We had Badillo (the Bronx), Sutton's vote for was important (Manhattan), the Staten Island Borough President was against, we had Brooklyn, and Cariello was with us in private if we gave him a veto over sites."²⁷

Thus, the voting lineup for the total scatter-site program outside ghetto areas and the vest pocket program for slum areas was:

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<u>FOR</u>		<u>AGAINST</u>	
Mayor	4	Controller	4
Brooklyn Borough President	2	City Council President	4
Manhattan Borough President	2	Staten Island Borough	
Bronx Borough President	2	President	2
	<hr/> 10		<hr/> 10

As long as no one switched, the Queens Borough President held the swing 2 votes. Since Controller Procacino and Staten Island Borough President Robert Connor were (and still are) ideological conservatives and would not switch their votes, the only possible weak point was the City Council President, and if that vote held then Cariello retained his leverage. Thus, this official believes that "Lefrak made a deal with Queens Deputy Borough President **Sidney Leviss**, the City Council President, and Rosenthal (the Congressman for Forest Hills and Corona)."²⁸

In addition, another very informed person states that there was a meeting between the Borough President and Congressman Rosenthal - a meeting of which a partial tape recording reportedly exists - at which the Congressman argued that "my good friend, Sam Lefrak, who has built so much housing in the City, deserves a high school."²⁹

On the City administration side, there were three people who made the political deals for the mayor: Deputy Mayor Bob Price, Bob Sweet, executive assistant to the Mayor, and Wyn Kamarski, the Board of Estimate coordinator. According to my information, the housing officials in the City had convinced Deputy Mayor Price that there would have to be a political price paid in order to get the scatter-site housing through. But they also warned him against dealing personally with Sam Lefrak,

since Lefrak, a person capable of great exaggeration, had started to brag that "he had Price in his hip pocket."³⁰ So, a deal was made, part of which may or may not have included giving Borough President Cariello the judgeship to which he was subsequently appointed.

However, as Don Elliott and others said, one should be wary about ascribing a single motive for the Borough President's actions; and, in fact, there was a great deal of community pressure over a larger geographical area in favor of getting a new high school. According to Don Elliott, "There were literally hundreds of groups meeting for six weeks for the school,"³¹ so that there was this very real political pressure which the Borough President faced from the parents.

But there was a larger political context in which all of this was taking place. There was also a basic power conflict between the Mayor and the other elected officials, a conflict in which the Corona issue can be seen as only one case in a larger issue. Part can be ascribed to political differences, since the rest of the Board of Estimate and most of the City Council were either Democrats or conservative Republicans, and part can be ascribed to a resentment against an exercise of mayoral power that took away the prerogatives that had long been associated with their respective offices. For the new City charter, setting up a strong mayorial system, had taken full effect on January 1, 1963. In this first instance of a divided city administration the new mayor was using his powers to the fullest. There was open feuding between Lindsay and the Democratic President of City Council, Frank O'Connor, who in the fall of 1966 was running against Republican Governor Nelson Rockefeller in the gubernatorial race.

The feud got so strong that Lindsay and O' Connor ultimately held a meeting of reconciliation, and each was then stating publicly that there was no reason why they should not cooperate with each other. *

The members of the City Council, reportedly tired of being considered a "rubber stamp" through twenty years of Democratic rule, were upset over a series of instances in which the administration had bypassed it, such as 1) implementing his new super-agency reorganization of city government by executive order before the council's legislative approval, 2) going directly to the state legislature for a broad tax program, 3) setting up "Little City Halls" with "funds on hand"³² after they had eliminated them from Lindsay's proposed budget, 4) creating a civilian-dominated police review board before the Council could debate the various proposals it had pending (a board eventually killed by public referendum after Lindsay campaigned extensively for it in the fall of 1966), and 5) by using many more executive orders (31) than Mayor Wagner had. The Times quotes one influential councilman as summarizing the views of his colleagues by saying:

John Lindsay keeps saying in public and in private, 'I am the Mayor' and yet he doesn't seem to believe that the Council, the legislative arm of city government, has a role to fill too. We promised him full cooperation before he took office. And he's gotten it when he's come to us, but unfortunately he's done it too little.³³

* For elaboration of this and the other political conflicts, see the book by Lindsay's press agent for 1966, Woody Klein, Lindsay's Promise: The Dream that Failed (New York: Macmillan, 1970). Also see Nat Hentoff, A Political Life: The Education of John V. Lindsay (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1969).

On the other side of governmental operation, with the more powerful Board of Estimate, things were even worse. As mentioned earlier, the City Council President and Controller were not happy with the mayor. On the same October 27th that the Times reported the Council's unhappiness, it also reported that the five borough presidents had met at lunch in order to combine to defeat the mayor on a number of issues. One was the symbolic act of refusing to authorize the rent for office space for the mayor's new Office of Staten Island Development, the executive order for which had "omitted the Borough President's office from a list of eight city agencies cited as cooperating in the development."³⁴ Another was the Corona housing site.

The Board of Estimate met and the results were printed in the Times under a headline of "Mayor Defeated by Borough Heads, Lindsay Loses on 3 Major Issues in Estimate Board." In addition to the Staten Island vote, which was carried when the Controller joined the Borough Presidents during the previous day's executive session - thereby forcing the Mayor to withdraw the request, the Corona housing site was withdrawn by the administration in favor of the high school; and Manhattan Borough President Percy Sutton succeeded in exempting part of an area from a proposed urban renewal project's boundaries in Harlem, with the Mayor being the only member of the Board to vote for including the area. So, having announced seven months earlier that in the interests of the whole city it would no longer give borough presidents an advance veto over capital projects, the Lindsay administration was defeated on major

issues that "concerned the planning and construction of physical improvements, an area in which borough presidents have traditionally had a strong voice . . . (Moreover), yesterday's actions indicate that the organized will of the Borough Presidents remains a powerful force in city government."³⁵

Thus, the issue of the public housing project was not only debated on the level of its own merits as a housing site and also as a part of a broader, very controversial scatter-site policy, but it got attached to the web of emotion over the process itself, an issue about which all the elected officials were sensitive.

Given the problems they were creating for themselves, what was the Lindsay administration trying to achieve during these negotiations from June through October, inasmuch as they were bargaining from a position of relative weakness with Borough President Cariello? Why did it take almost five months for the city to accept a deal which moved the housing site only blocks?

The city's dilemma stemmed from the fact that the same officials who wanted scatter-site housing also wanted the new Queens high school, because the high school was pivotal to the school integration plans for the area. These plans were based on redrawing high school district lines to incorporate students from the predominantly black neighborhoods, such as Elmhurst, and this was not possible to implement in a manner that would be educationally and politically successful while the existing

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Forest Hills and Newtown High Schools were so overcrowded. * Furthermore, just as the many parents in Forest Hills who had been trying for a long time to convince the city to provide a new high school had been unsuccessful, so too were these new administration officials in trying to get the Board of Education's bureaucracy to plan for the school. The fact that the school system was now taking action in planning for the school was desirable; the problem was how to get the high school without undesirable side-effects while at the same time not publicly antagonizing the borough president, whose vote was needed if the housing project was ever to be approved.

Efforts were made to find another acceptable school site. Eugenia Flatow checked, and confirmed, that twelve acres was the planning standard by the Board of Education for high schools in Queens at that time. She also confirmed that the Department of Real Estate did not have any "hold" on the disputed Lewis Avenue Corona site at that time. "The Department manufactured it later," she said.³⁶ Unknown to most people, the time from August 2 to September 9 was used in an abortive attempt to use part of Flushing Meadows Park. The plan, to have a specialized high school for the biological sciences with its recreation, a zoo, and an olympic sized swimming pool in the park was unenthusiastically accepted by Parks Commissioner Tom Hoving (now director of the Metropolitan Museum of Art). This would have saved all the homes in Corona, but the deal fell through.

* A similar redistricting to place Forest Hills High School white students in the new Hillcrest High School two miles away when it opened in 1971 resulted in several legal suits by parents.

(This was what Borough President Cariello was referring to in his previously quoted statement, "It protects the Flushing Meadow-Corona Park area . . . from the threat of encroachment . . ."37)

Apparently, either no one had the power or initiative to overrule the officials in the Board of Education in such a way that the system would continue to do the paper work processing needed to keep the school project going. Either the size of the high school - 4, 000 pupils was the then standard - or the amount or location of the recreational space could have been changed if more flexibility had existed in the school system. But this was prevented by the use of prevailing rigid standards, oriented toward minimizing operating, administrative and overhead costs than towards the social problems large schools created. The combination of the standards plus the political pressure for a school on the Corona site proved insurmountable, as they were mutually supportive of each other. Each side held a veto power over the other, but whereas the housing advocates wanted a school, the school people did not see it in their interest to also help change residential racial patterns. So the school system was willing to hold out for what it considered to be the optimum physical plant, irrespective of other consequences, either the Corona homeowners or the administration's long range social goals. Indeed, one of the administration officials involved in the battle characterized Adrian Blumenfeld of the school system as being "amoral. He will adopt any position because he has seen commissioners come and go."38

Finally, when the administration realized it had failed to find another school site acceptable to Cariello and Blumenfeld, it agreed to take the heat off Borough President Cariello by selecting the site for a school if he would support some other site for the housing project.³⁹ This was important for him because it gave assurance that the school really would be processed by the system, since the administration controlled the votes of the official Site Selection Board and could dominate the City Planning Commission, which had capital budget authority along with the Bureau of the Budget. The question was, what site would be good for the housing? It had to be in an area which met the social and physical criteria for scatter-site housing, including relatively good public services, and it had to be a site large enough for the total number of units on a city wide basis to still hold up.

To those who today complain about lack of planning, foresight and concern about compatible physical scale of buildings, it may come as a surprise to learn that the 108th Street site in Forest Hills was actually third choice as an alternative site. The first choice, according to an official involved in the process at the time, was eliminated because it was in the path of a planned expressway. The second choice was "an all single family home area where the project would clearly have been out of scale, and the third choice was the Forest Hills site, but we did not think it real because we heard that pilings had disappeared."⁴⁰ Indeed, that was the reason that the administration's housing policy makers had tried so hard for months to avoid the Forest Hills site, for they wanted to avoid any of the problems

that might occur with the poor subsoil, especially since, to the extent possible, they wanted to keep the buildings as low as they could⁴¹ and still stay within federal cost limits.

Until the day of the October 27th Board of Estimate meeting, it was not certain which of the sites would be accepted, but finally there was enough agreement in principle for the decision to be announced. There exists today an opinion among some, as expressed here by a New York Times reporter whom I interviewed, that "the private agreement at the Board of Estimate, which everyone will deny, was that the public housing would never be built in Forest Hills because the site was unbuildable." Certainly the administration's housing policy people did not agree to this, but if this agreement did exist, or, even if it did not exist as a spoken agreement but rather as an unspoken belief on the part of some people involved because of the reports about any previous effort to build on the site, the people who believed that nothing could be built were to be mistaken. The real issue was to be not whether anything could be built at all, but rather what kinds of trade-offs would be necessary to get some housing built.

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CHAPTER IV - WINTER, 1966

THE PUBLIC HOUSING DEAL IS RATIFIED

Recently the Planning Commission held a series of meetings on proposals to locate small, low-income public housing in peripheral middle-income areas. Mayor Lindsay's administration, in response to the acute need for low-income housing and the problems created by the continuing building of solid, low-income neighborhoods, has proposed an imaginative and forward-looking program . . .

What has been significant and alarming in the hearings has been the outspoken dislike and fear of the poor, expressed not only by the average residents of the middle-income areas but by their elected officials. Vituperative references to the poor and to the importance of preserving class distinctions were applauded.

In America we have prided ourselves on the erasing of lines between classes. We have rejected the labeling of groups, or the identifying of defined characteristics with any one group. Delinquency and vandalism, at the hearings, were identified with poverty. Both delinquency and vandalism are dramatically present at Long Island debutante parties and in so-called better suburbs. If we decide to live in a state of fear, then it is irrational to fear only one economic class.

Is it possible that our anti-poverty programs, valuable as they are, are labeling the classes in our society and sharpening lines between them? Are we having taught some new lessons in interclass hostility and fear? If so, the foundations of the system the middle-income groups stated they wish to preserve are frighteningly shaky.

The lamp beside the GoldenDoor shed no light in the Board of Estimate room these past few weeks. ¹

- Elinor Guggenheimer, Commissioner,
New York City Planning Commission
Letter to the Editor, New York Times,
June 28, 1966

The announcement of an agreement on October 27 did not eliminate these antagonisms. It merely changed their character by taking away the public sanction of most elected officials. For, despite the widespread opposition

by most of the local Queens politicians to the scatter-site proposals prior to October 27, there was an implicit understanding that they acquiesced in the agreement, as underscored by the borough president's reading into the record the names of the politicians present as he made his laudatory remarks. The emphasis of the political rhetoric that day at the Board of Estimate, of course, was that a badly needed high school site had been found that would reduce school overcrowding. There was also a recognition - remarkable in light of the statements made in the previous months - that there was a need for low rent housing in middle income areas. But then these officials could afford to be generous at a time when they were getting a high school in return. Indeed, not only did Mr. Cariello thank the various elected officials, "the Civic Associations of Queens, the Community Planning Boards, . . . and other community leaders who have made repeated trips to City Hall to testify" for their "united cooperation,"² but so also did a staunch advocate of scatter-site housing, Manhattan Borough President Percy Sutton, who said to the elected Queens state and city representatives present, "I think this is indicative of what ought to happen more often; elected, perhaps, to serve in one area, they are serving the people in all of the areas and I think you are to be commended, Gentlemen."³

As described earlier, the public housing project was only one item among several at this time that were in the middle of the disagreement among politicians and planners over who would control the planning process and in what policy directions it would go. Although the dispute

would be focused on by a New York Times November 2 editorial, "Political Football: Planning," it was nevertheless fairly difficult for the average citizen to really understand just what was going on. As in most planner versus politician disputes, the public statements did not necessarily mean what they seemed to if taken at face value.

On the one hand, the Times editorialized that

(T)he five Borough Presidents kicked the city's planning programs right off the field . . .

The issue, in the Borough Presidents' minds, was to show the Mayor that they could still call the signals, even if everyone went home with a broken leg. The real issue is whether obstructionist tactics, motivated by political self-interest, should be used against critical priorities of city-wide importance . . .

Mr. Cariello opposed the inclusion of low-income housing in a middle-income neighborhood in Queens. Mr. Sutton hoped to keep a locally favored Harlem residential project out of urban renewal or city planning boundaries. Mr. Connor was merely continuing his campaign against the Office of Staten Island Development set up by the Mayor's executive order to correct sordid and scandalous land exploitation in Staten Island to which the Borough President has been conspicuously unresponsive.

Each vote was a blow against long-overdue, carefully considered city planning policy, and against the city's future . . .

Still another Planning Commission report, on housing strategy, had urged the placement of small, scattered low-income housing groups to avoid the massive ghettos of the poor that are not only the source of the city's hard-core slums but many of its hard-core problems. The Logue report on Housing and Neighborhood Improvement last month pinpointed all of these crises and called for a crash program for large scale ghetto, and Harlem, renewal.

The Borough Presidents' argument that they can take the planning responsibility for their own areas is not a valid one. It is refuted by the record.

As things stand now, the score is city, nothing; Borough Presidents, nothing; the people of New York, nothing. It may have been a slick game of political football-playing, but it set a record of sorts for fouls. ⁴

On the other hand, Percy Sutton, the Borough President of Manhattan, in unusual sensitivity to a newspaper for a politician, responded with a long letter, saying

. . . (Your editorial) passed beyond the realm of fair comment and was, regrettably, permeated with misleading and inaccurate material . . .

(C)oncerning the site for an integrated housing project in Queens, . . . I voted with the Mayor, not against him, as your editorial said, to approve a site that the Mayor had advised was entirely satisfactory . . .

(C)oncerning a Mayor's office for Staten Island, my vote came after . . . receipt [at an executive session of the Board of Estimate] of an opinion by a member of the City Planning Commission that it, the City Planning Commission, could, in a Staten Island office, perform as effectively the tasks proposed for the new development corporation office.

Thus, my vote was in support of a City Planning Commission Office on Staten Island but against a proliferation of agencies . . .

I have neither statutory authority nor personal desire to supplant the Mayor in planning or indeed in any other way. Yet, together with other members of the Board of Estimate, I have the statutory authority and responsibility to review, evaluate and vote upon planning and other matters in accordance with my conscience and judgment . . .

(A) study of my record will show that I have avoided the partisan and the narrow in favor of an independent and progressive approach to issues; and that I support what is best for my borough and my city without regard to personal pride or public prejudice. ⁵

One of the problems here is that the Times mistakenly attempts to impart the impression that there is an impartial planning solution to these problems that is distinct from political and social values. For in none of the three cases cited is there an engineering type of answer that can be computed as simply as something like a road's traffic capacity. Each of

them deals with more complex issues that involve judgments on human relationships, and in these situations every side to a dispute has a "political self-interest." Indeed, the Times' view of what is of city-wide importance is, in and of itself, part of what comprises political self-interest in the support that a liberal mayor wants.⁶ For one of the most important powers in a city can be that of the news media, which can make or break a particular issue by its handling of the coverage. It is not without reason that New York magazine has consistently placed top officials of the Times among its list of the ten most powerful people in the City.⁷ The ability of the newspaper to influence governmental attitudes and awareness is considerable, as indeed, the frequent references to it in this paper show.

Another problem with the editorial is that it lumps all the borough presidents together, but neglects to mention the more powerful members of the Board, the Controller and President of City Council, without whom even a unanimous vote of the Borough Presidents would have been to no avail. Thus, by not accurately stating the political power realities, and by not explaining the "gentleman" ways by which a Mayor introduces a proposal after he has lost the closed door battle, the Times left the door open for Mr. Sutton's accurate defense that he was in favor of the low-income housing project. The fact that it was true that Cariello had opposed the original site was lost. Furthermore, Sutton's stated reasons for his other two votes, even if they may not have been the real reasons, only serve to amplify how planning decisions, which have a physical objective as the long run goal, in fact may be determined by one's feelings about the

validity of the process. Taken at face value, one can sympathize with Sutton's explanation on the urban renewal vote - his desire for equity for housing developers in Harlem who had spent four years negotiating with the city for the land which at his insistence was excluded from the Harlem urban renewal area; and the choice of a City Planning Commission or Mayor's office for Staten Island is again one of those judgmental matters that could go either way, for successful planning would depend on the political power relationships and judgments of the people who would eventually be appointed to those jobs.

All this just serves to point out the complexity of the problem facing anyone who tries to improve the overall state of planning in a city. No matter how valid the Times' arguments are about the overall failure of planning by borough presidents (and from personal knowledge I certainly agree with the Times' comment about Mr. Connor's lack of concern about land speculation in Staten Island), nevertheless the institutional process proposed as a solution must be able to pass other tests as well; and each case must draw a compromise between having all-inclusive power to mandate physical change and keeping the doors open for participation by interested parties. If one is going to make the attempt to completely bypass the existing political power structure, then one had best consider carefully whether he can still obtain his objectives without needing the support of those whom he has antagonized. Or, he must decide that the issue involved is worth the sacrifice. In the particular cases cited above, it is not at all clear that the judgments made by the Lindsay administration

were accurate, or, if the conceptual judgment was correct, that the implementation of the program was carried out well enough to have done justice to the original political initiative and courage. Frederick O' R. Hayes, Budget Bureau director during Lindsay's first term, hit the nub of the problem when he stated

(P)rogress has its problems, too . . . (Y)ou design a new program and it works logically but only if you can find management talent to carry it through . . .

Management is a subtle and difficult skill. The whole pattern in corporations and in much of government has tended to create organization men, people who are knowledgeable in rather specialized activities but who do not have the capacity for real managerial analysis.

In fact, the training of professionals in nearly every area is just not oriented in this direction . . . But admittedly, people do come along who can design good innovative programs. Okay, but knowing how to design a program and running it are different things.

And then, there's a third quality needed which is just as rare . . . (Y)ou also need personnel with a capacity for feedback - people with the sensitivity to evaluate what is actually happening as a result of any given program and who can use that information to sharpen or change the structure.⁸

In addition to all of this, Mr. Hayes added yet another condition in commenting "It's not much trouble getting first-rate youngsters, but it's harder to find the kind of people you need on the senior level - those who are very bright at management and can also relate to other people."⁹

Notwithstanding the unanimity which the transcript of the October 27 Board of Estimate meeting indicated, all was not calm with this part of the scatter-site program. The Times reported that "several Queens leaders"¹⁰ (unnamed) would oppose the plan, but I have not been able to fully determine

who these people were. One source of confusion stems from the desire of a number of the politicians involved to straddle both sides of the fence at various times. An example of this is Assemblyman Herbert Miller, who wrote in 1972 to the Times Magazine that he

. . . demand(ed) an immediate retraction of Walter Goodman's gratuitous but false statement . . . that I offered 'no word of criticism' to the 'compromise' proposal at the 1966 Board of Estimate meeting to re-locate a low income housing project in Forest Hills.¹¹

Mr. Miller continued in his letter that the "documented facts" are that it was assumed that the high school would go on 5 1/2 acres in Corona and that the announcement about the housing project was "an addendum."

Hearing this,

I instinctively arose from my seat, rushed to the podium and voiced my criticism of the city's heavy handedness in selecting Forest Hills as the new site without a public hearing or consultation with leaders in the Forest Hills community. I was assured that due process would follow.¹²

But, as Mr. Goodman pointed out in refusing to issue a retraction, not only did the executive assistant to the Mayor and the Queens Borough President explicitly refer to the housing site as integral parts of their announcements, but also the acreage for the school site was never mentioned at the Board, thereby allowing any mistaken assumptions on the details to continue.¹³ As mentioned earlier, the Mayor's representative had opened the meeting by saying:

. . . we have concluded that Lewis Avenue [Corona] is the only available site at which the entire high school complex could be constructed and that there is another

equally desirable site in the same area on which low rent housing can be placed . . . a vacant parcel a few blocks south of the Lewis Avenue site . . . at 108th Street, 62nd Drive, and 62nd Avenue. ¹⁴

Furthermore, rather than offering criticism, the transcript has Mr. Miller stating:

I do want to defer to our great Borough President Cariello. I feel now that we have assurances, finally that the determination of the Board will be in favor of a much-needed high school in the area of 100th Street and Lewis Avenue and I am withdrawing any demands at this time for any further hearings. ¹⁵

As to Mr. Miller's 1972 implication that the due process that he was assured would follow did not, one has to remember that a formal process does not necessarily change a prior decision. Although in 1972 it was to his political advantage to add this charge of procedural impropriety to what had become an unpopular decision, the facts make it difficult to support this. As the following sequence of events shows, the letter of the law was followed, although the spirit of community participation as it has come to be practiced in subsequent years was clearly lacking.

There were two different procedures to be followed for legal approval of the sites. In the case of the high school, the Board of Education had to request approval from the local advisory school board, the City's 5-member Site Selection Board, and then the Mayor, whose ratification of a Site Selection Board decision is routine. In the case of the housing project, approval had to be requested by the Housing Authority from the City Planning Commission and ratified by the Board of Estimate.

Both the Planning Commission and Site Selection Board have to hold public hearings, but the politics of getting approvals through the two agencies are very different. Because the Site Selection Board is composed of officials whose agencies will be involved in the many details of implementation - the Director of the Budget Bureau, the Chairman of the City Planning Commission, the Commissioner of the Real Estate Department, the Borough President of the Borough under discussion, and the Controller - there is usually a serious attempt to achieve consensus at this basic stage of decision-making. However, an administration can impose its will on a policy matter, since three of the five officials are mayorial appointees. With the seven member City Planning Commission, on the other hand, only a majority is needed, for none of the six part-time commissioners have power of their own with which to continue any opposition other than their power of rational argument to influence others. Only the Chairman has such power. The route that the high school took through this process, which was much slower than that for the housing project, will be discussed in another chapter.

The Housing Authority, with the pressure of the Mayor's housing officials and the possible loss of federal funds, moved very quickly — incredibly quickly, in fact, for those familiar with the normal workings of the bureaucracy in New York. On November 9th, thirteen days after the political agreement had been announced at the Board of Estimate, the Housing Authority submitted its official request. With the rules of the Planning Commission requiring that there normally be two weeks advance

notice of items for its public hearings, and with the few days advance time needed for printing, the scheduling of November 30 as the date for the public hearing meant that the agency was really pushing the item. It would not have been surprising if opposition had not had a chance to get organized, especially under the circumstances that there had been months of work with Borough President Cariello, who said he had been working with many community groups to achieve an acceptable solution.

But opposition there was, although this was forgotten by many in 1971. The person it was addressed to, the Chairman of the Planning Commission, was none other than Donald Elliott, who, as counsel to the mayor, had been a part of the group instituting the policy. For during the time between the Housing Authority's application and the public hearing there had been a major re-shuffle in the ten month old administration. On November 23, 1966, Donald Elliott had been appointed Chairman of the Planning Commission, Walter Washington came from Washington, D. C. to become the Chairman of the Housing Authority, and Jay Nathan was appointed Administrator of the new Housing and Development Administration superagency after Edward Logue had turned down the job several weeks earlier. At his first public hearing Elliott heard the project "debated heatedly for five and a half hours,"¹⁶ with thirty speakers for the project, twenty against, and fifty-nine other persons recorded in opposition. The opposition of local residents, local civic associations, one State Assemblyman, and a representative of the local Community Planning Board, was, according to the report of the Planning Commission,¹⁷ based on contentions

about the area's problems which had been voiced in general about every scatter-site project: overcrowding and inadequate school and transportation facilities, a fear of increased crime from the new residents ("it would bring into the neighborhood ' people we just don't want to associate with. ' ")¹⁸ and objections specific to this site that foundation costs would be excessive and that the land should be used for a park or junior high school. Support from the project came from residents of the local area, other sections of Queens, and a host of civil rights, religious, and housing organizations, groups whose support of the project, based on the summary by the Planning Commission, could be characterized as being based on generalities about the need for low-income housing in "sound" neighborhoods.

Two days after the November 30 hearing, the Planning Commission approved the project. From my experience at the Commission, it is obvious that this speed was to make the deadline for the next Board of Estimate meeting, as the items for the Board's meeting normally have to be published in advance in The City Record, and the Commission's normal procedure is to announce decisions at its next meeting two or three weeks later. What makes the official report of the Commission noteworthy, in addition to its speed, was the interpretation of it by the press. The Times characterized the report as using "unusually blunt language"¹⁹ when the Commission said:

Certain of the fears and anxieties expressed by the residents of the community are based on a desire for security, tranquility, and a better life.

These goals are not unique for one class, but are shared by all citizens. We believe they are achievable, but only if we respond to the needs of the less fortunate . . .

(We reject) the contention that the poor are morally inferior, or that vandalism and delinquency can be equated with income level.²⁰

The Commission rejected the general charges about the problems of the area by saying that "it was a strong and thriving community. We are committed to maintaining and improving the viability of this area. In our judgment, introduction of low income families will provide an element of diversity which will enhance the community."²¹ It discussed the school situation at length, concluding that

. . . there will be sufficient school facilities . . . after the construction of the New Queens High School and the addition to Junior High School 157. The high school being considered for the Lewis Avenue site will be programmed in this year's capital budget.²²

It also noted proposed grade level reorganization plans of the central Board of Education would provide additional flexibility, as would the ability to move some of the administrative offices out of rooms being used in Public School 14 to get additional capacity if needed.

Notwithstanding these facts . . . we have recommended the Housing Authority keep in close touch with the Board of Education during the detailed planning of this project so that provision can be made within the housing development for facilities for pre-kindergarten, kindergarten and first and second-grade children, if necessary . . .²³

It also denied - as it turned out, incorrectly - that the buildings for the project would require expensive pilings, based on assurances from the Housing Authority that the project could be built within federal cost limits: "It is properly the Housing Authority's responsibility to make this determination."²⁴

What was this project that had been approved? It was for 828 apartment units, with a specified breakdown of apartment types by number of bedrooms, to be "probably" built in seven buildings ranging from 10 to 22 stories. Legally, what had been approved were two separable items passed upon simultaneously -

- 1) a plan calling for public housing, and
- 2) a specific project for 828 units, 30% to be designed for the elderly, on the 8.46 acre site bounded by Horace Harding Expressway, Colonial Avenue, 62nd Drive, and 108th Street in Queens.

Although this plan technically appears insignificant and is standard operating procedure for the city, as we shall see, it has a number of serious consequences for the planning process.

Thus, as a result of the change in sites from Corona to 108th Street, the project size increased by 63% from 507 units to 828 units. More about the factors behind this change in project size will be discussed later.

As the item moved to the Board of Estimate the public's understanding of the situation was not increased by the desire of Borough President Cariello to have his position remain ambiguous. He did not want to provide the real political leadership and consciousness raising that might be expected from someone who had five weeks earlier called the school and housing deal "a victory for everything that is good and visionary" at the Board of Estimate, or for that matter, from someone who was to **speak** at the Board's hearing later that week of the need for "brotherhood." For opposition to the housing project had continued after the Planning Commission's December 2 approval. A few days afterwards about 30 people picketed the

Queens Borough Hall with such signs as "Parks and Schools Before Population Explosion" and "Low Cost Housing at High Expense." Rather than trying to explain that, aside from the social purposes involved, this was part of a package to provide their area a high school and also not place anything in the Flushing Meadows park, Deputy Borough President Sidney Leviss "met briefly with them and told them that Borough President Mario J. Cariello had not yet decided what action he would take at the Board of Estimate meeting."²⁵

On December 9, 1966, the Board of Estimate unanimously approved at its public hearing the Forest Hills public housing project. The New York Times, after months of reporting opposition to scatter-site housing in Queens, after its editorials and analysis articles on the planning and politics of the issues, and after its article on the very strong nature of the Planning Commission's report of approval, never reported this Board of Estimate decision and that the Queens Borough President had in fact joined in the decision. Indeed, nothing that the Board of Estimate discussed that day was carried in the Times, not even the lengthy debate on the West Side Urban Renewal Project. That means that only a sketchy summary of the hearing is possible.*

* There is, of course, the argument that what happened at the public hearing is irrelevant because the decision was made earlier at executive session. For the Board of Estimate, a municipal body unique in the nation, "is, paradoxically, the most democratic and most anti-democratic institution imaginable."²⁶ However, a study of this institution is beyond the scope of this paper, and the public hearing at least gives some idea of the citizen attitude even if it does not provide any insight into the elected officials' motives.

Because of the procedural process by which the items on the agenda that most people are there to discuss are held until last so that most of the hundreds of items can be disposed of quickly and because of the time spent on the West Side Urban Renewal Project, the hearing on the Forest Hills project did not start until late that Friday evening. About one dozen people spoke in opposition, two dozen spoke in support, and about a dozen people were listed as being on each respective side but not speaking. The only elected official listed as attending the Board's hearing was City Councilman Arthur Katzman, registered as being in opposition but not speaking. Of the people speaking in opposition, most appear to have been local residents and representatives of local civic associations except for Roger Starr, head of the Citizens Housing and Planning Council of New York, who in a very interesting speech supported the original project in Corona but opposed the Forest Hills site for a wide variety of reasons. Jerry Birbach, who later led the fight against the project, and the rabbis in opposition five years later, were not there. Of the people speaking in support, they came from various pro-housing groups around the city and Queens, including the city-wide Jewish and other religious groups, civil rights organizations, and a variety of local neighborhood groups from generally black neighborhoods around the city.²⁷

It would be wrong to assume that all the speeches on either side were either rhetoric or diatribes. For example, Roger Starr, in opposing the project because one has to deal with "specific proposals" and not just principles, noted that at times one might find himself "lined up with racists . . . But unless you believe in guilt by association, I ask you to

listen to my words and not look at my company. "28 On the other hand a supporter representing the New York AFL-CIO, who was also a resident of the area, noted that although he was sad that an overcrowded community planning board meeting "of my neighbors" a week earlier had exhibited "widespread discrimination and widespread evidence of racism," that nevertheless one had to "face up" to "the tremendous problems which will result in the community" and the fact that he felt some of the objections to the project were "legitimate." He went on to say that

. . . all of the social agencies of the city should be put to work to prepare the community for the proper and inevitable integration and the problems that will take place. I think that if people can be told what the problems are, we in the community can be prepared to handle them. . . . I didn't ask for the low-cost housing project to be in our area but it's coming . . . (There) are literally hundreds of decent human beings in the community . . . (and) we will do everything in our power to make it succeed. 29

In any case the testimony was not sufficient to cause the officials to postpone a decision until another meeting. Borough President Cariello noted as the vote was taken after testimony had ended that although the late hour (11 P. M.) had caused many of the people who wanted to oppose the project to leave, they "were permitted the opportunity to place a statement on the record and some of them did so. "30 (One should remember that orthodox Jews had to be home before sundown of that Friday evening.)

Mr. Cariello also made an eloquent statement that he "deplor(ed) the references to religion and to race," observed that non-residents of Queens might misunderstand some of the statements and actions of the

Queens residents, but that "all of these things must be understood within the context" of a young borough which "has yet to begin to grow" in comparison to the other developed boroughs. He went on to say that "this is not a religious or racial issue," and cited as proof both the telegrams of support for the project from three rabbis of congregations in the area (Rabbis Jacob Polish, Joshua Derby, and Benjamin Bockser) and the many telegrams and communications "against this low-income housing from persons of all races and nationalities." Concluding that "the predominant issues here are that all of us must give ourselves in brotherhood and understanding so that all people will have the opportunity to live in housing that will integrate all the communities in our city," he voted for the project.*³¹

Since the Times did not report on the hearing, the New York liberal and conservative communities missed the chance to read that beautiful rhetoric; and on that ignominious note the political battle to get official city approval for the Forest Hills project ended. The lack of newspaper coverage was a prophetic way for this phase of the housing development to end, for little was to be heard about it for the next five years as the governmental system tried to implement what the political process had sanctioned.

* Cariello several months later came out against any more scatter-site public housing in Queens until it had a new "subway, more paved streets and improved sanitation and police services." ³²

CHAPTER V - 1967 THROUGH 1970
THE HOUSING PROJECT QUIETLY GOES THROUGH
GOVERNMENTAL DESIGN AND FINANCIAL APPROVALS

Because the proposed housing site is situated at a prominent location visible to the great number of people who pass on the Expressway; because of the desirability of introducing architectural quality into this neighborhood; and because the project could serve as a demonstration as to how a public housing development could provide aesthetic enhancement of a community; the Commission recommends that the Housing Authority exert every effort to design this development, both the buildings and open spaces with architectural distinction and quality.¹

- Report of the City Planning Commission approving the Forest Hills project, December 2, 1966

'(G)ood design' is a hopelessly vague criterion over which parades of expert witnesses . . . (can) wrangle forever . . .

(The Forest Hills) decision . . . was not judged important enough to warrant the apparatus of special design studies . . .²

- Jonathan Barnett (former head of the New York City Planning Department's Urban Design Group), Urban Design as Public Policy

For five years after its approval, the housing project wound its way through the planning stages. Construction did not start until late 1971, though this chapter will only cover the period through 1970. This length of time is not too unusual for many public construction projects in New York City. Therefore, this part of the process is going to be examined because

1) virtually everyone interviewed agreed that because of the general changes in social and political attitudes, the protests against the project were much more effective than they would have been if construction had started several years before the actual date of December 1971, and

2) some of the issues which split the liberal support during the later protests grew out of decisions made in the disputes which caused the time delay in the first place. This, of course, illustrates a classic dilemma of the planning process: is the particular detail being disputed important enough to be worth causing the time delay in the project, with all the unforeseen changes that can happen in the future, or is it more important to get things built? The way these disputes are resolved — whether by one side withdrawing its objections or by innovative approaches to a new solution — is one indication of the values held by the decision makers. This is not to say that the participants should have foreseen all that happened - for hindsight is a wonderful advantage - but rather to try to illustrate certain points so that they might be instructive for us now.

A major issue of contention was the number of units to be built on any one site. This was crucial, as most of the physical and some of the social characteristics of any housing development are the result of decisions on size of project, density, and bedroom distribution. (The last item determines the age distribution of adults and the number of children, and from that, the demand for school services, playground space, and to a lesser extent, the level of maintenance problems.) The other major determinant for a development, the income level of the population group being

built for and how much one can spend for construction, was in this case not decided by market forces and the judgment of the developer but by the local and federal regulations established for public housing. (One should note the inter-connection between income and the physical development - such things as a lack of nearby recreational facilities can be minimized if a family can afford to go to the country during New York's hot summer, or an inability of residents to maintain internal surveillance for security may be minimized by the ability to hire a doorman.)

According to a high level administration official:

Except for Joe Christian - and, by implication, Walter Washington - there was never any acceptance in the Housing Authority of the concept of small scatter-site. We rammed it down their throats. (We were able to pursue this concept) only with the backing of Hillman in the federal government and a manoeuver to raise the cost limits.³

In this particular case, how was the size decision reached? The search for an alternate to the Corona site was limited by a need to "hold to the (city-wide) numbers." This was not made any easier by the fact that the proposed Corona project was, as far as I know, the largest of all the scatter-site projects being proposed by the administration. As in most decisions of this type, a decision on principle was made by top officials operating under assumptions about the way certain details would be resolved.

When the site was substituted in Queens we assumed a slight increase was necessary . . . There was the political problem that (Bronx Borough President) Herman Badillo was in favor of the program only if we didn't retreat on the number of total Queens units, and at that time there was a problem with another site.⁴

At the same time one top housing official signed off on this new site after making a personal quid-pro-quo with a top Housing Authority official that, in return for the site "being forced down the Authority's throat," a capital budget amendment would be gotten if "that damned Horse Creek" caused serious enough foundation problems to jeopardize the concept of keeping the buildings as low as possible (though they were still multi-story).⁵

But in July, 1966, Jason Nathan had become the City Renewal Commissioner, and during the fall, in the reshuffle that preceded the official November announcement of his becoming head of the Housing Development Administration, there was a shift in who had administration responsibility for the details of Forest Hills.⁶ What the former housing official had expected to be a slight increase in number of units, an increase that was acceptable to this official partly because of the knowledge of the financing deal, became much more than that. For with a different individual in charge, there was a different set of personal values that had to contend with the philosophy of the Housing Authority; and what one person might have considered unacceptable enough to press for a different resolution was considered acceptable to another person. One can speculate, for example, that it might have been considered essential for the Housing Authority to be willing to state publicly that the project could have been built within federal limits, a consideration which then would have superseded the prior official's desire to keep the project size down even if that meant using city funds.

With the need to increase the units for political reasons anyway, and with larger Forest Hills site zoned such that it would allow a much larger project, the philosophy of the Housing Authority in implementing the site change decision became much more important. As stated by Max Schreiber, Director of the Design Division of the Housing Authority,

Our procedure is to design as many units as zoning will allow . . . We take into account various aspects of the community and then submit the project to city agencies, the City Planning Commission, the Board of Estimate, and then the federal lending agency. If approved, we go into architect selection. ⁷ (emphasis added)

This design criterion is merely one of the facets of a policy to build as many units as possible legally - to play a numbers game of production, if you will. Another facet of this same outlook is to build large projects rather than small ones because of the administrative effort required to get each project through the bureaucracy and because of the long waiting list (150,000 families) for public housing. These are certainly understandable reasons. But it should be remembered that they have not always been the philosophy of the New York Housing Authority. Some of the Housing Authority's old low-density projects almost resemble present day planned unit developments, and they were built at a time when the zoning envelope for New York City would have allowed a population of 50 million as compared to the present zoning envelope of 12 million.

This design philosophy also was an obstacle for the vest-pocket housing units which the Lindsay administration people wanted to build in the inner city areas. Unlike their vision of building one six-story building

on a small lot in a block of existing 5-story tenements, the Housing Authority refused to build less than 300 unit projects. Eventually this conflict was resolved by a procedure of finding five or six sites close to each other and letting them out to bid as one combined contract.⁸

Thus, it was not the Housing Authority bureaucracy that was trying to initiate these major changes in operations but other decision-makers; consequently, the changing of the day-to-day decisions to accommodate to these new policies could not be effected by the same bureaucracy unless there had been a staff with new outlooks, either through re-education or new personnel.

Despite this, an interesting point to ponder during all the subsequent arguments that, on the one hand, unit construction costs for the project were too high because of high fixed costs of land and foundations and, on the other hand, that the project was too large, is that the Housing Authority formal application was not for the full number of units allowed under the R6 zoning, over 900, but for 828. The reason for this deviation, according to Mr. Schreiber, was that "City Planning didn't like it, and we acceded to their wishes."⁹ What reasons the officials in the Planning Department had for doing this are not known, but it illustrates that the officials in the Planning Department were more aware than the personnel in the Housing Authority of the inadequacy of accepting present zoning as the criterion for how many units should be built. Zoning for many reasons may be wrong, and, in any case, it certainly does not take into account the social class considerations involved in something as complex as scatter-site public housing.

Following Housing Authority procedure, the next step after Board of Estimate approval was to get approval from HUD in order to receive a commitment for the federal financing. Since 1) an architect would not be hired until after HUD approval, and 2) after he was hired, the architect would not be shown the Housing Authority's feasibility design studies, so "as not to influence him,"¹⁰ one would have thought that at this stage of generality the same proposal which the Board of Estimate had approved would simply be sent over to HUD, rather than change details. But for some reason - and I suspect it was because the Authority was becoming increasingly worried about foundation costs - this is not what happened.

The project, approved on December 9, 1966, was for 828 units which the Housing Authority "envisaged" would be in seven buildings (One of 22 stories, three of 12 stories, and three of 10 stories). But the Development Program sent to HUD one month later had 848 units in six buildings (two of 14 stories and four of 15 stories) plus a one-story community center. HUD eventually requested a letter that this did not conflict with zoning, as this was not what had been approved by the City, and on June 8, 1967, the City Planning Commission confirmed that the change was "minor" and did not need official re-submission. I have my doubts about whether 20 units are worth this kind of paperwork, despite the extra cushion on cost they might represent. In any case, the development program was approved by HUD on October 26, 1967; the site as selected by the City was approved a week later on November 2 (not, it should be noted,

until after internal HUD debate over the subsoil question); and the formal legal documents for federal financing of the repayment of the Housing Authority bonds were executed on November 9. These called for a total development cost of \$17,155,000 with a maximum annual federal contribution to the Housing Authority of \$1,029,300.¹¹ Eleven months had elapsed for federal approval of the project.

The difficulties of the architectural design process, subject to all the cost constraints, further lengthened the planning period. On November 27, 1967, Ulrich Franzen and Associates were appointed as the architects. Ordinarily, there would not be too much significance as to what firm was selected to design a public housing project, given the notable lack of distinction in housing projects all over the country, but that was not true here. For the selection of the Franzen firm was one small consequence of a widely heralded move by the Lindsay administration aimed at improving the design of both public and private buildings. This was the formation in 1967 by mayorial executive order of the New York City Urban Design Council, a task force of citizens and professionals under the chairmanship of CBS head William S. Paley.

In accordance with this group's recommendation, in some areas of government there was actually a change in the administrative structure and personnel involved in design review and specifications. The best example was the creation of a new "Urban Design Group" in the City Planning Department. This group, responsible for a number of planning innovations,

had varying degrees of success depending on the personal interests and influence of that small number of individuals and the extent to which they were supported by the upper echelon of the Planning Department and the Mayor's office against traditional political and economic pressures.¹² But with the responsibilities for construction of buildings scattered among several operating agencies - for example, the Board of Education built all schools whereas the Department of Public Works built buildings for a number of city agencies, including libraries, police stations, and fire stations - there of necessity had to be a different degree of implementation of this new "design initiative" across the entire public works spectrum.*

In the Housing Authority, which was itself responsible for the construction of public housing, there were apparently no major changes within the design division. Furthermore, of all city agencies, it alone had the additional difficulty of having to meet detailed federal specifications for buildings, as well as having legally imposed federal cost limits to work within. So clearly, changing the design philosophy of a system dedicated to a "production philosophy," one which had had an historical mandate from federal guidelines that all non-essentials were an extravagance,** would not be a simple matter. As Tunney Lee once pointed out,

* See also a 50 page report produced by the Urban Design Council in 1971 highly critical of the entire budget, site selection, and development process, for the many city agencies. The report is described in "Architects' Study Says City Gets Poorest Design at Greatest Cost," New York Times, November 23, 1971, pp. 1 and 45.

** See Myerson and Banfield, Politics, Planning, and the Public Interest, pp. 93-94 for a discussion of the Public Housing Administration guidelines during the 1940's and early 1950's and how they resulted in units without closet doors or showers, and with exposed pipes, small rooms and concrete floors.

design is not going to be changed merely by the hiring of some good architects for individual buildings if the government personnel responsible for the over-all policy determination of site selection, density, building specifications, and supervision of the private architect all remain the same. There may be a few successes, and there may be some smaller details on which the new architect will win some victories - and these should not be denigrated - but on a larger scale of values change will be a lot less certain over the long run.

After attempting to correct some of the reasons which the better architectural firms gave as to why they did not accept city contracts (computation of fees, delays over payment, etc.), the administration attempted to recruit these firms to start designing municipal buildings. This led to Mayor Lindsay's announcing on July 13, 1967 that five noted architects would design six public housing projects. The hiring of Franzen, who had both before and since won many architectural awards, was also a result of this movement at the time.

In making the July 13 announcement, the issue of good architecture was couched in terms of higher costs. Lindsay's comment that better designed buildings "may cost a little more, but we can stand the cost. Good design is well worth it,"⁶⁹ is interesting because of the fact that the city had nothing to do with paying the costs. The federal government did, and there was no apparent agreement for them to raise their cost limits. The only way for the city to back up its position was to say it would commit city funds to pay for any "little" extra cost, but there was also no mention of that.

Walter Washington, Chairman of the Housing Authority, said, "It is possible to get better design without raising costs too high," but then "he noted that the architects had been told they could not exceed Federal costs regulations, which limit the cost of each apartment to \$20,000."¹⁴ And although some blamed the increased costs of the city's middle-income housing built under the "good design" program on generally rising construction costs, one unnamed housing official said, "Exposed concrete construction, which many of the better architects use, adds \$400 - \$500 a room to the cost of construction and two months to construction time."¹⁵

In addition to the many above impediments to innovative design, the architect was faced with the fact that - despite the Planning Commission's statement to the contrary - the Housing Authority preliminary studies had indicated that there were subsoil problems. Mr. Schreiber's comment later that they did not take test borings at the time although they knew they would be needed may be explained by several reasons - 1) because he believed at the time that "a private builder's pilings were successful but were abandoned because FHA did not approve the marketing of middle-income housing on the site"¹⁶ and 2) although he did not say it, it is my understanding that it is illegal for the city to take test borings before it owns the property in question.

In order to make what follows more intelligible, the original cost as approved by HUD and within which the architect would presumably be required to design, is summarized below:

Land	\$ 2,325,000
Administration	465,000
Interest	500,000
Planning	803,800
Construction and Equipment	<u>12,405,000</u>
	\$ 16,543,000
5% Contingency	<u>612,000</u>
	\$ 17,155,000 ¹⁷

It should be noted that the previously referred to federal cost limit of \$20,300 per apartment unit applied to the total cost of the project, including land and other costs, and not just construction of the physical apartments (total cost of \$17,155,000 divided by 846 units equals \$20,277.78). It also included any extra foundation costs that might be incurred over normal costs, as well as the "extra" for good design that John Lindsay referred to. These details would later prove critical. The low interest rate assumed should also be noted.

As events eventually transpired the design produced by Mr. Franzen was considered too expensive by the Housing Authority and after two years of work his firm was dismissed. The actual nature of the dispute between Mr. Franzen and the Authority over the design is somewhat confusing in its details, as the sides disagree not on the cost estimate for Mr. Franzen's eventual design, but rather on whether this cost was within the dollar amount available for the project. In other words, the dispute,

which has continued to the present day, is to some extent over what instructions and procedures were communicated between architect and client. Complicating this essential aspect of the dispute is the contention of the Housing Authority that it was the design philosophy of Mr. Franzen which inevitably caused him to exceed the allowable dollar limits.

These matters became dramatically public at the height of the Forest Hills controversy in February, 1972, when Ada Louise Huxtable, the architectural critic of the New York Times, wrote a full page article on the project that was published prominently on the front page of its second section. The article, "Forest Hills: Innovation vs. Red Tape," highly praised Ulrich Franzen's rejected design and was very negative about the design the Authority had accepted from the second architect, Samuel Paul.¹⁸ The appearance of the article certainly did not help the Housing Authority in its beleaguered attempts at defense of the project at the time. The article was responded to with letters from Simeon Golar, Chairman of the Authority, and from Mr. Samuel Paul, letters which were never printed by the Times. But the issues raised, I think, are significant, especially when viewed in the larger context of how public decisions are made and with what criteria. For at their heart is the interplay between economics and social policy, especially as it is translated into reality by an individual architect who has his own conceptions about the relations between physical design and social behavior. They illustrate how problems of communication between different individuals

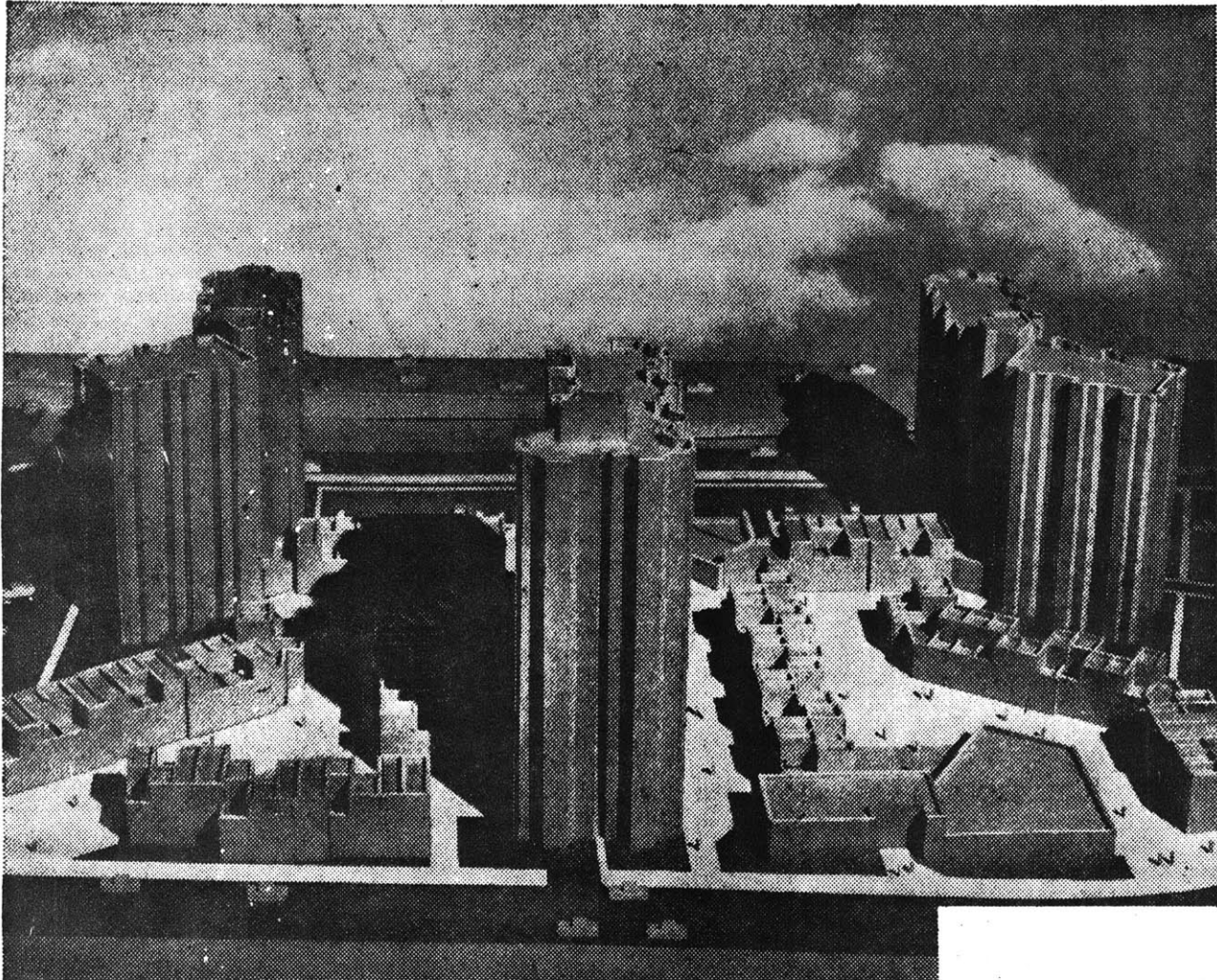
involved at various times can lead to misinterpretation by the respective parties and a subsequent hardening of positions.

Mr. Franzen, working within the density decisions made before he was hired, made his initial presentation in May, 1968, of the work done during the "Schematic Design Phase"¹⁹ (as it is defined on pages 6-7 of the Housing Authority document, "Architect's Contract for Federally-aided Project"). As was specified in the contract, this work was commenced only after the Housing Authority had provided the architect a copy of the Development Program approved by HUD, receipt of which Mr. Franzen had "acknowledged in writing."²⁰ His plan

. . . consisted of apartments and community facilities in rows of two-story structures clustered to form a pedestrian street running through the site, connected to three 17-story apartment towers and one 23-story tower for the elderly.²¹

According to Mrs. Huxtable, the reaction of the design chief of the Authority, Mr. Schreiber, was favorable, but that 1) the design would need to be approved by the Authority's Board of Directors because "it was a departure from Housing Authority design policy" and 2) there might be problems with the cost of "complex foundation work on a site known to have poor conditions."²²

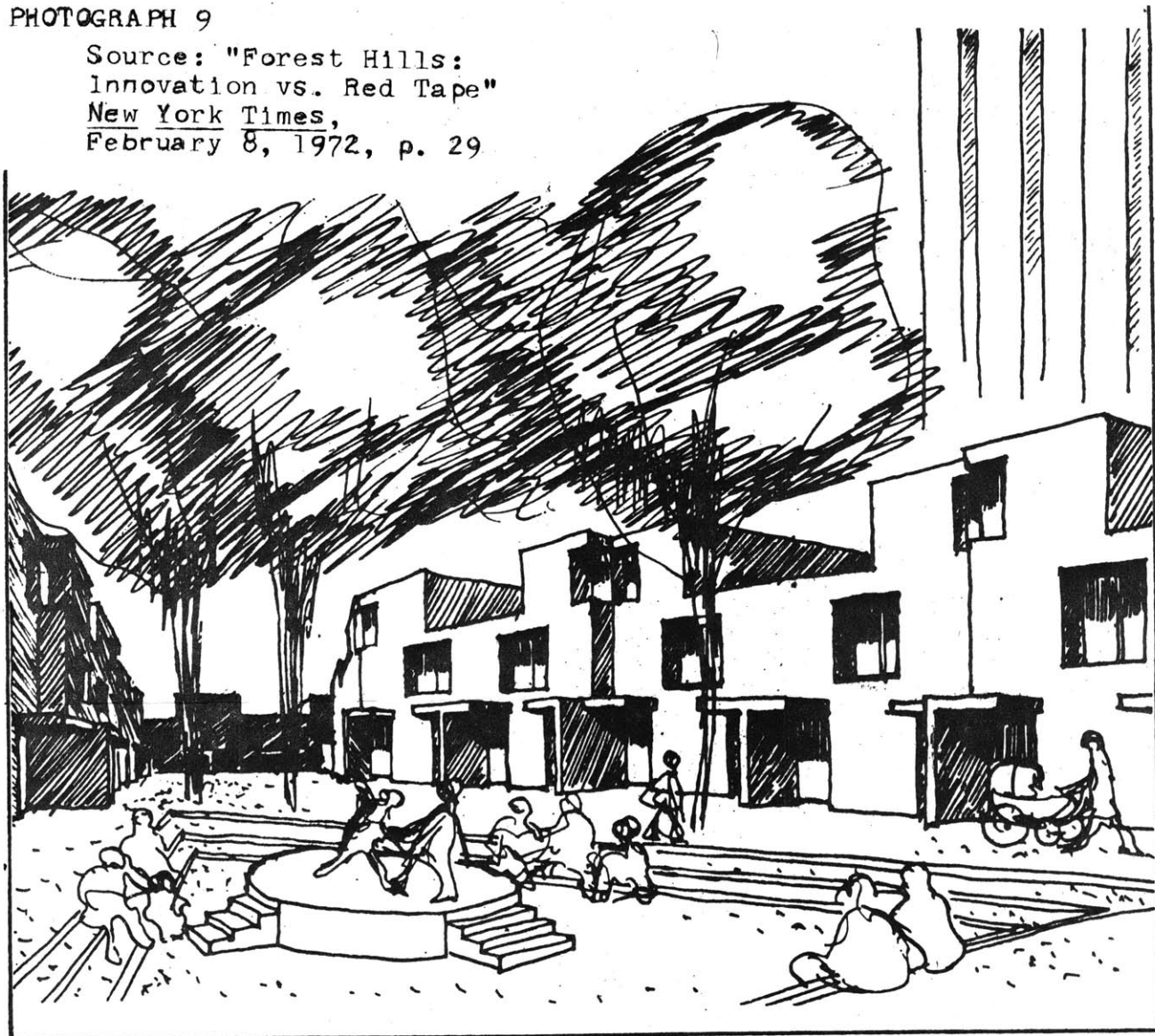
What action the Board of Directors took is not known to me. What is known is that Franzen presented his plan in a formal proposal eight months later in January, 1969, supporting his design with a foundation-engineering feasibility study, as required by his contract. His estimate for



The original design for the Forest Hills scatter-site housing project, above, was done by firm headed by Ulrich Franzen, right. It envisioned a variety of housing and low buildings connected by a pedestrian street that would have joined the various areas.

PHOTOGRAPH 9

Source: "Forest Hills:
Innovation vs. Red Tape"
New York Times,
February 8, 1972, p. 29



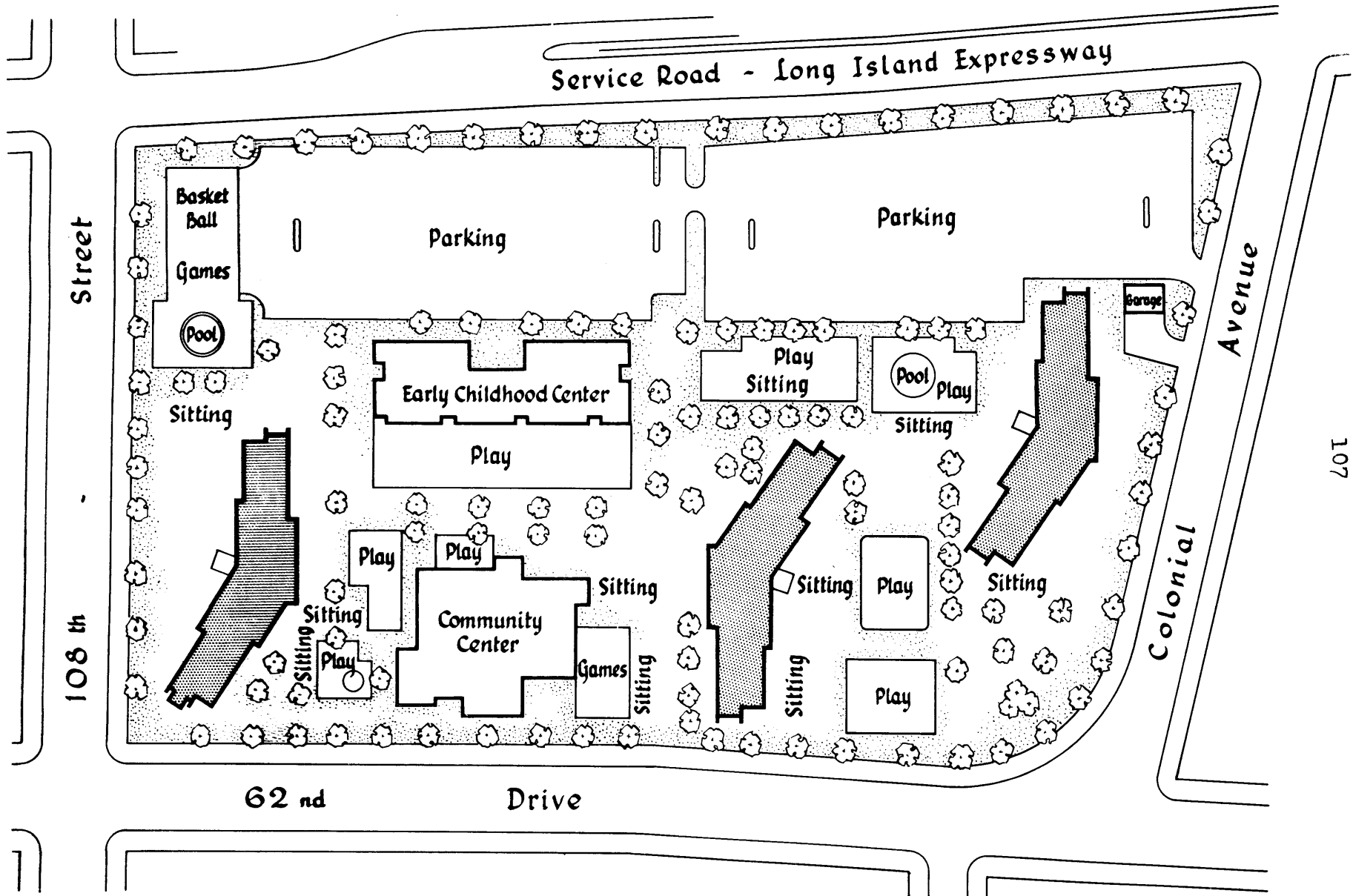
The street was planned to create a neighborhood character and function by establishing a physical and visual link



PHOTOGRAPH

An artist's rendering of the Forest Hills project design by Samuel Paul that was being constructed by the Housing Authority in early 1972

Source: New York City Housing Authority Photo Unit



PHOTOGRAPH 11 Site plan of Samuel Paul's design for the Forest Hills public housing project

Source: New York City Housing Authority Photo Unit

the cost was \$13 million, which, it should be noted, is the total obtained by adding the now two-year-old Development Program's figures for construction to the 5% contingency. Then, according to Mrs. Huxtable's version of the story, the minutes of the meeting show that the architect was told that he was "almost \$3 million over a \$10,284,750 development project figure of January, 1967."²³ Franzen then "said that this was the first he had heard of the figure, that he was working within statutory limits, as instructed, and that much of the escalation resulted from rising costs. A Housing Authority spokesman told Mr. Franzen that the full amount of the statutory limit was not available. The architect stated he had not been told this before."²⁴

Unfortunately, Mr. Golar's letter of reply to the Huxtable article only raises more questions. In it he states that the Development Program which was given to Mr. Franzen clearly indicated that \$12,405,000 was the budgeted construction cost, and that "the innovative design" presented in May, 1968, "exceeded the statutory limits established by the Federal government to the extent of over one million dollars. Even if money had not been a problem, the design incurably violated both the Multiple Dwelling Law and the City's Zoning Resolution. It was flatly and immediately apparent that there was no way that the Franzen design could be built."²⁵ I have not resolved the contradiction between Golar's \$12.4 million and the \$10.28 million figure referred to in the Huxtable article. There is a further question of how a competent architect's design can be "incurably" in violation of the governing codes. Disputes over costs of buildings are common. Disputes over meeting the technical requirements

of basic housing laws are not, especially when the design has not reached the zoning code's upper density limit. It is hard to believe that an architect would persist from May 1968 to January 1969 with a design that was in such basic disagreement with the codes, as Mr. Golar alleged.

However, Max Schreiber, the design chief of the Authority, said in the Huxtable article and in the interview I had with him in 1972 that the reason for Franzen's eventual firing was "economics completely."²⁶ When I asked him how this was the problem when Franzen stated that he was within cost, Schreiber said, "Franzen interpreted Congressional cost limits incorrectly. Both parties agreed on the actual costs of the buildings Franzen was given the chance to redesign, but he was obstinate and refused to."²⁷

Mr. Schreiber explained further that "We have to keep our buildings simple to come within cost limits. Brick is cheapest, so we still use it, not concrete panels." He continued,

Franzen was taken because he had a good reputation, and we're interested in good design. People like Pei, etc. won't work for us. We had Paul Rudolph for a few jobs, but he was unsuccessful because of high cost. He had to get extra city money. His design was like Franzen's - it had lots of breaks in the walls.²⁸

This would appear to contradict Mr. Golar's letter that "other projects designed at the same time as the Forest Hills project were successfully completed within cost limitations and now provide sorely needed public housing projects. Except for Mr. Franzen, the project in Forest Hills could have been built and occupied by now at a considerably lower cost

than now results from design imposed delays."²⁹ His statement also ignores the fact that the majority of the 1966 scatter-site projects never made it to the construction stage and were officially considered inactive projects.

Whether or not "good design" inherently requires higher cost is a matter of debate that will not be settled here. One's conception of good design may range from the large decision to use low rise walk-up buildings instead of high rise elevator buildings all the way down to such small details as the location of doorways in visual relation to the street; and a successful housing development is obviously the combination of many small and large design decisions coupled with the life-styles of the future residents and the social character of the neighborhood. Even the relative merit of Franzen's design versus the one produced by Samuel Paul is not the issue at this point of the paper, though that is obviously important within its own context for the future liveability of the development. Rather, what is at issue is the decision-making process with regard to the economics of the project.

First, one wonders why the issue of the construction cost limit dispute between the architect and the Housing Authority was not settled fairly quickly by the agency that in fact had the final word, HUD. If the May presentation had indicated that costs were going to be above the \$12.4 million figure, as the Golar letter states, let alone the \$10.3 million figure in the Huxtable article, then there were seven months to straighten out that issue before the formal schematic presentation of January, 1969. Even if

project costs could not be estimated precisely enough until January to know whether or not it would come in at the prescribed limit, certainly by that time communication between the Authority and the architect should have settled the economic guidelines. If the Authority was correct in its dollar estimates and in saying that Franzen refused to re-design, what was it that took another nine months to negotiate before Franzen was fired in September, 1969? Can it be ascribed simply to a failure of the administration in the Authority to make a firm decision quickly? I do not know; but since the terms of the architect's contract prevent him from proceeding from the Schematic Design Phase (Phase I) to the Design Development Phase (Phase II) until a written agreement has been worked out at a conference attended by a representative of HUD, said agreement to be "the basis for a Memorandum of Understanding"³⁰ upon which the Housing Authority will give written notification to proceed, one can only conclude that nothing was accomplished between January and September, 1969. It is the contention of then Deputy Director for Program Policy, and now Assistant General Manager of the Authority, James Messina, that the Authority could not get a definite answer from HUD during all this time, a time when the Washington HUD office was in the process of getting Congress to raise the national cost limit formula by about \$4,000 per unit.³¹ However, without further research, I am not able to say what the position of HUD was on this matter or what their expectations were about the probabilities of an imminent change in the cost limit standards.

A further opinion about the delays caused by HUD was expressed by Mr. Schreiber, who said,

HUD should review our material in broad general aspects and not the nitty gritty aspects of details (like the details of how elevator shafts are built), which delays us one year or more. Architects find it very frustrating. ³²

Were there other ways in which the economic problem could have been solved? For with construction costs constantly rising, the budget of January, 1967, got more out of date with each passing month. It presumably would have been even more unrealistic after any new architect had taken the time to do his new Schematic Design Phase, though one could always hope that by that time the federal guidelines would have caught up. One strategy that could have been pursued, if it had been the personnel in the Housing Authority who had been believers of the concept of scatter-site housing with smaller and better design, would have been to attack the political issues head on with the Mayor. He could have been asked to commit the extra city money needed to bring about the "better design" in this case and to reaffirm the city's commitment to make scatter-site housing a success. The technical people could have pointed out that the foundation costs were the principal problem, and that these were the direct result of the political deal that had chosen the site, and, in addition, that the 846 units constituted a very significant number of units in the housing pipeline (there were only 3,377 public housing units completed in 1969 and 1,700 in 1970). ³³

Yet, since it was the Mayor's office which had initiated the scatter-site policy, and not the Housing Authority, it should not even have been necessary for Housing Authority people to do this. There

should have been some degree of follow-up from the Mayor's office or the City Planning Department to see that the scatter-site projects kept moving. * For time lost over small amounts of money initially during a period of inflation (and even the \$1 million figure in Golar's letter represents only about 8% of the development program's construction cost, and 6% of total cost) frequently leads to greater losses later on.

* In 1968 the education section of the City Planning Department had a joint meeting with the Housing Authority, including Authority Chairman Albert Walsh, Joseph Christian and James Messina, and Adrian Blumenfeld from the school system in an attempt to resolve school issues in a half-dozen proposed public housing projects, including the Forest Hills and Lindenwood, Queens, scatter-site projects.³⁴

But this level of Planning Department initiative did not apparently extend to following the details on the design issues of housing itself. The Planning Department's housing section was not active at that time, and the 1969 involvement of the newly formed Queens office of the Department was minimal.

In August, 1969, a staff member of that office responsible for Community Planning District 6 called James Messina at the Authority and was informed that the designs were still schematic and were "contrary to the zoning resolution," that the Authority was being "blamed for inefficiency," and that Franzen would be dismissed. The conclusion was that "the status of the project = zero, its future unknown." Nothing was apparently done to initiate any follow-up.

In October, the Chairman of Community Planning District 6, Joe DeVoy, telephoned this staff member requesting "information about the status and new plans for the project" because "the community wants to review the plan." (That Mr. DeVoy was not dealing directly with the Authority is indicative of the lines of communication involved.)

Two weeks later, this staff member again talked with Messina and was informed that the new architect, Samuel Paul, was "working diligently" and that preliminary drawings were expected in three months. (Again, it should be noted that the Planning Department was not dealing directly with the Authority's Design Division.) This planner then informed DeVoy of this and "asked (him) to remind me after three months for new info."³⁵ Clearly, there was no serious concern about the situation from the Queens Office of the City Planning Department.

Even more importantly, the longer the time delay, the more likely that the project will die from either political opposition or bureaucratic inertia. Obviously, this particular strategy would have had many political problems, not the least of which were the Mayor's running for re-election in 1969 and consequent need for the Queens vote, * and the necessity for any proposal like this having to go back before the Board of Estimate. Another alternative would have been to combine the housing with some other public facility which would not have had a legal limit on costs and could have absorbed the extra costs for foundation pilings as part of a bookkeeping transfer of expenses. Still another strategy could have been consulting with the City Planning Department on the zoning margin and to see whether the extra elderly units that could be added to the high rise buildings of Franzen's design would bring it back within the per unit costs. For there is not really any difference, either for the inhabitants or the surroundings, between a 17-story building or a 20-story building. Such additional elderly units would not change the various projections of school needs, and, more importantly, would not have changed the basic objective of the Franzen plan, which was, in Franzen's official January report to be "purposefully in opposition to the usual complete segregation of spaces and activities."³⁶

The important issue here is not whether any particular strategy was rejected on political grounds, but whether anyone was trying to de-

* The infamous failure of the City to make Queens streets passable for up to a week after a 1969 snowstorm had already made that vote very problematic.

wise alternative ways of getting the development built quickly. Projects just do not move in a bureaucracy if no one is pushing to find different routes to achieve the objective when the first route is blocked. The City of New York had been experiencing problems in meeting federal construction cost limits for some time because they were not adjusted for regional factors, so the problem here was not a surprise. As one example, Eugenia Flatow said that she had worked on a manoeuver with the original Corona site to write down the land acquisition costs to \$1 by having it declared an urban renewal area.³⁷ Whether or not such a scheme would have worked in Forest Hills is unknown, but something along those lines would certainly have made a big difference, since there was a payment of \$2, 325, 000 for land (equal to \$267, 000 per acre or \$2, 747 per unit based on 846 units).

The City policy remained that all of the cost for public housing must be paid for by the federal government, whereas it was all right for the city to pay partial costs for other programs (urban renewal, highways, sewers, etc.) because that was what the federal government required in order for the city to get the federal funds. The city had decided, as a matter of local policy, that it wanted scatter-site public housing; it had been a local political manoeuver that had moved the site from a location with no subsoil problems to one that had them; and it had been local initiative that had wanted better design. As nice as it would have been for the federal government to pay for the consequences of all this, that was not legal. So, in practical terms, if the city had wanted the housing badly

enough, it could have considered its share of the extra costs as a way of getting another 90-95% federal contribution for a local project immediately, rather than losing more years over a very difficult housing problem in the city. After all, there was nothing magical in the federal formulas, and the city was spending money on subsidizing housing built under other formulas.

Moreover, it is clear that to have a good track record of using federal funds - which New York City does not have - and therefore to stand a better chance of getting more, the bureaucracy must take risks and force the issue. Perhaps this violates all rules of bureaucratic behavior and only a young organization can do this before its members have become overly concerned about things other than the prime goal. This might explain why the New York State Urban Development Corporation plays this brinkmanship game all the time, including even starting construction on land to which it has not yet obtained formal title or for which it has not yet received a federal commitment of 236 funds.

In any case, the fact remains that on September 5, 1969, the Franzen firm was fired, and apparently not paid for some of its work (the contract gives the Authority the right to terminate the contract on three days notice, with the architect "entitled to receive just and equitable compensation for any satisfactory work . . ." [emphasis added]). A week later, on September 12, 1969, the firm of Samuel Paul was retained. Whereas the Franzen firm had never worked for the Housing Authority before, Paul's had, and it was described by Schreiber in 1972 as "a practi-

cal office - knows cost, knows design."³⁸ Although these are attributes that are certainly important in getting projects actually built, what in fact appears to be the most significant change was the way the project was processed by the city and federal governments. Rather than negotiating a new federal contract at the start of design and then holding the architect to that fixed dollar figure, they simply made sure that he was designing what they felt were the most economical buildings, let the project go to bid, and then renegotiated the legal documents for the federal contribution at that time. This procedural (or attitude) change made all the difference, for just as other social and legal factors which were to make the opposition to the project stronger changed during the two years that this took, so too did the legal basis on which HUD could award subsidies. A new law took effect in May of 1971. Since the HUD office no doubt knew this was in the Congressional winds during 1970, I strongly suspect that this was deliberate, and that what made the administrators in the system willing to follow this procedure was their confidence in an architect who was a known quantity and who was willing to eliminate what HUD and the Authority felt were the more expensive aspects of his design.

The chronology of the process went as follows. In January, 1970, Mr. Paul presented his Phase I design concept, which "envisioned three 23-story buildings, four 4-story and four 2-story 'townhouses,' a community center and an early childhood center."³⁹ Ironically, this design also included some low level buildings. Since Paul presumably knew something of the history behind Franzen's dealings with the Authority, this would seem to imply that there was nothing drastically wrong with the

idea of having some low rise buildings by spreading their higher per unit costs throughout the total project cost. Indeed, Schreiber stated that Paul's low rise buildings were nice, but that they "cost \$50,000 per unit instead of our normal \$30,000 per unit."⁴⁰ Therefore, after a series of design review meetings the architect, Housing Authority and HUD agreed on April 14, 1970 to delete the eight low-rise buildings, but to keep the same total number of units by adding them to the high rise buildings. In other words, one could not average in some units of higher cost into the whole project, one had to minimize all per unit costs.

So again, what was important was not so much the wishes of the private architect but the directions taken by the officials responsible for public policy, with economics again being the rationale. In this case, it seems clear that part of the incentive to reduce the variety of housing types came from officials at HUD. This took place after HUD had issued national guidelines, as required by the 1968 Housing Act, that all public housing for families should be constructed as low rise buildings, unless it was determined to be economically infeasible. Thus, what had started out as a social experiment to encourage a more diverse racial and economic distribution of people throughout the city as the "macro" decision, ended up being decided at the "micro" level not with the participants in the process debating the pros and cons of how a given physical design would encourage or discourage social behavior patterns at the neighborhood level, but rather by technical personnel concerned about minimizing costs. The political choices as to priorities - varied housing types, community center, parking spaces, etc. - as well as whether a social experi-

ment of this type was so sensitive that the foundation costs should be borne for purposes of time alone, were never given to the social planners, let alone the citizenry of the neighborhood involved. Many of that last group, indeed, by now were under the mistaken illusion that the project was dead.

In fact, it seems fair to say that the choices about what kind of scatter-site housing project to build were made in the same way that many other decisions about city life have been made for this century — on technical criteria. This theme is amplified by Lisa Peattie in her article, "Reflection on Advocacy Planning," in which she states that whereas "planning" in ancient cities was done by individuals and small social organizations like families, guilds, and the local church,

Our cities are more and more publicly managed environments. Private actions take place within a generally narrowing network of public intervention, public policy, and public planning.

One way in which we have handled this transformation has been by recasting questions of public policy as problems for technical solution. 'Much of the history of social progress in the twentieth century,' says Harvey Brooks, 'can be described in terms of the transfer of wider and wider areas of public policy from politics to expertise. Often the problems of political choice have become buried in debates among experts over highly technical alternatives.' . . .

In a rapidly changing world of pluralistic goals, the casting of policy decisions into a technical framework makes possible an operating consensus that is necessary to keep our cities running even as well as they do.

But as a consequence, we have developed a set of bureaucratic management institutions which often seem impersonal and alien to human feelings.⁴¹

After the April, 1970, agreement the processing of the project went through the various approval stages with relative speed, as these things go. After receiving two site plan studies, HUD approved one of them on July 9, 1970, and authorized the Housing Authority to start the Phase II Design Development Phase, which consisted of drawings detailed enough to make firm cost estimates, scale plans of apartments and buildings, wall sections, detailed site plan, and a preliminary design of utility services. Four months later, on November 20, 1970, HUD approved the Phase II work and authorized the start of Phase III - Construction Documents (working drawings and specifications).⁴²

On paper, at least, there was now reason for the Authority to be optimistic about the project as the end of 1970 approached. The processing hurdles finally appeared to have been overcome.

CHAPTER VI - 1967 THROUGH 1970 -- THE ITALIANS OF CORONA
DEFEND THEIR HOMES WHILE PUBLIC HOUSING IN FOREST HILLS
IS FORGOTTEN

Be courteous and tactful as well as honest and diligent.
All your doings are publicly known, and must therefore
Be beyond complaint or criticism. Be absolutely impartial.
Always give a reason for refusing a plea; complainants
Like a kindly hearing even more than a successful
Plea. Preserve dignity but avoid inspiring fear.
Be an artist in words, that you may be strong, for
The tongue is a sword 1

-Precepts for the Egyptian Civil
Service thousands of years ago.

Despite what social science may say, politics is
morality. Politics is the making of choices be-
tween good and bad, choices of priorities among
competing good things. Democracy appeals be-
cause its emphasis on method keeps private
moralities in check. But that does not mean that
moral choice is not involved. . . 2

-Theodore Lowi,
The End of Liberalism

While the housing project was being processed by the government agencies amid relative calm, the proposal to build a high school in Corona was being actively opposed by the residents. It is not my intention to write a detailed history of the Corona dispute, for that would be a paper in itself. Yet knowledge of it is essential to understand many of the attitudes in Forest Hills about government, community power, and how the bargaining process should or could work. It also explains how certain individuals who were influential in the Forest Hills controversy first became familiar with

each other and developed the working relationships of respect and trust that are so important in negotiating a settlement to any dispute, especially one which is being closely followed by the press and other politicians.

Other major events also happened during the late '60's and early '70's which were important in forming people's perceptions of racial integration, political motives, and ethnic consciousness. Their details are not important for this paper because they intertwine with Forest Hills only in the most general sense of providing the ethos within which the larger community was moving.

In New York City the most notable event was the 1968 Ocean Hill-Brownsville school decentralization dispute, and the long city-wide teachers strike. First, it symbolized the ascendancy of the concept of decentralization and community control in large cities.* Second, it led many to believe that there was a polarization between the blacks of the local school board and the Jews of the heavily Jewish teachers union and to believe that the city's political leadership was more sensitive to demands for community control when the community involved was black, especially if there was an implied threat of violence. Another event was the rise of the mili-

* A distinction must be made here between community control and concern for the local community - meaning in this context the geographical concept of a neighborhood - as a basis for local social activity which should be consciously planned for. The idea that the local community should have complete control, with a veto power over the will of the larger city, seems to be fairly new, whereas a concern for the neighborhood as a functioning part of the larger city has waxed and waned in a kind of cyclical pattern over the years. For further discussion of the neighborhood and its planning, see the chapter, "Neighborhood and Neighborhood Unit," in Lewis Mumford's book, The Urban Prospect (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc., 1968), p. 56-78.

tant Jewish Defense League, with its slogan of "Never Again" and its willingness to resort to violent action in what it termed the "self-defense" of Jews. These two New York City issues basically revolved around questions of how people related to each other in social terms, and in this sense they were easily translated into city-wide concerns without any particular geographic, or neighborhood, boundaries.

Unlike the Forest Hills and Corona cases the above issues did not involve the allocation of budget funds for specific capital improvements, improvements closely linked to particular neighborhood locations. Furthermore, of all of the above issues, only Corona had been linked together with the housing issue during the site-selection process, and its use for a school would partially answer the objections to public housing because of lack of school facilities. Corona is also significant to understanding the Forest Hills experience because of 1) its proximity, 2) the tendency of many people to ascribe the selection of the Forest Hills site to the political power of a group of Italians, and 3) the envy and admiration which any group fighting the city has for another neighborhood group that successfully elevated its issue to one with which all the communities of the city could identify and which then won major concessions from the government.

The Corona issue started with a factor common to most citizen-government disputes. That is, the tenacity and depth of resentment on the citizen's part increases when he disagrees not only with the result of the government's decision but also feels that he was deliberately excluded (by a "conspiracy"?) from the information that would have enabled him to par-

ticipate meaningfully in the decision-making process. Then the legitimacy of the process itself becomes an issue as well. If this is joined with something as threatening to the individual's lifestyle as, say, condemnation of one's home, then the combined shock effect may be just enough to activate the one or two persons needed to work full time at mobilizing a previously politically inactive neighborhood.

Such was the case in Corona, as the Italian homeowners came to believe that they at best had been given a raw deal by the city and at worst had been duped by the city as unwitting accomplices to the expansion plans of the nearby, and detested, Lefrak City. The essence of their argument rests on the contention that 1) they were not informed originally that changing the proposal for the nearly vacant site from use as a housing project to a high school would require drastically enlarging its boundaries, and 2) that after this fact was known, their attempts to have alternate sites selected by the city were rebuffed by the official site selection process because the decision had really been made in advance behind closed doors, thereby constituting a denial of their right to legal due process. Neither of these arguments touches directly on the philosophical and political values involved at the heart of the matter; that is, under what circumstances it is better to condemn people's homes rather than making alternative decisions that may involve more expense, different land use relationships, different management procedures, or different administrative structures. But issues of values are rarely accepted by courts as grounds for overruling a city's right of eminent domain. Issues of process are.

It is often proclaimed that the greatness of New York City is its variety, its mixture of many groups of people and many types of areas. Yet the evidence is that the staff of the City Planning Department and all the various other agencies involved in reviewing a proposed site, both in the Site Selection Board (described on pages 81-82) and the concurrent all agency conference applied city wide rules of thumb without any attempt at variety based on the values and circumstances of the individual neighborhood and community of people involved. Examination of internal staff memoranda and working documents during the 1966-67 planning process reveals the result of this - every city agency was concerned with protecting its own engineering or technical standards that were based either on inspection of maps or minimizing the budgetary cost of any item charged to itself. There was no articulation of what type of people or community were involved, and no one questioned any possible effects on neighborhood cohesion.

Concern about any possible relocation of residences or commercial enterprises from the alternative sites was in terms of the assessed valuations involved. Consequently, one argument against locating the school at the vacant eight and a half acre site at 108th Street and Horace Harding Boulevard was that its assessed value of \$1.1 million was one-half million dollars higher than the assessed value of the Board of Education's original 12.6 acre site with 128 families to relocate. (A counter argument was that the market value the city would have to pay for condemnation would be roughly equal because of assessing practices.)

Whether it was possible to relocate a family in the same neighborhood or for homeowners to buy a new home nearby were not raised as relevant issues. Indeed, how could they be when such items as the sizes of families, how many units were rented or occupied by owners, and whether units were in good or bad condition were details not mentioned in the Department of Relocation's report to the Site Selection Board's committee.³ That would have required going out and meeting with each individual family before a site had been approved or even scheduled for a public hearing, or it would have required using Census of Housing block statistics. But all that anyone involved in the Site Selection Board's workings or the all agency conference was interested in knowing was the total number of units involved and the assessed valuations.

Before the deal announced at the Board of Estimate on October 27, 1966, the concern had been to have the overlap between the Board of Education and the Housing Authority resolved. The decision to have the Authority request instead 8 1/2 acres at 108th Street merely eliminated a vacant site alternative for the school. Even the political agreement to give the borough president and the Board of Education a school there did not necessarily mean that decisions still could not have been made by the civil service professionals to reduce the number of homes taken. But for all the interest in technical details, no one at staff level was concerned enough with the problems of the people on the site to challenge any of the

myriad technical assumptions that had led to the derivation of this particular site. *

At an all agency conference on November 23, 1966, participants were told about the 12.6 acres that "the same site was originally scheduled for a New York City Housing Authority proposal . . . The site for school purposes has not yet been formally approved by the Site Selection Board, but has been tentatively selected."⁵ (My emphasis) In keeping with the tradition that these all agency meetings deal with only the professional technical aspects of the site in question, such matters as sewer easements and ten foot street widenings were discussed. The City Planning Department was concerned that the costs of relocating utilities be determined** and also about increasing the street widths around the school's perimeter from the existing 50 feet to 60 feet. The general conclusion was that there were no major problems. This perhaps should not be surprising, as most of the participants had an engineering background, including those from City Planning.

* Although one city planner's August, 1966, memorandum in favor of the 108th Street site for the school did point out that the Forest Hills High School had a site of 9.6 acres and that that had certainly been satisfactory (albeit not perfect), he failed to continue the analysis to the point of noting that the Forest Hills High School had been built for 2,800 students, not 4,000.⁴

** Consolidated Edison had a major substation across the street, and as events transpired, ten major feeder cables had to be relocated, as did a large sewer.

But what is of more significance was the composition of the conference. Agencies with physical and financial concerns - like the Real Estate, Traffic, Water Resources, and Fire Departments, and Budget Bureau - were considered relevant for detailed site planning and were invited. Agencies with concerns that might be considered more social, such as the Relocation Department (which would presumably have as its self-interest the minimization of relocation) or the agency of the city concerned with housing development (which might or might not have argued that the destruction of sound housing in a viable community was an item on the debit side) were not there. The impact of condemnation on the people living there was apparently considered the domain of the Site Selection Board as more of a political, not professional, issue; and it can be argued that that is one of those divisions of responsibility that are necessary in a large system if anything is to be done at all. So, even though the chairmanship of the all agency conference was held by the City Planning Department, it was not a forum where physical land use and social policy conflicts could be resolved by the one agency that was theoretically supposed to be concerned with the total spectrum. It only arbitrated disputes of a technical nature.

However, the other side of the equation, the working committee on schools of the Site Selection Board did not concern itself with such trade-offs on social issues unless they were considered too politically objectionable to the borough president, and in this case they were not because he had made his political deal. The working committee on schools was chaired by the Bureau of the Budget. Historically the capital facili-

ties area of the Bureau had been dominated by engineers and has been a driving force behind the setting of arbitrary city-wide standards, for that made it easy to centrally process all departmental requests. With its objective of minimizing dollar costs it had a maximum it would pay for sites in high real estate value areas (typically Manhattan, which, combined with the difficulties of relocation, resulted in smaller sites), and it had a standard acreage for all other areas, regardless of how low land prices were. The number of pupils in a school and its program of requirements were also city-wide standards, and in this manner the Bureau's interests coincided with the rigidity of the Board of Education's School Planning division. Thus, the concern of the Bureau was not so much the social cost of moving people but the expected dollar costs of acquiring the dwelling units and businesses. Furthermore, the representatives of the Controller and the Real Estate Department* certainly could not be expected to redesign physical site plans by weighing social values (technically, of course, no detailed site plan yet existed, only a set of criteria). The only member of the committee who might be expected to was City Planning.

* The operating principle of the Real Estate Department was to keep immediate short run costs as low as possible, so it tended to follow the lead of the Budget Bureau. Moreover, its guiding principle was to keep as much land as possible on the tax rolls, so it opposed efforts to retain city-owned land as a form of land banking, wishing instead to auction it off.

But the Planning Department also was specialized along functional lines, and its representative on the committee came from the Department's education section. * With the same objective of getting a school built, with the need to meet with these same people at committee meetings for other schools, and with a greater familiarity and possible acceptance of the same value structure which created the standards for schools in the first place, it was unlikely that the specialist school planner would consider the social character of a neighborhood as a part of his responsibility, let alone consider it important enough to challenge either the efficiency assumptions behind one school of 4,000 students versus two schools of 2,000 students each or the drawing board simplicity of rectangular school sites bounded on all four sides by streets. And, as past documents and my personal conversations with some of the school planners involved confirmed, they did not at that time.

The school sites committee of the Site Selection Board approved the site by a unanimous 5-0 vote, meaning that the borough president's office was willing to withstand the political flack of the condemnation. The committee's internal report to the Site Selection Board described the site as being about 50% vacant and the other half composed of predominantly one and two story buildings with 128 residences and five

* A close degree of cooperation was thus required between the educational and engineering sections of the Planning Department if there was to be any possibility of changing the direction of policy that was otherwise undertaken under the operating consensus of the Site Selection Board and all agency conference.

businesses. It concluded that this was a site that "needed a minimum of demolition and tenant relocation."⁶ It was stated that alternate sites, including an almost completely vacant six acre one, would have required the use of park land for athletic fields (which was implicitly rejected) or would have involved more expense and relocation.

Between the time of the committee report and the Site Selection Board's public hearing in March, 1967, a small square block of 0.4 acres with 59 dwelling units in a six story building was eliminated from the corner of the proposed site, possibly due to citizen pressure but just as likely for economic reasons.

As the irate residents were to suspect, the March 20, 1967, hearing was indeed only a formality. No one in the formal school site selection process had articulated - and possibly no one even knew or cared about - the social factors or community land use values which the local Italian community cared about. The bureaucracy agreed with the Italians' contention that the high school was to provide additional pupil seats for the new housing that had been and was being built, but the social question of why the provision of public services for the new residents should force the removal of the old was not addressed seriously. For the career officials of the city it was a process that had been gone through many times, even though in other cases it frequently had the justification of removal of sub-standard housing. That it had been aided by the borough president this time only made it that much easier for most to accept, and those who might have otherwise opposed it did not for they felt they had gotten the public housing in return.

But a couple of the Corona residents whose homes were affected were not about to sit back quietly once they did become aware of what was happening, and through their determination, their fellow residents were organized into action.

As was admitted by the organization formed to oppose the condemnation, "The Corona Fighting 69," the president of their local homeowners association stated his approval of the use of the site for a high school instead of public housing⁷ when that was suggested at the June 15, 1966, City Planning Commission hearing at which hundreds of Queens residents opposed low-income housing. This is indicative of the level of misunderstanding at the time, as nothing is as contrary to the natural self-interest of a group of homeowners as their endorsing their own condemnation. Their explanation of this is that it came as an impromptu response to the proposal made at the meeting by others. They are quick to point out that the high school idea was initiated not by "the Corona community" but by "the Parents Coordinating Committee of Forest Hills - Rego Park, . . . in conjunction with Lefrak City."⁸ They also point out that it was assumed by their association's leadership that "the site" meant one with the same boundaries as those listed on the agenda for the public housing project. The error was compounded by the dynamics of how neighborhood organizations work and how information is communicated (as described on pp. 58 -60); and it illustrates the pitfalls that can occur when public agencies let private word of mouth replace the lengthy communication job in which they should deal directly

with the actual people and groups involved, and when rhetoric replaces all details at a public hearing. *

The danger in this fragmentary communication process is that it lets the mistaken understanding of one or two people be multiplied when they were asked about it by their neighbors. For there was an inherent willingness of people to trust the word of their own leaders rather than the word of an outsider from a private organization, no matter how much closer the ties of that stranger were to what was really happening in the city government. This is the only way that I can explain what would otherwise appear to be an inconsistency in the different versions of how the Corona residents found out that the site for the high school was not just the vacant land but included their homes.

On the one hand there are my earlier interview accounts of how a few public housing proponents tried warning them not to support the high school by distributing leaflets and speaking at a local meeting, ** at-

* I have been unable to find public reference to any details of the high school in question in the generally accepted modes of formal government-public communication in the six months following Adrian Blumenfeld's May letter to the Planning Commission. Neither his letter, nor newspaper accounts of the various public hearings during the summer and fall, nor any transcripts that I have been able to locate mention the actual size of the site for the school, nor its boundaries. (This includes a complete transcript of the October Board of Estimate hearing at which the deal was announced, the Planning Commission's discussion of the school issue in its formal report approving the public housing project for Forest Hills on December 2, 1966, and very incomplete portions of the transcript of the December 9, 1966, Board of Estimate hearing.)

** Because the people were outsiders and already known as advocates of what was on its face unpopular to many people at the meetings, the seriousness of their warnings was not checked out. This is somewhat analagous to the situation described by Martin Meyerson and Edward Banfield in Poli-tics, Planning and the Public Interest on page 262 where only the political

tempts which were unsuccessful by the housing proponents' own admission. On the other hand there are the claims by the residents, mentioned in a few of the subsequent press accounts, that the first indication of a change in the Board of Education's site plans from 5.1 acres to 12.6 acres came in a mid-November letter to the local school board; and that even after that no one bothered to inform the homeowners in question about the change. According to the brief filed by the Corona residents' lawyer at the March Site Selection Board public hearing, even up to the day of the local community school board's public hearing on December 13, 1966,

. . . the property owners involved had still not been informed that the earlier site had been expanded to embrace 65 additional homes! . . . ¹⁰

His brief went on to describe how groups from outside Corona appeared with statements dealing

. . . exclusively with the need for a high school in the area. There was no argument or discussion with respect to whether the site in question was the only available one. No mention was made of the possibility of reducing the site . . . ¹¹

Because the property owners at the hearing were now "confused" by this new development, they could only

(continued)

advice of those who could be trusted was taken by the supporters of public housing, which by definition excluded the advice of those closer to the actual people in positions of political power, for their motives or support of the cause was not clear. Consequently, the advice of these latter persons was not listened to when given and also not sought out by public housing advocates in Chicago.

. . . voice their shock. The Chairman of the [school] Planning Board recognized the unfortunate development and stated publicly that under the circumstances no fair hearing could be held. Another hearing was proposed but none ever eventuated. The Board proceeded to a vote and a 5 to 2 approval of the site was given. ¹²

A further elaboration of the attitudes about the school versus the public housing for Corona came in an exchange between Borough President Cariello and Mr. Piazza, the former head of the local civic association, on June 19, 1967. Mr. Piazza said:

Up until December 14, when we found out that somebody lied to us, that homes would be involved, that is when we created an uproar. Had we known this, President Cariello, we would have taken the project instead of the school. (My emphasis)¹³

Mr. Piazza proceeded to remind him of a December 6, 1966 conference in Borough Hall with some of Cariello's staff, including the chief engineer, at which they had been assured that the strongest efforts would be made to make sure that their homes would not be affected by the school. ¹⁴ (This was just a few days before the Board of Estimate formally approved public housing for the Forest Hills site and the local community school board gave its advisory approval of the high school on the Corona site.)

For months everyone had been referring to "a high school for the site," both verbally and in written public documents, and that was all the elaboration that was ever given. The charitable conclusion is that it apparently did not occur to anyone to ask how big a school was planned, or, if they knew, to ask how a 4,000 seat high school building

with its recreation facilities was to fit on a little over five acres. It was certainly not in the interest of supporters of the new high school to raise such potential obstacles. The uncharitable conclusion is that the Borough President's office deliberately withheld information and/or gave the affected Italian residents a misleading impression in its meetings with them.

It is also clear that central city officials knew these details from the very beginning. But the planning professionals of the City Planning Department and the Board of Education, who both left community relations to the borough president, failed to mention these details at either the public hearings or in the Planning Commission's official public report (issued after every formal decision) as facts which the public should know. From these facts - if they had been mentioned - someone else reading the report might perhaps have made the connection and realized the homes might be in danger. But this was, after all, true of the level of most of the discussion on the housing projects as well. Virtually no one asked about sizes and implications for future success. One only supported or rejected principles. Whether the details were consistent with the implementation of those principles was of concern to very few.

Once the Corona homeowners recognized the threat as real, however, they started mobilizing, first to contest the choice of their homes during the official site selection process as it proceeded during the months after December, 1966, and later to oppose the city with court suits and public demonstrations. They worked together in promoting events like

raffles and bingo games to raise over \$27, 000 in four years to finance buses, clerical expenses, and the hiring of a young Queens lawyer, Mario Cuomo. A list of alternative sites was formulated with the assistance of a large property owner in Queens and a former head of the Real Estate Board of New York City, Edward Tynan, who also owned seven houses and a Cabana Club* within the boundaries of the proposed site.¹⁵

Although they attempted to use such planning criteria as transportation, acquisition cost, and, most importantly, the absence of residential relocation, the fact remained that none of their proposed sites, except for Corona Flushing-Meadow Park, met the 12 acre requirement, nor did they attempt to argue why this 12 acre assumption was wrong other than that it meant taking their homes. So in a sense one merely had a replay of the staff discussions that had occurred in the summer of 1966 when the city officials favoring the public housing project for the Corona location had tried to find an alternative site for the high school.

Perhaps this was the appropriate situation in which a professional advocate planner working with the community could have made some difference by formulating an educational and physical alternative to the Board of Education's conception of what a high school should be (an approach, one remembers, that had been started with some initial success by Eugenia Flatow with the idea of a special school for the biological sciences). That might have raised the technical decisions to the level of visible political decisions, but that was never articulated beyond pointing out that the Board of Education had no detailed plans either. Rather,

* In late 1966 the Cabana Club was just starting to be constructed, despite efforts by the Borough President's office to convince the builder not to proceed.

the process tended to remain at the level of a struggle based on political power and the influence of the parties involved. * In that respect the homeowners could not win at the local level. There were too many groups wanting a school at any cost, groups which did not feel themselves to be a part of the Italian portion of Corona community and therefore did not feel caught among conflicting needs.

As we have seen, the formal site selection process for schools was more complicated than that for public housing. It involved more city agencies - each with their own specialized objectives - and more public hearings. This was partly because a decision to build a new school, especially a high school, represented a much greater commitment of municipal resources. It was also because people have historically been so concerned about schools that there were local and central institutions not subject to mayoral appointment that had initial say over educational decisions. (1968 school decentralization in New York and the election of local community school boards further increased this independence from mayoral input.) With schools being a highly desired service and an important factor in a family's decision about moving to a new residential area, they are usually of much greater interest to politicians,

* See David Rogers, 110 Livingston Street (New York: Vintage Books, 1969), for a comprehensive look at the politics and bureaucracy of the New York school system, including the methods and power of Adrian Blumenfeld: "Blumenfeld and his associates could make it sound so technical that they had much freedom to maneuver. Parent groups throughout the city, for example, report that Blumenfeld often told them they would not get their school if they did not accept the site he designated." (p. 411) The book has numerous examples of the difficulties civil rights groups, parents, and other government agencies had in trying to deal with Blumenfeld's School Planning and Research Division, including many charges of deception, inaccurate data, and refusal to pursue policies for racial integration of schools.

real estate developers, and city planners than other equally large municipal capital investments, such as sewage treatment plants, which are less visible to the public.

With so much at stake, the question of motives became an important factor in the complex equation of variables that determine human emotions. How important motives can be was recognized by Banfield and Wilson in describing the difference between old-style ward politicians and new style "good government" politicians:

The difference seems to be not so much in the effect produced as in the motives leading to the production of it. The motives that produced the faults of the old-style administration were reprehensible, and this made the faults readily identifiable as such, . . . even by those who committed them. The faults of the new style of administration arise from motives that are respectable, often even admirable, and therefore they are not usually regarded as faults at all. ¹⁷

One of their examples is appropriate. It also attests to how much attitudes towards urban renewal have changed since the book's publication in 1962.

. . . [I]f a downtown merchant, by promising election support to a mayor who "does things for the city," initiates a vast urban renewal project, he may enrich himself and impoverish others more than any businessman ever did by carrying a black bag to a boss's back room; but urban renewal rarely shocks anyone's sensibilities, for the intention of the merchant is good ("in the public interest," as he would say) even though the economic consequences of his actions may be no different . . . from those of the actions of the "boodlers" whom Lincoln Steffens excoriated. ¹⁸

So, over the years what might have been unrelated events appeared to some of the Corona participants as evidence that the interests of real estate developer Sam Lefrak and the government were the same and that there was a conspiracy against them. They believed that no builder could construct such a large development as Lefrak City without the implicit approval of the government. They argued that if Lefrak City, Forest Hills, and Rego Park needed a school, it should be built on some of Lefrak's land that was vacant at that time in 1966. A statement made at a local community school board meeting in late 1966 that "We can make it a high rise [school]. But first I'll have to show this to Mr. Lefrak," was cited as one example of the Lefrak influence by "The Fighting 69" of Corona, headed by Lillian Manasseri and Ralph Dellacona. More well-known reasons were the history of the Lefrak organization's support of opposition to public housing and its promotional advertisements during 1966-67 that listed a future high school next door as an additional amenity for prospective renters. His company's ability to advertise the existence of a public library and post office within Lefrak City also angered some of the Italians, for these facilities had been located within the older Corona area before the respective governmental agencies had moved them to the newer, more populous, complex.¹⁹

Later, as their struggle continued in 1970, some of the Italians believed that a political quid-pro-quo had occurred when Anthony Atlas was appointed the head of the city's Traffic Violations Bureau, which then rented one floor of space in Lefrak City's office building for its main

office. The tie-in, they claimed, was that Elena Atlas was active in the Forest Hills-Rego Park Parents Coordinating Committee which was a major lobbying group supporting the city in its selection of the Corona site for the school. Other allegations included one that the head of the local Corona Taxpayers Association was appointed to a high paying city job for which he was educationally unqualified just after he supported acceptance of the city's first compromise offer when others favored holding out for more.²⁰

The proof of a deal between Lefrak, Borough Hall, and the Planning Section of the Board of Education is beyond the scope of this paper. But the way official government actions and public hearings were held themselves further contributed to the affected residents' belief that the government was not even interested in listening to their position, rather than encouraging a belief that they had lost a difficult decision before a fair jury. The same issue comes up again in the Forest Hills dispute, and there are some interesting similarities.

The point that must be recognized is that psychologically, once people's suspicions of "improper" motives are aroused they are difficult to dissuade without a long constant performance of good faith effort. Blue-collar people whose lifelong contact with government has been filling out bureaucratic tax and license forms and talking with low-level clerks, see government as a large powerful entity whose mysterious high-level inner workings can only be guessed at. The Italian residents of Corona believed that officials of the Board of Education were obliged,

either legally or at least out of a sense of fair play, to inform them that their homes were being considered for a site before formally requesting approval of it from the community school board. The fact that it did not, combined with the history of the previous six months, aroused suspicions that approval was a fait accompli and that any public hearings would only be a formality.

That they were wrong about the Board's legal obligation did not invalidate their feelings about public hearings. The public assumption for years had been that city hearings were not a forum for intelligent dialogue with officials prior to a decision, in contrast to what is shown by the transcript of the typical federal public hearing, in which there is usually a fair level of calm give and take. Rather they were a place where one could only try to show that the number of persons in opposition to a proposal was greater than had been expected, which might cause decision makers to reverse themselves.

My own experience indicated that this was not always true, but it was the pattern. But perhaps worst of all, it was impossible for the citizen to tell whether or not that was the case for his particular item at the time of his hearing, so he assumed the worst. That, of course, simply increased the incentive for emotional tirades of frustration rather than encouraging intelligent discussion of the matters at hand; and since stenographic transcripts of New York City hearings are typed into English only for an exorbitant fee, there is a high probability that one will not be held accountable for what one says. Thus, the process encouraged bringing out the worst tendencies of people rather than the best.

But suspicions had been raised high enough in December, 1966, for the homeowners to hire a lawyer, and the educational process of learning about the legal intricacies of the governmental system began. At the Site Selection Board's public hearing of March 20, 1967, Mr. Cuomo submitted a 30 page brief describing the social characteristics of the community that would be broken up by the city's action, and he pleaded for consideration of these factors by the experts. He noted that the Board of Education could only be expected to preserve its own interests by trying to get schools exactly as it wanted, that it was its own expert as to what was the proper school, and urged the Site Selection Board's members to accept their responsibility of weighing the larger overall interest of the city, namely the preservation of communities while providing school facilities also.

The hearing, however, only confirmed the suspicions, for, as they described it later:

. . . . That hearing was a sham and patently so. Only one of the five Board members who were required to attend was actually present Nevertheless, a decision was rendered only 5 1/2 minutes after the conclusion of the hearing without so much as a quick review of the memoranda and documentation that had been placed in evidence. It was ineluctably clear that the decision had been made in advance. ²¹

So, they threatened to sue and stepped up their lobbying efforts. The city, apparently acting on legal advice, agreed to have another Site Selection Board public hearing; and the borough president's office now reacted to the pressure and tried to suggest alternative sites to get itself

out of the uncomfortable political situation that it had misjudged when earlier supporting the condemnation. But by this time what might have been the most viable alternative, the vacant 8 1/2 acres at 108th Street, which did not even require future approval for street changes because it was already mapped as a superblock, was committed to the Housing Authority. So at a special meeting of the school sites working committee on July 20, 1967, most of his proposed alternatives were eliminated because Adrian Blumenfeld said they were too small for either a school building or athletic field. The other two alternatives suggested by the borough president would have created a split site by combining either the northern half (6.8 acres) or the southern half (6.9 acres) of the Corona site with 7.9 acres of a partially vacant industrial area several blocks away. The idea was to put the school building on the residentially zoned portion and the athletic fields on the industrial land. This received more serious staff consideration but was rejected, and the original Corona site was reconfirmed at the Site Selection Board public hearing on July 24, by a 3 to 2 vote.

Yet even there the process only further inflamed passions. The borough president, knowing that the 3 votes of the mayoral appointees made his vote meaningless, was able to look good to his constituents by saying that he had presented plans in the executive session that would have saved many homes and still provided all the requested facilities. The problem of failure to meet technical specifications - irrespective of how reasonable these specifications were - was not mentioned and thus

gave further impetus to the residents' claims that there were alternatives. Also overlooked was the failure of the borough president to commit himself to oppose the official closings of the streets when the matter would subsequently come up to the Board of Estimate. That was the only place where he could exercise his political power effectively and would have signified that he was serious about his opposition. But these items could easily be overlooked while passions rose against the attitude of the mayor's appointees, for, according to the "Fighting 69,"

Upon the recording of the vote petitioners' attorney requested a description of the reasons for the majority decision and was told by two members of the majority that he was entitled to no explanation and would receive none.²²

Whether or not the rejection of the borough president's split site scheme was justified is a judgment that is not going to be resolved in this paper. Certainly a public explanation of some of the objections that the planners had would have brought out into the open the technical complications and therefore the underlying values behind the technical decisions of the specialists involved at the working committee level. Adrian Blumenfeld opposed having a split site, and his power at the Board of Education was such that that alone would have been enough to kill the proposal. Further elaboration of the school system's position came in 1970, when an official told New York Times reporter Murray Schumach that the partly vacant, and reportedly for sale, Hagen industrial property (referred to by some as a "junkyard") could not be used for a recreation area because it would require students to cross a street to get to it.²³ Schumach, incidentally, also pursued the matter

with the previously mentioned real estate operator and owner of the cabana club on the school site, Edward Tynan. Tynan said that Lefrak had an option on the property but that this could not be proven for a newspaper story because it was a handshake agreement.²⁴ So this is another piece of the jigsaw puzzle whose influence on any of the respective parties remains unknown.

Also revealing are some of the positions of other city agencies who also were consulted by the working committee on the new alternative schemes proposed by the borough president's office. The Fire Department opposed the proposed recreational area because it would close a through street (98th Street) leading to Lefrak City, even though there were two roughly parallel streets on either side which would have added at most 800 feet to the response route from a fire station eight blocks away. The mapping section of the City Planning Department also opposed the street closing for the same reason. This policy for a part of Corona which had a modified street system ran counter to what the Plan for New York City later cited as one of the attributes of areas in Corona - that the lack of a grid system prevented through traffic from filtering through residential areas and made them more pleasant. But this was not surprising, for the head of the mapping section was a long-time official who had a reputation as an advocate of very wide grid-iron streets in residential areas, and this was probably one of the reasons why New York City did not accept the planned unit development concept until the late sixties.

Most important, though, were the opinions of the Planning Department's school section head, * for with Don Elliott having been a major participant in the October 27th agreement, only a strong argument from a professional planner on his staff could have convinced him to oppose Adrian Blumenfeld and the other city agencies. Her opinion was that it was a "new, viable and expanding industrial area" which provided 224+ jobs and which did not "impinge seriously on the residential areas surrounding it."²⁵ But she felt it was undesirable to place an athletic field "within" this industrial area and viewed the separation of the field from the school building as a detriment, as was the expected higher cost of the industrial land than the residential land at the Lewis Avenue site. (The term "within" may be misleading, since it would have taken a large part of the industrial zone and been bounded by industry on only one side - with a junior high school and homes on the other three sides. The twelve acre residentially zoned original school site also was bounded by an industrial zone on one side.) In effect she was implying that the jobs were more important than the effects of residential condemnation, a position which would have stimulated an interesting dialogue if it had been stated publicly to the residents, but it never was.

A few other words about underlying philosophies and assumptions appear in order. First, which agency takes the initiative in raising an issue in inter-agency disputes is important because it is a prima facie indicator of who is not satisfied with the current relationships and because other agencies' reactions are to some degree prejudiced by their

* This was no longer Dick Bader, who had been involved in the 1966 meetings.

preconceived ideas about what the first agency's motives are. Because it was the borough president's office that raised the objection to condemnation of the homes, it was that much easier for the planners and budget officials to categorize the problem as political rather than technical. Accordingly, there was no apparent effort to investigate the arguments that Mr. Cuomo made in his testimony. The staff analysis of the new sites was made at the last minute only when it was clear that a new public hearing had been won by Cuomo's legal efforts, and the staff memoranda listed only the costs associated with the proposed alternate sites without listing also the costs associated with the original Corona site. Second, the engineering preciseness and beauty of long straight lines, preferably streets, as boundaries for sites that should approximate a rectangle as closely as possible was accepted without question. The Housing Authority in its original request for 5 1/2 acres in Corona knew that it was proposing something unpopular and that residential condemnation would be an albatross around the neck of any proposed housing project. Accordingly, its site boundaries zig-zagged in a saw toothed pattern so as to avoid as many homes as possible on the irregularly built block-front. School officials had no such constraint, and they opted for regularly shaped sites. The operating principle was based on what the standards called for, and the inventiveness and flexibility of the later architectural stage of the process to adapt to anything but the norm was ignored.

The July 24, 1967, Site Selection Board reaffirmation of its earlier decision on the Corona school site marked, for all practical purposes, the end of involvement by city agencies in that phase of planning. It also was the last chance that the citizens had to reverse the decision under normal procedures, and they knew it. So the legal and political strategy became one of delaying tactics to stop the condemnation process. As Planning Commission Chairman Donald Elliott recalled years later, "Cuomo came in and said, 'I'll hold you up for three years.' We said, 'C'est la vie,' and he did."²⁶

During the next two months of 1967 both sides parried for position. The absurdity and ambiguity of a City Charter paragraph requiring a Board of Estimate hearing before the Mayor could start condemnation of real property or initiation of a capital project without giving the Board the power to vote after the hearing was held became all too clear. On the one hand the citizens capitalized on procedural errors of the city by saying they would prevent a fair hearing. At the same time they tried to show that the hearing was meaningless by forcing Mayor Lindsay to retract his statement that the Board could vote on the items. On the other hand, the city took the position that discussion about the merits of the site was irrelevant because the hearing concerned the authorization to go ahead with a construction project. In any event the Mayor signed the papers to start the condemnation proceedings, and the citizens sued for a new hearing.

After two years of legal battles the courts refused to order a new hearing. Adding insult to injury was the city's legal argument that a second hearing was unnecessary because the Corona residents had implicitly approved the project by not appearing in opposition when the Board of Estimate had approved in the capital budget the need for a new high school in Queens. (The official capital budget title of the project was "New Queens High School.") The Corona residents tried to counter by saying that no site had been specified then, so that there had been no reason for them to oppose it. In the fall of 1969 the city officially took ownership of the Corona homes and started billing the residents for rent.

Although the situation then appeared hopeless despite years of political and legal efforts, the struggle was revitalized with the appearance in the spring of 1970 of the first politician who would support the homeowners and make their fight his major cause. That politician was Vito Battista, a conservative State Assemblyman from Brooklyn who in the summer of 1966 had opposed the city's entire public housing program as a waste of middle class money (ref. p. 48). Described as a "neanderthal" by a couple of the people who were later involved in mediation efforts in Forest Hills, he was nevertheless a showman with a dramatic flair who was able to lead people in street demonstrations and to attract audiences with his enthusiasm, good humor, and rhetorical exaggeration. All of these things made his "street theater" more interesting for visual coverage by the media.

The opportunity for a formal political forum came with the need by the city to legally demap the streets that criss-crossed the site. A technical matter that takes place after detailed plans for a project are ready and after the city has taken title to the property (so that it is not denying the right of legal access to a property owner against his will), this would normally attract no public notice. But, as opponents of interstate highways going through central city areas discovered, it is in the manipulation of such technicalities that local politicians have the greatest leveraging ability, for there is no more basic right of a locality, dating back to English Common law, than control over the location of public rights of way. This action involved the approval of the City Planning Commission, instead of just its Chairman, and the entire Board of Estimate, instead of just Mayor Lindsay, and therefore required another round of public hearings.

The effort spent on legal delays over the intervening years was not in vain, for what had been won was a new set of personalities in the government who, at a minimum, were going to take more time to listen to the complaints of a local community before reaffirming the continuation of a project that was well along the pipeline. That fact in itself meant more delay, and thus, as so many times happens in these cases, delay itself became an issue and gave the opponents of the project that much more of a weapon. More time also meant more potential media coverage and the opportunity to try to escalate the issue from purely local to city-wide significance by having it become symbolic enough for politicians in other parts of the city to start expressing an

opinion on it. Finally, the delay of several years and the expansion of the number of people interested in it increased both the probability of errors in the accuracy of the information on which the public and politicians would make their decisions and the likelihood that the focus of decision-makers would be toward the wider implications of how such a symbolic change would affect other possible city-community conflicts.

The Planning Commission hearing was held August 12, 1970. Initial New York Times coverage of the matter was on the front page of its second section. It quoted the director of the office for school construction, Hugh McLaren, as saying that plans for the school were complete and could not be revised because that would mean more delay and higher costs. The article by Martin Tolchin (a reporter later to be noted for his series against the use of consultant contracts by the city) also had the misleading thrust of saying that no one knew how the site had been selected because all the local political figures had been opposed to it.²⁷

With this auspicious beginning the dispute escalated for the next four months. Suits to prevent the eviction of the residents from their homes were filed, there were frequent charges that Lindsay was biased against Italians, and demonstrations and picketing of city hall continued. Counter-protests were begun by the many parents and teachers of the existing Forest Hills High School, who argued that their school was on triple sessions and that nothing should be changed because they needed a new school immediately. This effort was supported by Councilman

Katzman and State Senator Gold, which led to charges by the Corona group that these politicians were guilty of exploiting a neighborhood they did not represent for one that they did, and if Forest Hills needed a school so much it should be placed within their districts.²⁸

During this time, a countervailing issue occupying much more of the Planning Commission's staff time was the \$600 million plus that was going to be requested by the Board of Education for its 1971-72 construction program. Commission Chairman Elliott was most concerned about the failure of the Board of Education to move its projects through the pipeline quickly even after construction funds had been approved and the rapidly increasing costs of schools, which he ascribed to inflation. Controller Beame's office, however, charged that the increasing costs of schools were due to extravagant architecture, and in a number of cases was urging that building plans for schools that had jumped in cost be revised before construction contracts were issued. The problem that it was taking the city an average of seven years to build a high school and the increase in costs of the new Queens High School from \$16 million to \$28 million were thus seen as a part of the larger problem of the need to get schools built quickly. But the thrust of some persons toward standardizing school architectural plans as a way to achieve speed only increased the pressure for rigid city-wide standards on the already fairly rigid Board of Education rather than going toward the direction of flexibility of school sizes and standards. Indeed, the Board of Education took the position that its delays were caused by its problems with clearing sites, relocating tenants, and resolving com-

munity conflicts; yet at the same time its planning officials continued in insisting on rigid standards, such as the necessity for the athletic field in the proposed Corona high school to be contiguous with the building.

With such problems as extra cost and delay for a needed school and with assurances from the staff that none of the eleven alternative sites suggested by the opposition were feasible, the Planning Commission approved the street closings by a 6-1 vote (the dissenter was Beverly Spatt), and the matter went to the Board of Estimate. Some of the staff were influenced by the desire of the Chairman to have administration policy approved by the Commission rather than by an unwillingness to privately disagree with the values and standards upon which the School Board's proposal was based. This will be discussed further later in this chapter and in the concluding chapter.

But while such speculation about the values and performance of professional planners is interesting, in fact it is unlikely that any individual staff planner would have made any difference to the Commission vote unless he had also convinced Chairman Donald Elliott, and what efforts were made toward that end failed. One of the Commissioners, who must remain anonymous, said that the Commission response to Corona must be viewed in its historical context as a time when "the gap between the Commission and staff was widening" because Elliott wanted it that way. "Staff work was done for Elliott, not us." He continued that the Planning Commission was frequently "diverted from the significant issues" on a given matter by misplaced emphasis in the heat of battle. ²⁹

This was made possible by the structure of the Commission, in which the Chairman has complete control over staff in his dual role as Director of the Planning Department and in which the six part time Commissioners did not have even a single assistant who could help them keep track of the numerous items that come up. These planning matters are frequently in legal and technical language as amendments to the zoning ordinance or capital budget. Their real purpose is often obscure without a staff explanation. The Chairman is able to control the flow of information through such techniques as not having any minutes kept of the weekly executive sessions of the Commission, his ability to control the agenda, and his ability to render any staff person ineffective in the future if that individual is too indiscrete with Commissioners, either collectively at executive session or individually.

Thus, the discussion and disposition of an item by the Commission is dependent on whether it has been "flagged" by the staff, which the Chairman controls, or whether it happens to have evoked the interest of a particular Commissioner, who decides to pursue a line of questioning because of a "pet" concern which might or might not be in any way relevant to what the real issues of an item are. Luck, as I learned during my two years there, has a great deal of importance in this, especially as to which group of Commissioners would be present at any particular time for any meeting, as all had outside jobs.

With regard to the particulars of how Corona was treated by the Commission, one Commissioner recalled two items. As to suspicions

voiced by some that Elliott had pushed the item through the Commission, he remembers that when the people were protesting Elliott "told us that it was just an effort to get more condemnation money." Also, that "at one of the public hearings Vito Battista came with his people - it was out of order and out of context - and he got up and made an impassioned plea for the people and homes, and that made it appear more trivial" and gave the Commissioners no reason to doubt Elliott's explanation of the situation.³⁰ The theatrics of the protest, in other words, made it seem less serious to these officials, most of whom tried to believe that they acted on the merits of an issue and not on its popularity or unpopularity.

In addition, it was true that economics was one matter of concern to the protestors. The city's offer of market value to homeowners was not enough to enable them to purchase an equivalent dwelling unit in the same neighborhood and was of no help to renters, a dozen of whom had left for higher rents in other neighborhoods by December 1.³¹ The fact that a significant proportion of the families were retired and owned their homes free and clear of any mortgage meant that transition to renter status anywhere would be difficult. The suggestion by a city worker that the solution to one homeowner's problem was to move to an apartment and to send their elderly mother, who was living with them, to a home for the elderly only further infuriated this family because of their sense of family cohesiveness.³² One can only guess how much less resistance there would have been in general if the city policy was not to minimize costs by paying market value for a unit that is not voluntarily on the market, but rather to pay replacement value for what it would cost to find a

roughly similar living unit. For the market value of these old single family homes, many of them with no mortgage, was not enough for people to buy another home in the current market, and the significant percentage of retired families meant there was no income coming in to start new mortgage payments. But to give people replacement value rather than market value not only would probably require new legislation, but it would also be the type of issue that decision-makers would look at only as a city-wide issue in its own right rather than as a part of another local dispute, and no one forced the issue in those terms.

That the high school site was a matter of high administration policy was reaffirmed on September 21, 1970, when Mayor Lindsay sent a letter to two local Queens politicians saying that "a thorough review" by the Board of Education and Planning Commission had produced no change.³³ What was more revealing of the values involved, however, was the statement that the Board of Education review "had elicited no new information concerning sites superior to the one adopted."³⁴ For the inherent issue was the balancing of conflicting values, not whether a school site of equal merit was available. By keeping all the same standards as before - both physical and financial - one was really saying that they were more important. For example, by fighting for the site size needed for athletic fields the school board in effect felt that the physical education program's need for a football and baseball field was worth the extra years of existing overcrowding in classrooms the struggle was causing.

To add to this political donnybrook, Battista called for intervention by Governor Rockefeller, who, mindful that he was up for re-election in a few months, released an announcement through a personal representative attending a Corona rally on September 4th that the state would investigate. The report was issued in late October by the State Division of Housing and Community Renewal by its Commissioner Charles Urstadt, and it did nothing to alleviate the widening rift between Mayor Lindsay and Governor Rockefeller. I think a fair summary of the report would be to say that it was an excellent socio-economic analysis of the effect of displacement on the affected households, but a cop-out on the real issues that were involved with trying to find an alternative site for the school. Its many tables of characteristics of the households and their dwelling units were compiled from interviews with all of the affected families and are as complete a picture as one could want. Its much heralded conclusion that there were alternative sites (the nearby industrial area, the Flushing Meadows park, or the public housing site at 108th street) available for the school, however, was very incomplete and shows the problem of making planning decisions solely by visual inspection. The technical reasons the city had not selected those sites were not mentioned, for there was apparently no discussion between the city's planners and the state's. What few different values the state did recognize were involved were simply dismissed by saying they were not important.

The report stated that the land at 108th Street in Forest Hills was the site of "a dormant public housing project;" that "although no

borings have been taken" no unusual structural problems in building a school were expected "judging by the high rise apartments in the immediate neighborhood;" and that the "anticipated objections" from the city would be based on the fact that it was only eight blocks north of the existing Forest Hills High School.³⁵ This affirmation that the housing project was dead was made at just that point in time when in fact design progress was accelerating, with HUD's having approved Phase I designs 3 months earlier and with Phase II designs virtually complete. The other two assertions were also erroneous, and the official city reaction was stated by Don Elliott, who publicly dismissed it as a "political maneuver."³⁶

On November 13, 1970, the Board of Estimate unanimously approved the street closings for the school after a "raucous and bitter three-hour hearing that was marked by repeated charges of ethnic discrimination,"³⁷ as the many supporters of a new school argued against any change and the Corona residents argued for a school, but not at the expense of homes.

In an exchange with Adrian Blumenfeld, director of school planning and research, who said that all other suggested sites were too small for an adequate high school and full athletic fields, Mr. Battista roared: 'What kind of amateur plan is this? You've been talking about a three-story school. Build a six-story school then on a smaller site.'³⁸

Thus was cleared the last legal obstacle to the demolition of the homes, barring judicial interference.

Yet the lesson of the Corona story was to be that even at this late a time, there can be a juncture of circumstances which can convince a high government official to suddenly reverse the entire direction of events even when there appears no hope left. It is a classic case that proved once again that an individual can make a difference and that group action, while necessary to publicize an issue and influence individuals enough for them to reconsider a position is not necessarily the strategy to use to successfully resolve the issue. For pressure does not necessarily convince a decision maker that there exists a way to reconcile both sides and still satisfy the original need for a public facility.

In this case the catalyst for a re-opening of the case was popular writer and columnist Jimmy Breslin, who had run for City Council President the previous year on a ticket with Norman Mailer for Mayor, advocating that New York City become a 51st state. Breslin lived in Forest Hills, became sympathetic to their cause and deeply impressed by their lawyer, Mario Cuomo, * while attending a

* See Jimmy Breslin's preface to the book by Mario Cuomo, Forest Hills Diary: The Crisis of Low-Income Housing (New York: Random House, 1974), p. x - xii, for his description of how he went expecting to find no "heavyweights," heard Cuomo speaking — "I had not heard anyone speak like this in years," — and remembered Congressman Hugh Carey telling him

About somebody he had wanted to run on a ticket with . . . 'a genius nobody knows about . . . a law professor at St. John's. Brilliant sonofabitch. Mario Cuomo. I begged him to run with me. Nobody knows him . . . But I just couldn't talk him into running.'

November meeting being held in the building of the Corona Volunteer Ambulance Corps, and, most importantly, had access to Deputy Mayor Richard Aurelio. He was able to convince Aurelio to meet with Cuomo in an effort to restudy the situation as Cuomo was preparing once again (for what he said would be the 29th time³⁹) to go to court in a last ditch effort to block the imminent eviction of the Corona residents. Liberal Village Voice columnist Jack Newfield also wrote about the case after discussing it with John Lindsay, Richard Aurelio, and other mayoral staff, and he also urged the city to reverse itself.

Negotiations went on during the last two weeks of November, and a proposed compromise was announced on December 1 by Mayor Lindsay, who described it as an example of "compassion with progress."⁴⁰ It is clear that much of the success was due to the personal respect which Cuomo gained from Aurelio and others as being a man of integrity who was both reasonable to deal with and could make a lucid presentation supporting his own position. In other words, the personalities were as important as the issues.

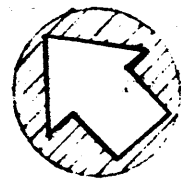
The meetings held between Aurelio and Cuomo in November accidentally set off the chain of events leading to the rise of opposition to the Forest Hills public housing project. In my interviews with both of these men there was general agreement on what had happened. Cuomo had suggested the vacant land at 108th Street as an alternate high school site. Aurelio telephoned Housing Authority Chairman Simeon Golar, who responded that "108th Street was all ready to go, and you can't touch it."⁴¹ With that they went on to discuss other proposals.

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Afterwards Cuomo reported this to the Italian residents in explaining why that idea had not worked out. The Long Island Press then included this in an article. A community meeting was called a few weeks later about the now pending housing project, and it was the surprisingly large turnout which led the opponents of the project to realize how much company they had and to continue the effort.

The compromise offered by the city was a delicate interweaving of physical site design technicalities, political alliances, engineering capabilities, and legal difficulties. As shown on the enclosed maps, it reduced the size of, and relocated, the football field and track so that it would not require the demolition of existing houses, and it introduced a cul-de-sac street within the existing mapped street to satisfy the school planners' desire for access and street boundaries. These 31 homes were to be returned to the owners. To make up for the lost acreage, a three-acre athletic field was to be built in Flushing Meadow-Corona park at 111th Street and Corona Avenue, which was about 1/4 mile from the Forest Hills public housing site and 1/2 mile from the Corona school site.⁴² In an attempt to satisfy the united front of the residents, who had been previously unwilling to accept suggested partial solutions,⁴³ and to avoid the problems of redesign of the school building, the city said that each of the 28 families with houses remaining on the building site could choose to either accept the condemnation offer or to have the city physically move the building to a nearby vacant lot.

In fact, the reason the vacant lot was available was itself a commentary on the values of the architectural process. It was in city



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CHRISTIE AVE.

101 ST.

ST.

Ball Fields Area

RADCLIFF AVE.

102 NO.

LEWIS AVE.

ST.

School Building

Baseball

Football, Soccer & Running Track

Bleachers

Play Fields Basketball etc.

MARTENSE AVE.

57 TH. AVE.

Original School Boundary

99 TH.

ST.

100 TH.

ST.

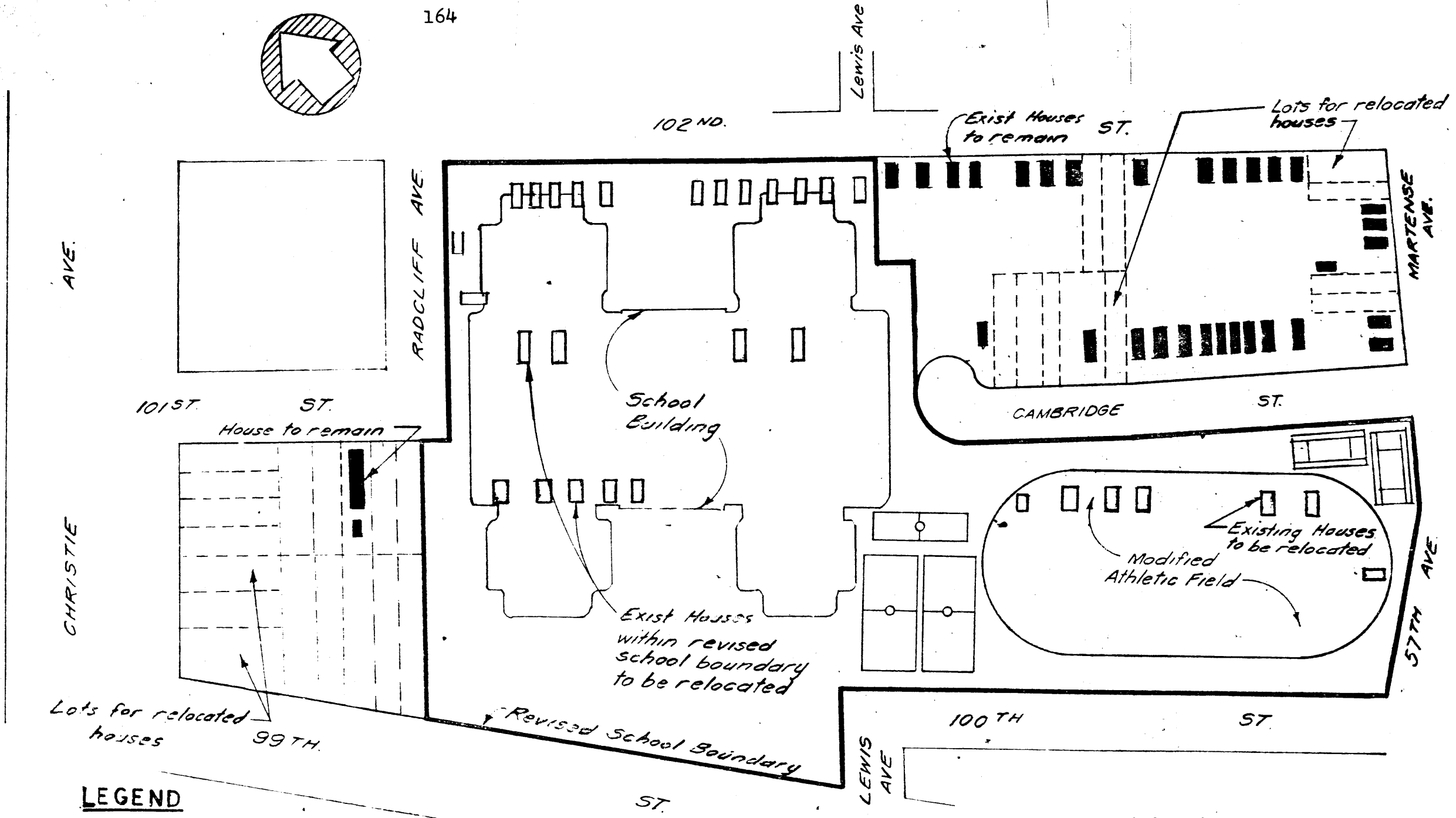
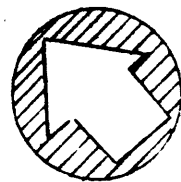
LEWIS AVE.

MAP 12




NEW QUEENS H.S.

ORIGINAL PLAN

Not to Scale



LEGEND

-  Existing Houses to remain
-  Existing Houses to be relocated
-  Lots for relocated houses

MAP 13

NEW QUEENS H.S.

MODIFIED SITE

Not to Scale

(City's original compromise proposal of December, 1970)

ownership because it had been a part of the site selected for the school. But on February 2, 1968, Adrian Blumenfeld officially indicated that that square block of about one acre "may be deleted from the site without undue interference with design and function of the school building and athletic facility."⁴⁴ Thus, at the same time as the residents were in the middle of their 3 year legal struggle, the bureaucracy had willingly given up a significant parcel of land occupied by only one house while sticking to its standard "H" building design, which oriented the building's bulk toward the row of houses along 102nd Street rather than designing it to occupy a maximum amount of already vacant land.

The decision was precedent-setting in that it was the first time that the city agreed to restore property taken by eminent domain to the original owners. This, of course, meant no competitive bidding, and it required the State to pass enabling legislation, which was one of the reasons why the lobbying which Cuomo and Breslin did with the various State Assemblymen and Senators was so important. Indeed, it was because it was so precedent-setting that for a number of people the symbolic nature of the issue was what counted, irrespective of the details of the case. George Zandalezini, a powerful and much feared chief engineer in charge of the Bureau's capital budget examiners* (typically engineers), opposed any compromise on the grounds that giving in to a citizen's group could eventually bring the city's entire capital construction program to a halt.⁴⁵

* As contrasted with the program planners brought into the Bureau under the regime of Director of the Budget Frederick O' R. Hayes.

Further compounding the difficulties were the reactions of the Corona residents and the members of the Board of Estimate. Because Cuomo had been negotiating secretly and because of a previous dispute over tactics which had led some of the Corona residents to replace Cuomo with another lawyer, there was some resentment and confusion among the residents over whether to accept or reject what Lindsay had announced in his press conference. They did not know such things as whose homes fell into which category, what the timing would be, what would happen to people who had already accepted a condemnation settlement, whether a favorite tree could be moved with the house, whether each house was structurally capable of withstanding a move, etc. So they adopted a cautious wait and see attitude. The Board of Estimate members, however, were immediately infuriated, and issued extremely strong statements charging deception by the Lindsay administration on telling them two weeks earlier that there was no alternative but to condemn the houses. Their lack of confidence in administration assurances was manifested over the next several weeks in the Board's rejection of other unrelated but controversial administration proposals.

Responding to the heavy political flak from the Board of Estimate members who said this was no way to run a government, the Times reported that Deputy Mayor Aurelio's reaction was that the November 13, 1970 decision

. . . was sound at the time, and that it was not until a week later that the key to the compromise - the idea of moving the houses rather than razing them - was introduced.

' Believe me, no one ever thought of that until 10 days ago,' Mr. Aurelio declared. ' It's a great idea and it would have been a great idea if Mr. Garelik [City Council President] or Mr. Beame [Controller] or anyone had thought of it six months or a year ago. But no one did until the last minute.'

. . . Moving the houses, the Deputy Mayor added, was the idea of Mario Cuomo . . .⁴⁶

In fact, unbeknownst to either Aurelio or Cuomo, the idea had been thought of six months earlier by a staff person in the Queens Office of the City Planning Department. While on a subway ride home with the Counsel for the Department, Norman Marcus, he had discussed this and such associated issues as whether the old hand-built homes could withstand the strain of being jacked up for moving. This individual, responsible at the time for Community Boards 4 and 6, * said, however, that the idea "was never mentioned downtown" because there was "no opportunity to" in a meaningful way. He and the Queens office had nothing to do with any of the decisions regarding Corona, he said, explaining that

It was a very highly charged political issue close to Don Elliott and Ed Robin. They wanted to have their fingers on it and dealt only with downtown people . . . Irwin Fructman [from the main office] went with Elliott to look at all eleven sites . . . Don and Ed wanted only one kind of answer . . .

Unfortunately, Corona was an issue where the politics were irrational. Elliott was - I guess the best word is 'principled' - and his rule was never go back on a site once it had been selected.⁴⁷

* This was not the person covering those areas in October, 1969, who spoke to Board 6 Chairman DeVoy about the status of the public housing project but was the person later to be telephoned by a Housing Authority staff person for DeVoy's telephone number, as will be described later.

Whether or not the Queens Planning Office should have tried to make itself a more visible and active force in decisions regarding Corona (or Forest Hills, for that matter) is an important question, the answer to which rests on one's basic philosophy about what planning is and how it is determined within a structured organization and the body politic in general, and will be discussed in the last chapter.

In any event, as 1970 drew to a close it looked as if a successful resolution to the Corona situation might have been found. There were many details still being worked out. City engineers and even horticultural experts were examining the properties in question, and work had begun on the legal documents to be presented to the State Legislature for its approval. But a portent of future difficulties was in the air. Assemblyman Battista was going around the neighborhood with a sound truck trying to convince the residents that a better deal could be obtained by holding out. The Brooklyn Borough President also seemed to hold out more hope to people who did not know whether to trust the city's word now by his saying publicly that the whole thing should be looked at again. The issue reappeared in the press on December 24, with Aurelio reaffirming that the government had gone as far as it would. Cuomo agreed and "said it would be 'cruel and morally indefensible' to upset the Corona compromise without having a better plan to offer."⁴⁸

Two separate statements during December summed up Breslin's and Cuomo's conclusions about the governmental process. Breslin

said the compromise was "a matter of getting the government to sit still and realize how much wrong had been done."⁴⁹ The lesson which Cuomo drew from it, as stated in the Times, was that "The apparatus of city government has shown in the Corona case that it 'has the potential for producing the most outrageous kind of blunders' and that something like an ombudsman is needed to prevent similar situations elsewhere."⁵⁰

Little did anyone suspect that the Corona saga was far from over, and that the following year was to bring the other half of the original package, the Forest Hills housing project, into much greater prominence than Corona had ever had.

CHAPTER VII - DEMOGRAPHIC AND SOCIAL CHANGES

IN NEW YORK CITY AND QUEENS

Brooklyn College is only two miles south of our neighborhood; yet in a visit to an urban sociology class, I found the usual racial misconceptions being expressed by otherwise bright students. Jerry Krase, class teacher and neighbor, invited me to tell his students about our neighborhood. As soon as they heard the phrase "racially mixed," a picture sprang into their minds. Jerry discovered what that picture was like when they handed in their reports. A few of the braver students had ventured into our blocks and were amazed to find clean streets, beautifully kept houses and gardens. But one student handed in a paper full of phrases like "broken glass," "garbage piled along sidewalks," "abandoned cars." Jerry asked him if he had ever visited our community. The student confessed, "No, I described what I thought it would be like.

- Robert Thomason
 "Racial Hope in Brooklyn,"
Christian Century, May 9, 1973

In Chapter II we saw how quantitative population changes and physical development patterns combined to create a land use pattern unsatisfactory for future needs and how the resulting scarcity of vacant land created conflict between city agencies trying to respond to pent-up demands for their services. In this chapter we shall give a broad overview of the changing characteristics of the city's population and its housing stock to better understand the context from which citizen perceptions and government policies were generated. Although the formal census material was in many cases not available at the times that decisions were

being made, many of the trends were known to knowledgeable city officials from other statistical indicators as well as being evident to the citizen, even if the latter could only characterize these changes from his own observations of his daily environment.

As in most large American cities, New York City during the sixties had a significant increase in its minority population, although the city did run counter to the national trend in one respect — its total population did not decline but remained constant. Because Census Bureau categories are not mutually exclusive, it is possible only to approximate the number of Puerto Ricans and blacks. Analysis of the 1970 census for New York City showed they increased by about one million and that there was a net out-migration of one million non-Spanish speaking whites.¹ Detailed examination showed that the "old segregated housing patterns were intensified" with "minority areas [growing] to two to three times their former size in Brooklyn, the Bronx and Queens," and that even "[w]here census tracts had a mixed population it was very frequently a case of minority groups having expanded rapidly into old white areas . . . on the fringe of long-established black and Puerto Rican sections."² Since there was an additional geographical shift in population because of new construction on vacant land, predominantly in outlying areas of the city (Staten Island, Queens, Co-op City in the Bronx, etc.), and since most of these new housing developments became overwhelmingly white occupied, the extent of white flight from the areas of minority concentration was even greater than the 1 to 1 change in total population would indicate by itself.

Occurring simultaneously were dramatic increases in the territorial extent of the city's poverty areas and the proportion of people in these areas on welfare. From 1965 to 1971 the city-wide welfare rolls tripled. An average of 1 in 6 New Yorkers was receiving public assistance, with the concentrations in poverty areas being much higher, according to data from the New York City Human Resources administration. For example, Hunts Point in the Bronx had 44% of its 175,000 population on welfare; Bedford-Stuyvesant and Brownsville in Brooklyn and Morrisania, South Bronx, and Tremont in the Bronx all had 35 to 50%; and Central Harlem and East Harlem in Manhattan had over 31% on welfare.³ During the same six years housing abandonment emerged for the first time in New York's history as a problem of serious magnitude. The frequent geographical coincidence between these problems and the residential patterns of minority settlement further complicated any proposed solutions, as perceptions about cause and effect were influenced by emotions about the "new" evil of drug addiction, fear of violent crime, and racial stereotypes.

The consequences of housing abandonment that are of particular interest to this paper have two widely divergent themes. On the one hand, its highly visible effects on neighborhoods had a psychological effect on both the residents who had left them, by showing just how much a block they knew years before could change for the worst, and on people living in as yet unaffected areas of the city by increasing their fears that such a phenomenon could happen to them if vigilance were not maintained against allowing any change in the area that would start any kind of "down-

ward slide." Its conspicuousness was heightened by an association with burned out and boarded up tenements and storefronts (fire and false alarm rates skyrocketed so high that fire engine companies in these localities were averaging 20 runs per day, year after year⁴), trash littered streets and sidewalks, and drug addicts. The wail of police and fire sirens became so commonplace that people no longer even bothered to look up in curiosity to see where they were going,⁵ and even visiting mayors who had inner city problems of their own came back from bus tours of these many mile square areas in shock, likening what they had seen to World War II bombed-out London.

On the other hand the abandonment of sound housing (estimated by economist Dr. Frank Kristof of the New York State Urban Development Corporation at 105,000 units from 1960 through 1970⁶) increased the dimensions of an already serious housing problem. From 1963 through 1970 there was a steady decline in new housing completions (including conversions), while housing losses from demolition, mergers, and abandonment were on a generally upward trend, with the result that beginning in 1967 there was a net loss of units in the city each year.⁷ Private construction in the late sixties was limited by such traditional market factors as rising costs and variations in mortgage money supply throughout the country as well as by such New York City factors as particularly high housing construction and development costs and the psychological deterrent to new construction posed by the city's much debated rent control law (the fear being that it could be extended in some form to cover more units, as was eventually done under the rent stabilization

program). Additional pressure to build all forms of subsidized housing units developed as a result of about 50,000 new household formations while the total population remained virtually constant during the decade, thus keeping the housing vacancy rate low. But for a whole variety of reasons the combined total of city, state, and federally subsidized units built each year during the last half of the decade did not increase, although there were dramatic changes in the mix. Public housing completions hit a 23 year low in 1970 with a total of 1,700 units, a miniscule figure when compared with the Housing Authority's waiting list of 150,000 families.⁸

A result of all this as the sixties drew to a close was a renewed attractiveness of larger housing developments of all types to city officials. The pendulum had shifted from a public emphasis by the Lindsay administration on good design, though this was by no means forgotten, to a major push for new construction. The total number of units produced again became a simple measure of immediate success. This shift toward a production philosophy strengthened, and was in turn reinforced by, the willingness of officials to accept the argument that it was better to have large*

* "Large" is a relative concept closely linked to the time periods it is being used in, as its meaning is in terms of what people consider to be the realistic alternatives to what is being built at that particular time. Over time spans of many years what was once considered small might be considered unacceptably large at another time. This becomes particularly important when the time span in which these values can change becomes shorter than the time span required to bring a physical development to completion from the beginning of the planning process.

In terms of day to day decision-making, "large" can represent the direction in which policy makers are going in terms of what is considered acceptable, and in the short run there tends to be a very fine line

developments than small ones because it took just as much time and effort to get each through the administrative and political system. It interlocked with the problem of rising costs by encouraging local officials to try to spread the overhead costs of one project over as many units as possible and to try to devise strategies that would get around processing delays. Among the results of all this in practical terms for the Housing Authority was a greater willingness to build new buildings on the open space of existing public housing projects, the demise of the vest-pocket program in the Model Cities areas with its emphasis on smaller projects and individual buildings - including walk-up units, and

* (continued)

between "larger" and "large." The issue of direction is whether the working hypothesis is to get as many dwelling units as you can into a single development, with the limit being imposed by someone else objecting (such as local neighborhood, the zoning authorities, or a marketing analyst who says there is not a sufficient demand) or whether the objective is to try to make the development as small as can be managed within the restrictions of the economics involved (for such reasons as aesthetics, social impact, a desire to utilize smaller sites, etc.).

However, one must be careful to distinguish between large developments with greater land requirements and large individual buildings (usually meaning high in New York). While the pressures to go larger may be the same for both cases, the planning considerations of the physical and social consequences are not. They may range from effects of high-speed elevators on maintenance costs, security, and an increased vulnerability to power failures and strikes of maintenance men on the ability of people to get to upper level apartments to such other effects as the social interactions among residents and neighbors, the provision of automobile parking space versus recreational space, and so forth.

One must also be careful to distinguish the policy on planned projects, which is where most basic decisions are made, from what is currently being constructed at any point in time, for the long lead times and the general unwillingness to reverse previously made commitments can make visual appearances very deceiving.

the announcement in January, 1971, by Housing Authority Chairman Simeon Golar that he could start construction on a record 14,000 units that year as long as there was cooperation from the federal government in the availability of funds.⁹

A third trend was the changing nature of the racial composition of the public schools, which was taking place faster than the rate of overall change in population.

Several factors combined to account for the change. Along with a gradual decline in total births from 1956 to 1971 went an absolute and proportional increase in the number of births of non-whites and Puerto-Ricans, according to the New York City Department of Health statistics shown below. (It should be noted that they also have definitional problems with the category "Puerto Rican," as only children whose mothers were actually born in Puerto Rico are listed as such. Others are listed in the "white" category, which may result in some undercount.)

The percentages shown are more meaningful when compared to the Health Department's calculations that the city's total population in 1970 was 67% white, 23% non-white, and 10% Puerto Rican.¹⁰ With such a large absolute level of whites in the city, the reason that the shift in birth proportions had a disproportionate effect was that a significant number of white children were enrolled in the virtually all white non-public schools, especially Catholic and Jewish. With a slowly declining enrollment in past years, the number of students in private schools dipped just below 400,000 in 1971. When this was combined with the migration

TABLE 8
Births in New York City, by Race

	Total	White	Non-white	Puerto Rican
1956	151,850 100%	103,800 68%	28,700 19%	19,400 13%
1965	147,940 100%	83,300 56%	40,300 27%	24,300 24%
1970	139,230 100%	71,700 52%	43,200 31%	24,200 17%
1971	123,700 100%	64,200 52%	38,700 31%	20,850 17%

Source: New York City Health Department,
as cited by the New York Times
May 29, 1973, pp. 1 and 22

of whites out of the city, the result for the public school system was that as enrollment rose by 200, 000 in the 15 years between 1957-1972 to a total of 1, 146, 000,¹¹ the number of white students declined by 170, 000,¹² and the student composition, according to the Board of Education, changed as follows:

TABLE 9
New York City Public School Enrollment, by Race

	Whites (incl. Orientals and Hispanics other than Puerto Ricans)	Blacks	Puerto Ricans
1957	68%	18%	14%
1960	63	21.5	15.5
1965	52	28	20
1970	43*	34	23
1971	42*	35	23

* 5 percentage points in these 2 years were composed of Orientals and Hispanics other than Puerto Ricans.

Source: New York City Board of Ed.,
as cited by the New York Times
May 29, 1973, p. 22

What effect did all this have on the area of Queens that we are concerned with? In Community Planning Board 6, with Forest Hills and Rego Park, population went from about 80,000 in 1950 to about 103,000 in 1960 to 119,000 in 1970,¹³ with much of the increase coming from old Jewish areas, such as the lower East Side. In Planning Board 4, which includes Corona and Lefrak City, the population went from about 70,000 in 1950 to about 75,000 in 1960 to 108,000 in 1970.¹⁴

During 1971 and 1972 many different perceptions developed about the racial and ethnic character of the area. Whether or not one believed there were blacks residing there was used as an argument for or against the proposition that racial prejudice was a significant reason for the opposition to the public housing. Nathan Glazer, for example, in his January 2, 1972, article on Forest Hills argued that

There is a simple explanation commonly given for this migration into Forest Hills and similar parts of New York City: the blacks. But it is the wrong explanation. There are blacks in Forest Hills. In a development such as Lefrak City, built by a large corporate builder which selects its tenants by impersonal bureaucratic methods, there are substantial numbers of them, as well as Orientals, Indians, and others (I speak from visual inspection).¹⁵

This type of logic about "impersonal bureaucratic methods" would seem naive to those connected with civil rights groups, who were well aware that the Lefrak organization had in August, 1970, been the subject of the first U. S. Justice Department suit in the country for violation of the 1968 Fair Housing Act in its many thousands of Brooklyn apartment units and had signed a consent decree on January 28, 1971.¹⁶

At this date, several years later, it is possible to at least settle the factual question with the availability of the detailed 1970 census tract data, though not the question of whether it is valid to say that Lefrak City is a part of what people consider to be Forest Hills. Community District 6's population of 119,019 was 97.15% white, 0.59% Negro (or 712), and 2.4% other non-white (or 2,670)¹⁷ *. The Puerto Rican population, which is included within the previous three racial categories, was close to 1%.¹⁸ At a smaller scale within District 6, census tract 717, which covered most of the new highrise buildings four blocks west of the public housing site, had 2.0% of its 9,712 people classified as Negro (or 193) and 3.3% (or 320) as other non-white.¹⁹ Lefrak City, located immediately north across the Expressway in Community District 4, comprised all of census tract 455. Its 11,501 population was 8.6% Negro (or 989) and 9.2% other non-white (or 1,053).²⁰ This was above the overall figure for Community District 4, whose 107,961 total in 1970 broke down to 91.81% white, 3.14% Negro^{**} (or 3,395), and 5.04% other non-white (or 5,443).²¹ The overall Puerto Rican population in District 4 was about 2.5%.²²

* For those not familiar with New York and the relative reputations of different parts of the city as being "white areas," the southernmost part of Staten Island - Community Board 4 - had 1.40% of its 56,533 people classified as Negro, and Community Board 3 covering the most rapidly growing part of the Island had 2.60% of its 102,211 people listed as Negro. Bay Ridge and Bensonhurst in Brooklyn, Community Districts 10 and 11 respectively, had a Negro population of 0.17% and 0.39%.

** Up from a 1% figure in the 1960 census.

But the situation in the Forest Hills public schools was not identical with the residential racial (and therefore economic) patterns, and this was one of the hidden factors underlying the controversy. The local school district line was drawn far south to take in portions of Jamaica with heavy minority concentration (see map, next page). Busing of black students to white areas was also a common practice and, of course, a portion of the Jewish students in the Forest Hills area went to private schools. The net result was that in 1971-72, of the 27,500 elementary and junior high public school students in all of local School District 28, which encompassed Forest Hills, 16,500 (or 60%) were Black, Hispanic, and other non-whites, and 11,000 (or 40%) were whites of European descent.²³ It is also clear that in the relevant time period the percentage of minorities in those schools within the smaller Community Planning District 6 was a large multiple of the number of minorities living in the immediate neighborhoods. Data available for 1972-73 for each school show the percentage of minority enrollment to range from 24% to 42%.²⁴ The two high schools, which were under the jurisdiction of the central school board rather than the local ones, had a similar situation. Forest Hills High School had a 20% minority enrollment, and Newtown High School in Corona had a 41% minority student body.²⁵ All of these minority percentages of school enrollment were well above those cited by the Housing Authority in its 1966 application for approval of the Forest Hills housing.

Furthermore, the passions created by the widespread busing at this time were by no means one-sided and limited to the white neighbor-

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Maps for: Public School Enrollment
Elementary and Jr. High Schools - 1971-72

Births in 1971
Shown by Health Districts

Forest Hills is in the northern part of School District 28. The District's northern boundary is the Long Island Expressway, except for a small rectangular extension that covers about half of Lefrak City. Except for this addition, the northern portion of District 28 is essentially co-terminus with the eastern, northern, and western boundaries of Community Planning District 6.







For purposes of comparison, a map of the racial distribution of births is also shown.

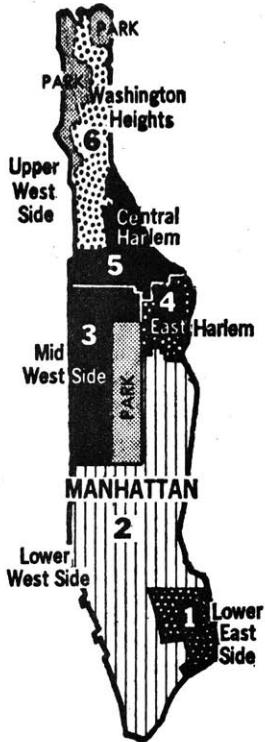
Source: New York Times
May 29, 1973, p. 22

MAP 14

PUBLIC SCHOOL ENROLLMENT

Elementary and Jr. High Schools-1971-72

-  White majority
-  Majority of Whites and Orientals
-  Black majority
-  Puerto Rican majority
-  Majority of Blacks and Puerto Ricans
-  Majority of Puerto Ricans and other Hispanics





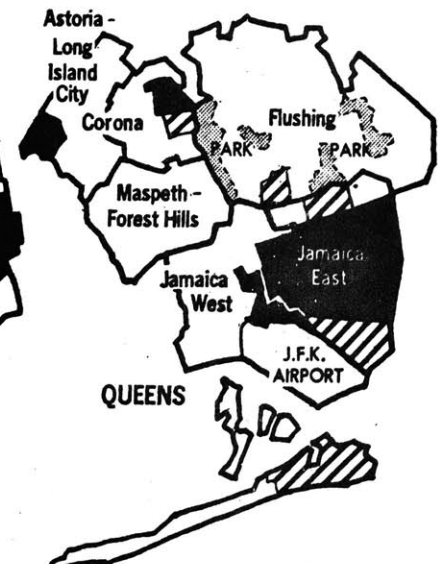
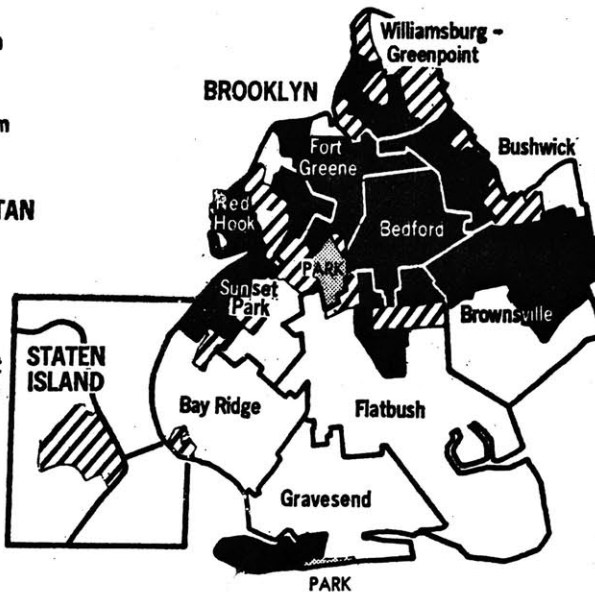
MAP 15

BIRTHS IN 1971

Shown by Health Districts

Proportion of Black and Puerto Rican Births

-  Majority of Blacks and Puerto Ricans
-  25% to 50% Black and Puerto Rican



hoods. At City Planning Commission capital budget hearings for Queens schools held in December, 1971, many blacks expressed the same kinds of fears for their children as white parents typically used in their opposition to school integration:

Relating stories about black children whose safety they said had been threatened in "hostile" white communities, speaker after speaker asked that the children of South Jamaica and southeast Queens be given more of their own schools rather than "being sent up to integrate northern Queens."26

A few other items will complete this statistical picture, and to give a sense of perspective, the figures for all of New York City are also shown, as well as those for Queens (see following table).

The median income data confirmed the popular image of the Forest Hills - Rego Park area as a more wealthy part of the city. The high percentage of units occupied by renters in District 6 shows that while there may have remained a significant number of single family homeowners in the area around the Forest Hills high school, for the area as a whole the traditional reputation was no longer valid. District 4, even with its rapid population increase, had a higher proportion of homeowners, though still below the Queens average. However, the proportion of elderly in District 6 is surprisingly high for an area of such rapid growth, one that was supposedly especially attractive to a young mobile Jewish population, especially since the low number of persons living in group quarters would seem to rule out the explanation of nursing homes. Furthermore, notwithstanding such developments as Lefrak City, the somewhat higher

TABLE 10

Selected 1970 Census Data

	Queens Community District 6	Queens Community District 4	New York City	Borough of Queens
median family income	\$ 13, 881	11, 370	9, 682	11, 554
median income of unrelated in- dividuals 14 ⁺ years old	\$ 5, 944	5, 216	4, 050	4, 064
% of population aged 65 and over	16. 9%	11. 3%	12. 0%	12. 4%
% of housing units occupied by renters	82. 6%	75. 4%	74. 3%	57. 0%
number of families with income below federal poverty level	1, 260	1, 548	236, 507	30, 161
number of unrelated individuals 14 ⁺ with income below federal poverty level	2, 805	2, 849	266, 053	47, 520

Source: New York City Planning Commission,
Community Planning District Profiles,
Parts I and II - May, 1973

proportion of ownership in District 4 and its reputation as an older area would have led one to suspect a higher number of elderly, yet its percentage of elderly is below the average in both the entire city and Queens.

CHAPTER VIII - THE HOUSING PROJECT BECOMES AN ISSUE

(I)t is precisely because the experts confine themselves to projections based on facts that their predictions are vulnerable. For history is shaped as much by intangibles as by hard facts . . . (T)he experts . . . had no way of knowing where or how human hopes or fears would be suddenly created into vast surges of energy that would transform political, economic, and social institutions . . .

The most important factor in the complex equation of the future is the way the human mind responds to crisis. Arnold Toynbee's A Study of History makes the point that the greatest of all historical forces are set in motion when people decide to pit themselves against serious challenge. Human experience is not a closed circle. It is full of magnificent detours and sudden departures from predicted destinations . . .

The way the human mind will respond to any given situation is the kind of intangible that can become the dominant reality of tomorrow.¹

- Norman Cousins, editor
Saturday Review/World

I still get heckled and screamed at in middle-class white areas because of my plans to scatter public housing in those neighborhoods, and for other reasons, but it isn't as intense and violent as it was.²

-Mayor John Lindsay
September, 1967

The organization and leadership of the anti-public housing movement that was to bring Forest Hills into prominence by the end of 1971 had its genesis in the period of December, 1970-January, 1971. It was not as if there had been no opposition in the preceding years, for there had. But it had been individualistic enough and unorganized enough so that its im-

pact was fragmentary and virtually unknown to anyone not intimately involved. For example, in November, 1967, the Queens Civic Conference had vowed continued opposition after HUD approved the project that month,³ while at the same time Housing Authority official Joseph Christian said he expected construction to start in about one year when architectural designs were completed.⁴ Discussion in subsequent years indicates that a year later some people in the community had been led to believe the project was going nowhere because of reports of economic problems from architect Franzen.⁵ There is also an unsubstantiated rumor that some Forest Hills residents had gone to Washington, D. C. and been assured by someone in the federal government that the project was dead.⁶ Otherwise little is known about this period. Of course, there was no reason for people to spend a lot of time organizing opposition if they believed the project to be defunct for all practical purposes. Once that belief became widespread the Housing Authority, when it hired a new architect, also just as easily could have felt there was no reason to stir things up needlessly by announcing the project was moving once again, preferring instead to just get construction started before opposition could again be aroused.

For the Housing Authority had not been unaware of the latent opposition. By November, 1967, the percentage of elderly units in the project had been raised from the original thirty percent to a contemplated forty to forty-five percent.⁷ In March, 1968, an agreement with the Board of Education to sign a ten year lease to pay for early childhood space in the project was reported to top Planning Department official

Edward Robin as being a decision which Housing Authority, school system, and Planning Department officials agreed "would soothe some of the tensions within the community caused by the project."⁸ Indeed, as will be described in more detail later, the Authority was especially sensitive about the Forest Hills situation, more so than with many other projects. Nevertheless, such events as the need for Community Planning Board 6 Chairman Joseph DeVoy to call the City Planning Department in late 1969 because he did not know the name of the architect after two years of architectural work had been done and the very mystery about these years themselves all indicate the lack of widespread communication about the project.

In looking backward at such controversial issues as the Forest Hills project, there is a tendency to analyze them only in terms of broad social issues with the assumption that the original participants consciously understood the abstract issues. We forget that some movements start not because of informed leadership, but rather because some citizens meet to discuss something on which they have fragmentary and incomplete information, and therefore act out of a more emotional basis. Furthermore, for those not experienced in community organizing, it may be hard to realize 1) how many neighborhood meetings are taking place all the time - on everything ranging from a traffic light at a school intersection to a protest against a new gasoline station to demands for better police protection, 2) how large a network of personal contacts must be maintained by any individual if he is to keep track of what both a myriad of

government agencies and community groups are talking about at any one time, let alone what the history and context of any issue is, and 3) that there is no inevitability about any item catching on as a public issue beyond a small locality, no matter how obvious it might seem years later.

It is unclear whether opposition arose initially just out of a concern with the public housing alone and then was later joined by people who wanted the high school moved from the Corona site or whether a few people saw in it a chance to kill two birds with one stone. I say this because of the way that the first opposition meetings were held after the Corona discussions between Aurelio and Cuomo had brought to people's attention that the public housing project was not dead, a fact reaffirmed in January with its inclusion in a list of public housing projects on which Simeon Golar intended to break ground to meet his goal of starting a record 14,000 units in 1971.

The earliest local anti-project meeting of a public nature that I have been able to trace was held in January, 1971. It was reportedly called by Assemblyman Herbert Miller, who was at the same time involved with Assemblyman Vito Battista in trying to win a complete victory for the Corona homeowners rather than accept the compromise offered by the city. It was at this meeting that Jerry Birbach first emerged. He was a 42 year old Manhattan real estate dealer who lived in a \$41,000 home four blocks south of the housing site, a corpulent person with a booming voice who was 11 months later to be a household name in New York as the acknowledged leader of the opposition movement.⁹

But he was not a leader at this gathering. Here he was a spectator standing in the rear of a meeting hall.

The meeting was an example of how the course of future events is not always changed by forethought but by chance and the passions of the moment. As was stated by Birbach in a newspaper interview in November, 1971,¹⁰ and confirmed to me by a Housing Authority staff person who anonymously attended the meeting because he lived relatively nearby, Birbach was reluctant to get involved as a protest leader but eventually agreed to do so. It came about as people debated with Miller what to do about the project. According to the man from the Authority, "Herb was inept."¹¹ People from Corona and elsewhere were arguing that if one was to oppose the project effectively that one had to become active with things like baby carriage parades and other such visible tactics. Birbach asked some questions about the particulars and Miller replied negatively, saying that he was going to fight the project through channels. In the words of the Authority official, "It was clear that Miller was only going to make a political ploy of it."¹² As Birbach put it, he [Birbach] was listening to "a politician 'make a political circus' of the anti-project campaign."¹³ After Miller indicated he would not do what Birbach suggested, people in the room turned to Birbach and said they would join him if he would carry through.¹⁴ A week later there was a second meeting held, using the headquarters of the Conservative party,¹⁵ and eventually Birbach took a leadership role in the movement, setting up the Forest Hills Residents Association over the next couple of months.

The first demonstration to make the New York Times was the "noisy" interruption of a February 3rd meeting which Queens Borough President Sidney Leviss was holding with City Planning Commission Chairman Donald Elliott and the several hundred members of all fourteen Queens Community Planning Boards to prepare for the public hearings on the Plan for New York City that the Commission was going to hold in each community district. (This was the first time, incidentally, that the Commission was ever going to have meetings in the "outer" Boroughs rather than in City Hall in lower Manhattan.)

Three aspects of the demonstration are of interest: what was said by whom, the manner in which the protest was carried out, and the political undertones existing between the borough president and the Community Boards.

The strategy was obviously one of confrontation politics. The hundred protestors wanted not only to demonstrate outside the meeting, with placards saying "Lindsay, you are killing our neighborhood" and "Your dollars will be paying for a housing project - We need a school," but also to get into the meeting. After being told by the borough president's Coordinator of Community Boards that only "friends" were welcome, which they were not, it was agreed to let four persons in as observers, but twelve pushed their way in.

One of the dissidents, who wanted a high school on the site . . . was Mrs. Sherrie Birbach, who interrupted the meeting with a shouted, 'What about our school?' . . . [She] was rebuked by [Borough President] Leviss, who remarked, 'You people allowed in as observers will not be permitted to speak.'¹⁶

In a subsequent discussion, "Jerry Koenig, who described himself as president of the Fairview Tenants Association, spoke for the dissidents, 'We were promised a school on the site,' he said. 'We don't know who's on our planning board. We want representation on the Board.'"¹⁷ The newspaper article then went on to point out that of the 14 members on Board 6, only four were present, including Anthony Atlas, head of the city's Traffic Violations Bureau, but did not give any indication of their reaction to the demonstration.

If one takes these comments at face value, one would have to ask who promised them a school on the site, and can they really have been as ignorant as they tried to portray themselves. Some probably were. A certain degree of vagueness about the kind of school the protestors wanted for the site - some said a high school, some an intermediate or junior high school - might have added to the misunderstanding and rumors that could have developed among those not familiar with the details. For since 1968-69, the capital budget had indeed included authorization for a new intermediate school (IS 241) to be built in the general vicinity of Community Planning District 4 or the northern part of District 6 because of the overcrowding in the existing intermediate and junior high schools. A site for this school, to be built by the Educational Construction Fund,^{*18} had remained undetermined for the following two and one-half years. It is possible that some of these people concerned about the intermediate school had at some time been led to believe that this would be an appropriate site for that particular school.

* The ECF is an autonomous New York City public agency authorized to construct educational buildings in conjunction with revenue producing facilities: industrial, commercial, or residential.

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But it strains credulity to believe the people who said they had been promised a high school on the site, unless they were trying to refer to something prior to 1966. There had been too many local school and civic organizations involved in communication with city officials throughout 1970 on the status of the high school for Corona and there had been too much publicity over the Corona compromise proposed two months earlier for such ignorance to be so complete.

Secondly, Mrs. Sherrie Birbach was the wife of Jerry Birbach, who had earlier indicated an interest in creating a more effective opposition to the public housing and who, in fact, was not new to the leadership of an organization. In the files of the City Planning Department I found an obscure February, 1967, letter from him as the President of B' nai B' rith Benevolence Lodge 2267, stating his opposition to the condemnation of Corona homes for a new high school:

. . . I personally spoke to Mr. Piazza, who I know to be very active in civic affairs in that community and was shocked to learn that his home is included in the 69 homes to be condemned.

Our membership feels that this is an unnecessary action, since there is plenty of vacant land in the surrounding area that could be utilized without anyone suffering . . . I personally know this part of Corona. This (sic) residents are community minded and take an active interest in local organizations. 19

The letter went on to say that the VFW Post which Mr. Piazza headed had given "large donations to a newly formed Temple in Rego Park," a new ambulance to the Corona Community Ambulance Corps., and \$15,000 to the Corona Boys Club, and it concluded by saying that "we feel that other land, such as the old World Fair grounds, can be used for the satisfaction of all concerned."²⁰ There was no mention of the public housing site's vacant land in Forest Hills in that letter.

Thus, what is more likely is that the high school was seen in early 1971 as a good issue to oppose the housing project with, both because it was a needed facility and because there was already a measure of support for moving the school off the Corona site. However, it is interesting that in its reporting of this February 3 demonstration against the public housing the Times article failed to mention the Corona school situation as bearing any relation to the "promised" school for the site, despite its direct reference to Mrs. Birbach wanting a "high school." It is also noteworthy that there was no mention of any local politician being present in support of the protestors.

Another important shift in the politics of the planning process that was taking place during these months was also in evidence that same February 3rd evening. That was the growing mood of independence of the Community Boards, a change that was showing up in scattered instances throughout the city. * The Boards, one for each Community Planning District, were each a body of not more than fifty citizens, all appointed by the borough president. They were officially advisory to their respective borough president, with some limited legal powers of an advisory review over matters before the City Planning Commission.

* For example, during the previous year, while I was working for the Staten Island office of the City Planning Department, the Staten Island Community Boards attempted to set up an executive council composed of the board chairmen to coordinate information and activities among themselves. The Staten Island Borough President tried to block this move in several not so subtle ways and finally attempted to remove the chairman who had initiated the idea of an executive council from his Board membership.

But in reality they had increasing powers of influence as they became an institutional vehicle through which the city government, in particular the City Planning Department, could deal directly with local neighborhoods in some kind of structured forum in a city of eight million people.

In the case of Borough President Sidney Leviss, the Queens Boards were dealing with a man who, as I observed once at an executive session of the Board of Estimate, could be overzealous in defending the prerogatives of the borough president, both as an institution and as it related to his personal authority. Although preaching the cause of community control and decentralization could be popular, it had different meanings to different people. With some it could mean giving more of the Mayor's power to the borough president, and not necessarily to the "local" Community Board. * There was open disagreement in February between Leviss and the Boards over whether or not they could hold public hearings on anything before the borough president had officially referred a subject to them. The definition that the boards were "advisory" to him rather than "political" also implied in his view that once a borough president had exercised his power voting on a given matter in the Board of Estimate the item was no longer subject to formal discussion by a Community Board. Thus, the question of control of the Boards was a very real one.

Public indications of this split came at that February 3rd meeting, when the borough president criticized one of the Boards for holding

* I say "local" because one must remember that many boards encompassed areas with populations ranging from 100,000 to 200,000 and thus were equivalent to the population of a small city.

a public hearing on a proposed interborough truckway before plans were complete. 'A community board spokesman responded, to applause, that the hearing had been held because 'Too often the public never gets to say anything before a project is a fait accompli.' "21 Later on in February this conflict continued as Community Board 4 wanted to hold a public hearing on the issue of the high school site in Corona, reportedly for the purpose of censuring the borough president for voting to approve the site.²²

In such an atmosphere, and with the need to maintain "political etiquette" with the sensitive Levis, who had reportedly done a lot of the legwork to arrange the 1966 political site selection deal as Deputy Borough President, it is likely that even if there were a local Queens politician who supported the protestors at that time, he would have stayed away from being physically present at such an outward show of disrespect for the Borough President as the February 3rd meeting. Furthermore, though the protestors may not have realized it at the time, the protest was more likely to achieve public and Community Planning Board support if it did not have anyone from a conventional political background supporting it initially, for then it would lose both its image as a spontaneous citizen protest and its ability to appear to be gaining momentum over the long drive ahead as people joined it. For if there was any lesson learned by the people in the area from the nearby Corona struggle, which so many of the Forest Hills-Rego Park parents were reminded of daily as long as their children attended the overcrowded high schools in the area, it was that anyone preparing to do battle with the city had to be prepared for a long struggle and that publicity was essential to keep the momentum going.

Although the protests continued during February, including the picketing of a dinner near Forest Hills honoring Deputy Mayor Aurelio, the situation regarding Corona was in the spotlight as it continued to deteriorate, and the city bureaucracy had itself to blame as much as the political opposition. In January Assemblymen Battista and Miller had co-filed a bill in the State Legislature to counter the city's bill introduced by Assemblyman Lisa. Whereas the Lisa bill was tailored to the particular circumstances in its wording of which owners would have title returned and which could accept either an outright condemnation award or could accept the return of title to a house that would be physically relocated onto a nearby lot, the Battista-Miller bill was much more general. It would have applied to all sites selected by the city for any public facility. It would have required the city to return title to the original owners of all the land selected for a site whenever any portion of the originally selected site was not going to be used for the original purpose for which the site had been selected. This would obviously have been a legal straitjacket for the city, not only in Corona but in general, for it was not unusual for the city to auction leftover pieces of land after a facility had been finished.

Battista made it clear that that was his general intention. The stated objectives were first to have all the Corona homes left as they were and the high school built on the Forest Hills site and second to reduce the amount of residential condemnation by the city in the site selection process for all city developments. Battista and Miller told the press that they had sent a telegram to Governor Rockefeller reminding

him of the Urstadt report's recommendations for another site for the high school.²³ The net loss in this, aside from time, would have been the public housing units, which - as we saw earlier - had been misjudged in the Urstadt report, but this was not important to either Battista or Miller. They saw that as a good result rather than as one which would have also had to be taken into the equation by finding some other place for the housing units if the high school was moved to Forest Hills. Battista, after all, had called for the taxation of public housing a year earlier when he had been the Conservative Party's candidate for city controller.

All of this was happening at a time when residents of the homes were debating with each other whether or not to accept the city's offer, and a public relations battle was going on as each side proclaimed that a majority of the residents would support them when the time came. What was really going on was a war of nerves over political strategy and this was acknowledged on January 18th when

Mr. Lisa said the situation was particularly delicate because homeowners were to begin negotiations with the city on the compromise this week, and rumors are circulating that they can get more if they hold out. He accused Mr. Battista and Mr. Miller of 'headline hunting,' but Mr. Battista insists they have the community's best interests at heart.²⁴

With friends arguing with friends in Corona, with reports of violence and threats of violence circulating in the area, and just a couple of days after the new group of Forest Hills protestors had aroused attention at the borough president's meeting, the city government produced

what can only be termed its most spectacular example of incompetence. Its move demonstrated just how insensitive lower level officials could be in implementing higher level policy decisions. In a story that made the front page of the Times it was reported that the Corporation Counsel's office had sent a letter to the affected Corona residents that in effect invalidated the Aurelio Corona compromise. The letter, by stating that only the owner-occupied homes were protected under the compromise, eliminated about one-quarter of the structures in question, among them even those occupied by the children or parents of the title holder. It set a ten-day deadline for the owners to notify the city of the acceptance or rejection of the compromise, while also stating that any agreement depended on approval of pending legislation by the state, copies of which were not available but would be in a few days.²⁵ Why there was such a short deadline when the state legislation might not be passed for months, I do not know, nor do I know whether the lawyers were aware of just how many of the houses were occupied by long term renters. But in any case, the letter certainly caused consternation, confusion, and distrust in Corona.

The unfortunate part of it all was that it had been a mistake, and the people responsible for the letter were not perceptive enough to realize it even when a tip-off for trouble was an inquiry from the press. The reporter who wrote the story related how he had called the city when he discovered the letter and received confirmation of it by the writer, an assistant Corporation Counsel. Verifying the letter's effect, the lawyer

said, "Dick Aurelio will probably have to make some special arrangements."²⁶ The reporter then called Deputy Mayor Aurelio, who could not believe that the letter said what it did until it was read to him verbatim.²⁷

On February 8th there was a follow-up story in which Aurelio blasted the letter as being "just stupidity," and he stated that he would not have allowed it to go out had he seen it. He said it was "one of those things that happen in a bureaucracy,"²⁸ and that the original deal still stood. Such a furor over credibility had been created that Mayor Lindsay took the rare step of commenting on a current political issue on his weekly television program, reaffirming that the original compromise offer would still stand for all the homes.

The denials by the city did not get a prominent position in the Times, and some damage had been done. Furthermore, although it was a humane decision by Aurelio, it was a backhanded victory in that it showed once again that sometimes one can get "justice" only by going to the top. It further demonstrated the valuable role the press can play by bringing attention to a situation when the regular government channels in the field failed to communicate an obvious mistake to the top. Unfortunately, it also demonstrated the irrelevancy of the Queens office of the City Planning Department to the whole process, an irrelevancy due to self-imposed non-involvement.²⁹

Press coverage of the Forest Hills housing issue continued two weeks later in the February 21 Sunday New York Times with an obscurely

placed, but moderately sized, "background" article that accurately summarized the history of the scatter-site program. It pointed out that all of the scatter-site projects had had some community opposition, from middle income blacks as well as whites. Commenting on the "giant" Forest Hills project "in the works" since 1966, it observed that "[i]n fact, its original site was perhaps more controversial than its present one"³⁰

Aside from its historical value as a contemporary source of what people were saying then, as well as what they were not saying, the article was important by its mere presence. With so many local disputes taking place all the time, it was rather unusual for the Times to run an article of this type, which was not reporting a specific daily news event, such a short time after any community activity had started. The fact that it did, for whatever reason, showed that the issue was considered newsworthy at an early stage, and that in itself was a help to anyone trying to affect any change through mass political action. Unfortunately, in view of the influence of the press, later articles were not always as accurate as this one.

It is always difficult to know whether people are expressing the real reasons for their feelings. But since the ones people express publicly form the first basis for communication between the protagonists, they are important. The bluntest expression of all that was reported in the Times was that of Assemblyman Miller, who appeared to continue shifting from a position of trying to find any alternate high school site

to outright opposition to any public housing in Forst Hills by saying, "This whole project is . . . a disservice to the people who live here and to the ones who'll be brought in. "31

But in general the reasons given for opposition were along more conventional lines: "overcrowded neighborhood, inadequate schools, and expensive pilings needed because of an underground river, "32 and the Housing Authority response was also traditional in its tone: that 40% of the units would be for the elderly, that a children's center would be included with 7 classrooms, and that the school problem would be solved because the new Corona high school was scheduled to be open when the housing was completed in mid-1973, a little over two years away. As for the criticism of the foundation cost, "a Housing Authority spokesman said, 'The Housing Authority is a responsible public agency, and we are not about to build on unsound soil or ground. This business of an underground stream is nonsense. "'33

While this appeared straightforward, in fact the Authority's defense contained the seeds of its own destruction. It relied on a press spokesman who either felt that it looked bad to admit that a citizen objection might be valid or who had just gotten hasty summaries of the details from a line official in his agency. But by so doing, it made its rebuttal to Assemblyman Miller's accusation of political manipulation by the Mayor that much less believable to the average citizen. For Miller was charging that the Lindsay campaign people had told residents during the 1969 election that the project would not be built in order to help secure their votes. Since the Queens and Jewish vote had been acknowl-

edged by political commentators as critical to Lindsay's re-election, this had an air of plausibility to some. The Authority's defense, that the delay was because the project had to be redesigned in 1969 when the original design proved too expensive, relied on people to trust the credibility of government officials rather than explaining that the heart of the difficulty was the very subsoil problem that people meant when referring to an underground stream. But they had already denied this problem. Further, the high school explanation was at face value irrelevant to those working against the Corona compromise and at its best could only be taken with skepticism by the others, who knew that their Corona neighbors were split over the compromise and knew that in any case the Housing Authority had no influence over whatever the city government was doing with the school issue. Moreover, the Board of Education's track record in meeting its schedules was no better than the Housing Authority's.

As to the critical issue of acceptance of low-income families in a middle-income neighborhood, the Times said that "neither side is willing to mention [it] publicly, but concede privately that it is very real."³⁴ A president of a civic association accused the city of raising the issue of "unwanted poor families" as a way of "trying to shame the community into accepting something it doesn't want." The comment of Housing Authority Chairman Simeon Golar on this - whether because he was trying to be diplomatic or because he took the opposition too lightly is hard to tell - was that he liked the support the project was getting in Queens and that "There's always some opposition, but we expect this project to be a solid, integral part of the community in every way."³⁵

As frequently happens in community-government conflicts, there was a period of no particularly dramatic events over the next couple of months. There were some demonstrations and meetings but most of the press coverage was limited to local newspapers. There was a new organization formed to fight the project, the Forest Hills Residents Association, with Jerry Birbach and Jerry Koenig as co-chairmen. At a February City Council meeting on the education section of the capital budget, one councilman accused Assemblyman Miller of being against the housing project because there would be blacks in it. Miller countered by using the rationale of the wish of the community for a school. Also, the City Council approved the Aurelio-Cuomo Corona compromise while the state enabling legislation was still pending.

During this time, while opposition was continuing to form, it is clear that the most serious concern of the Housing Authority was its failure to maintain its ambitious production schedule of 14,000 units, as mentioned in Chapter VII. This objective had become the primary goal of Chairman Golar, who not only had gone out on the limb by publicly making the prediction in the first place, but had also said, when asked in March how the lagging program could possibly make it, "It may be I'll personally have to take command . . . [I'm] egotistical enough to believe that my being here makes a difference."³⁶

The emphasis was now on the economic aspects of the production function, and the constraint of the federal cost limits. For the immediate short run of that year, the solutions were seen as the raising of these limits, the possible use of city capital budget funds if the federal

limits were not raised high enough, and a much greater use of turn-key construction, a policy which the regional office of HUD had been strongly urging the Housing Authority to pursue. (Indeed, the Housing Authority had recently signed its first contract with the Lefrak organization to build 638 turn-key units in some ghetto areas, and Sam Lefrak was talking about building 50,000 more such units over the next ten years for the city.)³⁷ In the longer run, the planning policy was to reverse the downward trend of project sizes. "We cannot afford the luxury of playing with pretty little vest-pocket plans which will net us 45 or 50 units or maybe 100 or 200," said Mr. Golar.³⁸

There were two directions in physical design logically possible as a result of this policy shift - increasing building height while keeping land requirements relatively constant or increasing land area requirements with relatively low buildings. The choice, as Mr. Golar had indicated a month earlier, was the former.

'The pendulum has swung back' to construction of high rise apartment buildings, which the Housing Authority de-emphasized in the last few years in the interests of good design and lower crime levels. Mr. Golar said recent studies of housing projects showed that the height of an individual building was not necessarily a factor in the crime level . . . and that many high-rise buildings were actually safer than low-rise buildings if they were designed properly.*³⁹

* I have some questions about the accuracy of these statements. The studies referred to were done by Oscar Newman and were later published as the book Defensible Space. While they do indicate that crime could be reduced in high-rise buildings with changes in details of their design, it seems clear to me that they indicate that larger design decisions, as well as socio-economic characteristics of tenants and neighbors, are more im-

It should be briefly noted that the effects of such a decision are more far reaching than might appear at first glance. Because sites for public housing require political approval and because the level of community input into the planning process was in the process of dramatically increasing during this period of years, such features as high rise buildings and larger sized projects create more negative features for a proposal to overcome, especially in the outer areas of the city where some vacant land exists and where even privately developed market rate housing is opposed when it involves a change from the predominant type of low-rise structure. For the goal of scatter-site housing it adds another strike against what is already unpopular, just as some condemnation of homes is deemed politically possible for "good" facilities and impossible for locally "undesirable" facilities. Thus, any such proposed project may be killed entirely. And even if it is not, the consequence of any obstacles, whether rational or irrational perceptions on the part of any local citizenry, is to add time to the site approval process, and that time is money. For the federal cost limits on public housing may be considered a step function over time, just as social security benefits are. They are raised by Congress only occasionally and are a belated response to an inflation which goes on continuously. Thus, speed through the political process is just as important as overcoming the delays caused

* (continued)

portant. For example, ". . . it is not only large size [of projects], but large size in combination with higher buildings that contributes to a more criminally active situation. It seems that one can still maintain high density (size) and not encounter higher crime rates, as long as building height remains low." 40

by bureaucratic red tape in the federal review process; and if one is committed to try to obtain sites in middle-class areas, including even those areas which are currently experiencing private development rather than waiting until only the left-over sites are available, then one must be willing to compromise on the goal of maximum units per site.

The long lead times required before construction could start, however, meant that many of the projects which the Housing Authority was counting on for its 14,000 unit goal did not reflect the shift in policy. Twenty-one of the forty-nine projects which the Authority had listed for 1971 starts had less than 200 units,⁴¹ and many of the others were in the 200's and 300's. In contrast the Forest Hills project with its 840 units was one of the largest and was much further along in the pipeline than most of the other projects. For not only did a majority of the 49 projects still need formal federal financing approval as of late March, but a significant number also were lacking either a preliminary program reservation for funds by HUD or were still awaiting site approval from the New York City Board of Estimate.⁴²

By May 1, with the year one-third over, the Authority had started only 1,000 units. But in the last week of April there were several developments which gave cause for new optimism in the Authority's efforts to surmount its economic problems of construction costs that were by now rising by as much as 1% per month and an operating budget that had a \$14 million yearly deficit. Among them were permission to piggyback

federal model cities funds on top of standard public housing funds to bring several hundred units back within federal cost limits. The most significant actions were the raising of the federal construction cost per room limit by about one-third as a result of a change in the law by Congress the previous year, a second announcement that HUD regional administrator William Green was exercising his legally permissible discretion to allow New York City to exceed the new limit by 5%, and a third announcement by Green that HUD had "reserved" enough money for 12,294 units not yet under construction (assuming, of course, that the city could get that many ready for financing within the limits).⁴³ At the same time Simeon Golar announced that construction of the Forest Hills project was imminent, with solicitation of bids expected by the end of May and ground breaking by July.⁴⁴

By now, however, the opposition had taken hold over a wider range of persons. For example, the Boards for Community Planning Districts 3 (two miles north of the project) and 6 had already voted against the project and Board 4 was debating it. In addition, an estimated 1,000 persons at the Forest Hills High School heard Assemblyman Miller speak on April 29 about his bill that would require voter approval of public housing.⁴⁵ This was an item of particular interest at that time because the United States Supreme Court had three days earlier upheld the constitutionality of such a law in California in *James vs. Valtierra*, based on that state's long history of public referenda (one justice not participating, three justices dissenting).⁴⁶

The response of the Housing Authority to the opposition was premised on the fact that the project had its legal approvals and was therefore assumed to be a fait accompli. So the posture ultimately adopted by the Authority was one of explanation and justification, rather than bargaining. Within the Authority itself Forest Hills was seen prior to 1971 to be in need of special treatment, by irregular procedures, unlike those used with other scatter-site projects in Queens, including some which had also received their legal approvals.

An example for comparison is Latimer Gardens in nearby Flushing. It was occupied in early 1971, was hailed by Simeon Golar as an example of a successful project, and was cited by Mario Cuomo as part of his justification for reducing the size of the Forest Hills project in his compromise report to the Mayor in 1972.

An explanation of how the Authority did or did not deal with the local people requires some understanding of its division of responsibilities. It did not have staff "project directors" responsible for the coordination of a project from start to finish. Consequently, there was no one person who had complete knowledge of the Forest Hills project's complex political, economic, and design history who could talk to community groups as an official who, though subject to higher authority, was nevertheless responsible for knowing all the facets of a job. Rather, there were several offices involved, including the program policy office and the design division. Another was a small understaffed office which was first called the Intergroup Relations office in the late sixties and was

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reorganized as the Community Affairs office. On paper this office had the responsibility to communicate with citizen organizations prior to the opening of a new project.

However, this was considered to be just a third priority item among the responsibilities of that office in 1969. At that time the primary job of the single staff person who covered all of Queens was the continual monitoring in the field of the racial distribution of all projects, working in a liaison capacity between the managers of projects and the tenant selection office in the Authority's central headquarters. With the objective of keeping projects racially integrated, they were working in a very sensitive area, as civil rights legislation and litigation had made it illegal for the tenant selection office to refer to race in any way, though the Intergroup Relations office could. A second priority was the investigation of any complaints of problems of an interracial nature, both among tenants and Authority employees.⁴⁷

The instructions given in early 1969 to the newly hired staff person for Queens, however, did not place Forest Hills in that third category of responsibilities, as were the Latimer Gardens project and a project in Arverne on the far easterly ocean side of Queens. Rather he was told that their office was not handling the Forest Hills project, that it was "a touchy situation - a Jewish problem and was to be dealt with at the highest level of the Authority, using Jewish staff."⁴⁸ What this meant, according to a knowledgeable official, was that Forest Hills was to be

handled by the "front office - by Joe Christian, "^{*49} the then general manager, and a person whose involvement in the original scatter-site discussions and the Forest Hills site selection issue went back to 1966.

At least part of the reason for this had to do with the internal politics and questions of trust that are important in any large bureaucracy in which staff and modus operandi have been inbred for many years and in which the introduction of any outsider is viewed with suspicion. In this case the then head of the Community Affairs office was a person who had been brought in from the Urban League to reorganize what had been a group of departments (Intergroup Relations, Community Services, etc.). Not only was he "suspect," but the very office involved, Intergroup Relations, had itself been an upsetting influence within some of the organization. Furthermore, this official was black. There is some reason to suspect that the top officials of the Authority, now headed by Albert Walsh, who had succeeded Walter Washington as chairman, believed that the sending of a man from an office with a "black image" might simply exacerbate a delicate situation. This was in addition to any desire to keep control of the Forest Hills situation with one or two trusted people at the top,⁵⁰ just as the site selection deal of 1966 was worked out at the top level of the city administration, with only one or two people in the Housing Authority knowing what happened. (A present-day high official who had been involved with the planning details of the Forest Hills project as a

* He was not Jewish, but saying that the Authority wanted to use Jewish staff for a Jewish problem was a way of assuaging the feelings of an office which was being told it could not handle something that was ostensibly within its jurisdiction.

staff person since its inception in 1966, for example, admitted that he did not know the details of the 1966 site deal, but believed the stories that the Lindsay people had moved it to Forest Hills because Jews would object less than Corona Italians.⁵¹ This is another example of what happens over long periods of time when a bureaucracy operates under self-imposed restrictions of information.)

Precisely how high up the decision not to deal with the various Forest Hills community groups originated is not known. One contemporary high official in the Authority said that they did not go out to talk with communities with the scatter-site projects because they were restricted by "City Hall," in contrast to what took place with their projects in model city areas, in which he claimed the Authority had dealt successfully with the communities. Also, although general manager Christian apparently had some contacts with some of the rabbis and others in the area who supported the project from its inception, it cannot be assumed from this that he made the policy decision regarding how much community contact the Authority would have. A person who worked at one time with both Joe Christian and Albert Walsh stated that the personalities of Albert Walsh and Simeon Golar were so assertive that they insisted on making all policy decisions. Joe Christian was characterized by this person as "a very capable staff person, but not a leader of men" when working under these aggressive persons.⁵²

Yet another viewpoint about community participation was expressed by a former staff person in the Authority. He said that it was

not surprising that the work with communities in which new projects were underway was made a third priority of the Community Affairs office in 1969. "The Housing Authority had never dealt with communities, because it was assumed that all communities would oppose a project. So we build it anyway, and then deal with it" after people realize they just have to live with it.⁵³

So, from 1969 to January 1971 the Community Affairs office person covering Queens had nothing to do with the Forest Hills project other than routine internal matters like occasionally checking with his contact person* who had the data sheets on the current condition of pending projects. He did, by comparison, spend an estimated two months on the Latimer Gardens development. People there also were initially opposed to the project, but over time there became a "grudging acceptance" of it and a desire among the neighborhood leadership to get "their people" in as they were convinced of the reality of the project.⁵⁴ This was encouraged by the staff person's going to many meetings and literally going door to door trying to get local people to apply for units in that particular project by handing out pre-application forms. People would then mail these back to be put on the list to receive regular application forms.

To be fair in this comparison, some of the differences between the Latimer Gardens area and Forest Hills should be noted. It was an area of more mixed land uses, without the exclusive residential image

* Who later became the high official referred to on the previous page.

of Forest Hills, since it was next to the downtown business and commercial area of Flushing at the end of the subway line and also next to land zoned and used for light and heavy industry. Secondly, although the entire Community Planning District 7 area was overwhelmingly white-middle class, located just four blocks away from Latimer Gardens was the Bland Houses project. Bland Houses was described by one of the Authority staff as one of the best public housing developments in the city, one which had been well integrated (60% white - 40% black) for years.⁵⁵ So the prospect of another project was not exactly the same new phenomenon to that neighborhood as it was to the Forest Hills-Rego Park area. Also, Latimer Gardens had half as many units as the 840 unit Forest Hills project and had a physical design for 10 stories rather than 24.

While on the topic of the distribution of pre-application forms for new housing projects, a few additional words are in order about the tenant selection process. The pre-application procedure was used because formal application lists for any new project were compiled only in the last four months prior to the opening of a building. This was due to the complexity involved in trying to select fairly from a long waiting list of people meeting both income eligibility requirements and one or more categories of priority ranking⁵⁶ (such as emergency relocatees, persons moved for federal or city construction projects, veterans, people in 1970 who had been living in "welfare hotels," persons moved off the site of the housing project being opened, and so forth^{*}). On the tenant

* This list is not in the order of relative priorities in which the Authority ranks these categories.

side of the equation, the Authority gave all of its applicants the right to indicate the borough in which they wished to live, but not the right to select any particular project. In the case of a completely new project, however, people could express a preference for that particular project, but again the final decision was up to the Authority. Some of the effect of this policy, as a result of people's preferences to stay at least relatively near familiar territory and/or jobs, may be seen in the following tables, which indicate less inter-borough migration associated with public housing than might otherwise have been expected.

Thus, searching out people in an area to whom pre-application forms could be given was the technique by which it was legally possible for the Authority to have the new projects racially integrated in these white areas when they opened, given the rising number of minority applicants on the list in general who met the priority requirements and the low rate of turnover in the Authority's occupied developments. The Authority's tenant selection office could not know or consider the race of any individual applicant, but it and the Community Affairs office could and did make educated guesses based on an applicant's address. Combining this with a new top priority category for a new project - applicants already living in the neighborhood - gave the Authority more flexibility. By deliberately searching for these low-income people in particular neighborhoods - a form of affirmative marketing action, if you will - both the Authority's face to face visibility was increased and local citizens had more of a stake in seeing that the project would meet some of their needs and not only those of blacks and people on public assistance as the stereotyped view would have it.

TABLE 11

Applicants (Households) for Public Housing
in New York City by Borough of Residence, 1967

Borough of Residence	Number	Percent
Manhattan	22, 101	29. 8
Brooklyn	27, 880	37. 5
Bronx	17, 970	24. 2
Queens	5, 050	6. 8
Staten Island	1, 080	1. 5
Out of New York City ^a	180	0. 2
TOTAL	74, 261	100. 0

^aResidents of New York City who are servicemen can qualify for admission.

Source: Margaret Webb Latimer, op. cit.
Table VII-4

TABLE 12

Applicants (Households) for Public Housing
in New York City by Borough of Choice, 1967

Borough of Choice	Number	Percent
Manhattan	23, 379	36. 9
Brooklyn	25, 287	34. 1
Bronx	13, 292	17. 9
Queens	6, 734	9. 1
Staten Island	1, 327	1. 7
Any	242	0. 3
TOTAL	74, 261	100. 0

Source: Margaret Webb Latimer, op. cit.
Table VII-5

TABLE 13
Percentage Distribution of Applicants for Public Housing
by Borough of Residence and Borough of Choice, 1967

Borough of Choice	-----Borough of Residence-----				
	Manhattan	Brooklyn	Bronx	Queens	Staten Island
Manhattan	<u>91.6</u>	6.2	27.7	6.5	1.9
Brooklyn	1.8	<u>86.9</u>	1.7	6.1	0.0
Bronx	3.9	1.4	<u>66.3</u>	2.4	0.9
Queens	2.3	4.7	3.7	<u>83.4</u>	1.9
Staten Island	0.3	0.5	0.3	0.3	<u>94.4</u>
Any	0.1	0.3	0.3	1.0	0.9
TOTAL	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source: Margaret Webb Latimer, op. cit.
Table VII-7

TABLE 14
Percentage Distribution of Public Housing Tenants by Previous
Borough and Current Borough, 1968

Current Borough	-----Previous Borough-----				
	Manhattan	Brooklyn	Bronx	Queens	Staten Island
Manhattan	<u>71.2</u>	4.7	12.8	4.5	1.1
Brooklyn	8.4	<u>84.6</u>	4.4	11.1	0.9
Bronx	13.3	2.6	<u>77.7</u>	5.4	0.3
Queens	6.4	7.0	4.2	<u>77.6</u>	1.3
Staten Island	0.7	1.1	0.9	1.4	<u>96.4</u>
TOTAL	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source: Margaret Webb Latimer, op. cit.
Table VI-61

Some of the consequences of all this for the Forest Hills controversy were that

1. The Housing Authority could, if it wanted to, ensure a significant percentage of white occupants. The number of low income whites in Community Districts 4 and 6 (Table 10) show that the people were there if the Authority sought to find them, * and certainly there were enough in Queens as a whole. This was reinforced by the patterns of borough selection by applicants (Table 13), which, when combined with the racial characteristics of the boroughs, had resulted in Queens and Richmond having the highest percentage of whites in public housing (Table 6).

2. To the extent that minorities were admitted into the Forest Hills project, although minority percentages were low in Queens the absolute numbers were high enough in comparison to the impact of one individual project on the entire waiting list that most of the minorities would come from Queens itself and not the rest of the city (Table 7).

Whether the Authority wished to accomplish these occupancy patterns, whether it could politically afford to say so if it did, and whether anyone would believe the Authority if it did say so, were questions of a different nature.

In any case as the Latimer Gardens project was constructed in 1970 there was relative calm around the Forest Hills project. No one

* Up until May 20, 1971, 1,062 pre-applications had been received by the Authority for the Forest Hills project. A breakdown by postal zip-code indicated that only 222 of these were submitted by neighborhood people. 57

I have talked to disagreed that the prevalent belief in the area was that the project was dead, just as were a majority of the 1966-67 scatter-site projects (later to be categorized by the Authority as being on "official hold" status). Passage of time, the belief that the land was unbuildable, and other factors all contributed to the attitude. In such an atmosphere it would be easy to suspect that the demonstrations in February and rising opposition in March and April caught the Housing Authority by surprise, and that the prescription for success would be to have had the Authority aware earlier of the neighborhood meetings that were taking place in early 1971, especially in January and February. In fact, such was not the case. One of the ironies of the Forest Hills saga is that the Community Affairs office's Queens person was living a mile north of the area in Elmhurst, heard about the first meeting, and went to it. But his involvement was not that of a representative of the Housing Authority, for he did not tell anyone that he was from the Authority. Instead it was as an "interested neighbor."⁵⁸

Memoranda about these meetings were sent from the Community Affairs office to the Chairman's office from the very beginning and continued for months as this staff member kept going to the local meetings as a detached observer. The local citizenry did not ask the Authority to send a spokesman to any meeting for more information about the project, and the Authority made no attempt to utilize their inside knowledge of the meetings to initiate a contact with the opposition in an attempt to defuse the situation before it got worse. The basic rationale behind the lack of

action appears to have been a belief that the Forest Hills case would go the same way as Latimer Gardens did: namely, that as the inevitability of the project became clear to the people there would be a shift toward trying to make the best of it and get some local people in as tenants, and that that would inevitably calm the situation.

Another important factor was the change of personnel that by this time had occurred in the Authority and the fact that any involvement by the Authority in the community would clearly have been a change of policy that would require both someone to advocate it and someone at the top to approve it. Simeon Golar had become chairman of the Authority in January, 1970, and had brought with him from the Human Relations Commission, where he had been chairman for nine months, Val Coleman as his director of public information. Golar, a black, was the first chairman of the Authority to have himself grown up in public housing, and he was active in Liberal Party politics. The leadership of the Community Affairs Office had also changed, with the politically appropriate appointment, considering the Housing Authority's changing ethnic constituency, of a Puerto Rican woman. She reportedly had good contacts with her own ethnic community but has been described as a meek administrator. With lack of a clear signal from above, the Community Affairs office remained passive, and the viewpoint of Val Coleman that there should be no direct response with the opposition because the protest would die won the day.⁵⁹ Part of that general feeling was also due to a belief that the protest was merely a traditional-type of local political opposition to Mayor Lindsay rather than a more basic fear of public housing, as the

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original meeting in January had been called by a politician, Democrat-Conservative Assemblyman Miller, and the second meeting had been held at the local Conservative Party club. To help keep a local anti-Lindsay squabble from escalating into city-wide visibility an effort was made by the Public Information Office, through its contacts, to keep media coverage at a minimum, especially out of that part of the Times that circulated in Manhattan and off of television.⁶⁰ (This may partially explain why many of the Sunday Times articles were carried only in its limited circulation Brooklyn-Queens section, even after earlier articles had been carried for the entire city.)

In early spring of 1971 there was a sudden shift of direction by the Authority. The exact timing of events may not be quite precise, but sometime in late March or April the Authority was for the first time asked to send a spokesman to a meeting at the Rego Park Jewish Community Center, a meeting which was being held under the auspices of the local office of the Mayor's Urban Action Task Force. The decision was made to send general manager Joe Christian. According to one informed person, Christian "came back shaken" after being shouted down by the audience and ordered the Community Affairs office to get their man out there.⁶¹

The initial contacts made by the Queens representative of the Community Affairs office in April were with the people who had supported the project in 1966, especially several rabbis from Forest Hills whom Joe Christian had met with in 1966-67. The other Queens groups which

supported the project were generally included within an umbrella organization, the Queens Council for Better Housing and Community Development. Its membership of over twenty liberal religious, political, and civil rights groups included various Queens branches of the NAACP, a variety of church supported social organizations, the Americans for Democratic Action, the Liberal Party, the Urban League, etc. A policy decision was made by the Housing Authority to rely on Queens people, especially this Queens Council, to organize and generate the primary support for the project rather than bring in Manhattan people from the city-wide offices of liberal and civil rights groups. The Community Affairs person was to act as a liaison with them and was to make contacts of his own among local institutional leaders, like rabbis and school principals.⁶²

This decision to rely on Queens people for local support (keeping in mind the different ranges which "local" can mean - the immediate neighborhood, the community planning district with its 100,000 plus population, or the city with eight million people) was certainly one of several legitimate strategies to choose. All, of course, would have had problems - some of which could have been foreseen at the time and could have been mitigated and others which can be seen only in hindsight. In the latter category are such things as the positions which certain "liberal" politicians took (both pro and con), positions which would have been very difficult to predict in advance, and the entire change of political atmosphere occasioned by Lindsay's entry into the Presidential primaries in early 1972.

At this point, perhaps, I should mention the comment by a Housing Authority official who said, in reaction to my probing into details of meetings and community input, that the problem with this approach is that it assumes the objections to the housing project were rational. His view was that many of the arguments against the project were "irrational"* and that "the whole Forest Hills thing is not one you can find logic in; it's all emotional." He said that to talk about what would have happened if there had been community involvement is ridiculous because the Forest Hills people simply "on principle did not want black public housing."⁶³ My problem with this position is that one should know that a part of any controversial new thing like scatter-site housing is going to involve some degree of "emotional irrationality" and lack of government credibility. The question is how to best deal with that so it does not become predominant and how to best help that portion of a community which is "rational" to surface and provide leadership.

One of the problems was that the liberal Queens Council was not in general from Forest Hills. Another problem was the failure of

* The particular item cited was a charge made by some rabbis in late 1971 that the Housing Authority was deliberately placing all scatter-site projects in Jewish areas as a deliberate effort to destroy those areas. Both he and one of the Planning Commission members were not able to convince the rabbi each spoke to that the charge was false on its face, as a look at the list of locations of projects I think shows fairly easily.

communication and coordination to take place between the different government agencies to the degree necessary to compensate for the Queens Council's lack of input into the Forest Hills' community structure. Furthermore, the Queens Council had been a supporter of other public housing projects in previous years. So not only were they viewed with suspicion by local residents as a group of liberals who supported the project as a principle rather than out of any knowledge of the particulars of the neighborhood, but their meetings were usually held amongst their own membership and other announced supporters. Thus, it was a case of the convinced talking to the convinced outside of Forest Hills, except when they were trying to raise support inside Forest Hills by such methods as distributing leaflets.

Within Forest Hills the Community Affairs person found that people like school principals and other institutional leaders who were not actively opposed to the project were nevertheless intimidated enough by the widespread sense of community opposition as early as April and May to prevent their speaking out publicly in support of the project. The only people who were willing to take a public stand were some of the clergy, but here again there were problems with just how much time and real effort they were going to put into support of the project.

A case in point was that of Rabbi Bokser, Rabbi Derby, and Rabbi Polish. They had been cited by Borough President Cariello in his Board of Estimate speech of December, 1966, as rabbis who supported the project when he attempted to show that charges of a black-Jewish

split and no local support for the project were incorrect. * Throughout the long Forest Hills controversy they remained supporters of the project. Even so there were problems with how far out on a limb they would go to support the Authority because it had left them hanging before. For during the year following approval of the Forest Hills project, Joseph Christian had met with a small group of local people, including Rabbi Bokser and Rabbi Derby, who made suggestions about provisions for the elderly and additional social services.⁶⁴ It was agreed to include these in the project's program of requirements and also to have the architect come back to this group for review of the architectural designs. Somewhere along the line the architectural review failed to happen,⁶⁵ possibly being one of those things that got overlooked after the change to a new architect in September, 1969. In the overall scheme of things for the Housing Authority, of course, this was a small matter compared to the larger economic issues it was trying to resolve at that time with HUD. Yet for local people who had supported in principle the concept of building public housing in their community when it had been unpopular in 1966 but who were also concerned with the detailed merits of the proposed project, the lack of follow-through by the Authority was hardly conducive to encouraging enthusiastic support for the Authority when they were asked for it in 1971.

* Borough President Cariello, at the time of his affirmative vote, said:

I deeply deplore the references to religion and to race and to a number of other extraneous and unnecessary statements that were . . . raised during the course of this hearing . . .

Now I want to say that this is not a religious or social issue. I have before me telegrams from the three Rabbis of the congregations in the area, . . . all in support of this resolution for the low-income housing . . .⁶⁶

Another problem revolved around the Authority's relationships with the Community Planning Boards. At a time when they were emerging as a politically legitimate (and in some parts of the city, fairly mature) form of community representation, the Housing Authority's knowledge of the Boards in that area of Queens was nil; and given the history of the Community Affairs Office's responsibilities, that is not surprising. One can criticize the Authority's leadership for not including the Community Boards in their instructions as to who should be contacted by the staff of the Community Affairs office. However, I think that misses the real core of the problem, which is best exemplified by the events in April described below.

As mentioned earlier, Community Planning Board 6 for Forest Hills and Rego Park and Board 3 for Elmhurst voted their opposition to the housing project in April. This contributed to the political complications later on in a number of ways, not only in conventional political judgments of the local politicians as they made their own judgments about what posture to take, but also in adding to the complexity of the city-wide issue of community control in general — a battlecry over which the Ocean Hill-Brownsville black-Jewish school confrontation and the long 1968 city-wide school teachers strike had been fought. The Housing Authority, however, only found out about the vote by reading it in the newspaper. There was then an attempt by the Community Affairs Office's Queens representative to contact the chairman of Community Planning Board 6, Joseph DeVoy. In order to get his telephone number he called the City Planning Department's Queens office and got the number from

the staff person there who was responsible for both Board 4 (covering Corona) and Board 6. Yet, despite the fact that he got "good vibes" from this City Planning Department person, neither one suggested that they discuss the problems of the housing project and try to formulate a joint strategy for dealing with the Community Board, nor did they ever meet.⁶⁷ And DeVoy, for his part, told him there wasn't much point in trying to meet with the Board because they had considered the matter carefully and felt that they knew enough about the project.

The Authority did speak to a couple of other community boards that month, Board 4 and Board 12 covering Jamaica (the predominantly black area discussed in Chapter VII of this paper as being in the same school district as Forest Hills). In a continuation of the strategy of trying to mobilize support for the project from people considered to be the Authority's friends, Simeon Golar spoke of the project to Board 12 in terms of "building a better community than you now have."⁶⁸ To Board 4 the Authority sent the director of Community Affairs, Blanco Cedano, in one of the few trips she made to the area during the whole dispute, and the then deputy director of Program Planning, Jim Messina, who was ordered to go there possibly because he was Italian.⁶⁹ Their approaches varied from an unsuccessful attempt by the Community Affairs director to convince people that the project would not have negative impacts on the schools* to the very outspoken and blunt personality

* She cited the provision of classrooms in the early childhood center and said that four public elementary and intermediate schools in the area were operating at an average of 90% capacity. She could not give data on the high school question, and could simply refer to a previous Authority statement that the new high school in Corona would ease over-

of the man from the Program Policy office, who told the Board, "I'm not here to sell the idea of this development; it's beyond that stage."⁷⁰ According to the Times, a number of legislators also agreed privately with this belief that it was too late to stop construction of the project.

At the same time Assemblyman Lisa was telling a Board 4 public hearing that the Governor's office was "completely behind the Corona school compromise," for that too was still an issue of great dispute.⁷¹

While the Housing Authority did not have the responsibility or need to keep in contact with what Community Boards were doing on a monthly basis around the city, the City Planning Department did. It was the one agency in the central executive government structure, as contrasted with the borough presidents, which had staff assigned to monitor each board. It was the communication link that should have notified another governmental agency that one of that agency's projects was on a board's agenda for discussion, or, if a matter had been raised and voted against all in one meeting, that a project was in trouble. Moreover, given the degree to which Planning Commission Chairman Donald Elliott had been involved with scatter-site housing from the beginning and the strong support for the scatter-site housing principle which both the City

*(Continued)

crowding.⁷² The issue of school utilization rates was very messy, as the City Planning Department and Housing Authority used central Board of Education figures which the local school board and parents would say were wrong. Technical differences in calculations, such as the use of a classroom for a special reading program, thereby employing theoretically empty seats⁷³, make it difficult to say one side was right or wrong. Also, by the central school board's own figures, a fifth school in the area (an intermediate one) was operating at 143% of capacity.⁷⁴

Planning Department's Queens office* director and his staff person felt, it might have been expected that the Queens office itself would try delaying tactics with the Board and other community groups to prevent them from committing themselves while the Planning Department tried to get the Housing Authority into the picture. As far as I know, that did not happen. But even if it did, the contact person at the Housing Authority for the Planning Department's Queens staff person was the Authority's Public Information Office director, who, as we have seen, was a "low-profile" advocate.⁷⁵ So another possibility is that the Planning Department simply acquiesced in the way that the Housing Authority was handling matters.

Whichever was the case the Queens Local Area Planning Office decided, albeit consciously or by default, not to involve itself actively with the community aspects of the project (other than talking with DeVoy)⁷⁶ nor with the person actually out in the field for the Housing Authority. Perhaps it too simply felt that there was no point in spending a lot of scarce staff time when all the legal approvals were complete, that the planning process was over, and that it was simply up to the Authority to execute. Furthermore, a couple of persons from the local office of the Mayor's Urban Action Task Force were active in the area.⁷⁷ If the Queens office knew of their presence, it would have reinforced its view

* In 1969 the Planning Department had created local offices for each borough and had physically located them in each respective borough. This decentralization meant changing power relationships both within the Planning Department and outside with the borough presidents and the local citizen organizations.

that the problem was political. It would then not have been inconsistent for the Queens Planning Office to stay out of any involvement, just as it had stayed out of, and continued to stay out of, the Corona high school dispute, which was under the same staff person's jurisdiction at this particular time.

This belief that the problem was political in the bureaucratic sense, that is, that it was being handled at the highest levels of an agency and that initiative and direction were to come from above rather than being initiated by a field office, would have been substantiated by knowledge that a top level meeting between the Housing Authority, Planning Department, and Controller's Office was held in the spring. A report from a Housing Authority employee, which I have neither confirmed nor found reason to disbelieve, indicated that such a meeting took place to discuss the future of the project.⁷⁸ Once a decision to carry through on the project had been made at this level the local Planning office would have had to tread delicately, since involvement of City Planning might have been interpreted as a power-play of Donald Elliott on Simeon Golar's turf.⁷⁹

On the other hand, while the Housing Authority people had no reason to be familiar with the political and social pressures that had produced an explosion in nearby Corona, the Planning Department's Queens office did, and it should have at least taken the situation a little more seriously. If nothing else, it might have proved to be more helpful in situations where the Housing Authority had no credibility.

The above comments about planners and community involvement would become irrelevant if one accepted at face value the line of reasoning advanced by Roger Starr* in his June, 1972, article, "The Lesson of Forest Hills":

Still another argument is that scatter-site housing would have been entirely successful in Forest Hills if there had been more "involvement" of the "Community" from the beginning. Yet one of the specific irritants arose from too much, not too little, local consultation. As a portent of architectural wonders to come, the original design of the project was widely shown in the area after the plan had been approved. When this design turned out to be too expensive for federal subsidization, the consultation itself was taken as proof of an intent to deceive the local people.⁸⁰

I am not saying that there would not have been significant opposition to the project if there had been "community involvement." Rather I am saying that the argument advanced by him is specious by being too great a simplification of the dynamics and specifics of community involvement. The issue is not whether there would have been no opposition. On the contrary, there is opposition to anything, and scatter-site public housing had been opposed in various cities across the United States for 20 years, as will be discussed in the last chapter. But how much opposition is there, how strongly do people feel about it, and to what extent is it mitigated by support? No, the issue is whether actions which one might have reasonably and professionally expected from the Housing Authority and Planning Department to the problem of community opposition could have prevented the issue from escalating as it did.

* At the time head of the New York Citizens Housing and Planning Council, Inc. He was appointed Administrator of the Housing and Development Administration by newly elected Mayor Abraham Beame in January, 1974.

The caveat, however, is that of timing, for once the major thrust of an issue has been started, it may be almost impossible to change that direction. That was recognized by outgoing Deputy Mayor Edward Hamilton in his comments about Forest Hills at the end of 1973 when he was reviewing the record of the 8-year Lindsay administration in a television interview. Hamilton, who came to New York from Washington, D. C., in 1970 to be the city's Budget Bureau director, stated:

Obviously you try to do all those communication things behind the scenes before a problem blows up because it is twenty times easier, and we did . . . 81

He said that Forest Hills was relatively non-controversial in 1966, and added:

After all, it was passed by unanimous Board of Estimate vote . . .

We had communication with Jerry Birbach and his group twice with the Mayor before it blew. But Jerry Birbach has to be viewed as a politician - and he did later run - and not as a community person interested in solving a problem. 82

Mr. Hamilton was right in principle but wrong in his judgment of the situation. His second statement indicates his belief that the period when easy communication remained possible did not end until the start of 1972, which is apparently when he thinks the problem "blew-up." However, I think that positions in the neighborhood had really hardened by the end of spring, 1971, and that is why so much of this paper has been spent on this period. Although there is a great deal of material worth

discussing about the events, decisions, policies, legal issues, and other matters that come later, the time when the course of events could most easily have been changed, the time when professionals in the government had their best chances at preventing a confrontation had really ended by summer. After that, one is really talking about how to deal with a conflict whose battlelines have been drawn, irrespective of whether the parties on each side were all perceptive enough to realize it at the time.

Indicative of the problem was the difficulty the Housing Authority had in just trying to present its case at public meetings, because in the spring

. . . by the time public meetings were called the opposition had already held six meetings before. The only place to talk rationally was with the Queens Council [for Better Housing and Community Development] and the local Jewish groups, but they were [already] our friends. ⁸³

Rumors and misinformation were circulating all over, ranging from people saying the project was completely unbuildable because of the sub-soil problems, * to exaggerations about the project's size (up to 2,000 units) and to claims that the project would add 900 students to the schools (a projected age distribution by the Authority indicated about one-half that figure). ⁸⁴ By around May, in the retrospective opinion of the Authority's staff person who had been going to the local meetings, Forest Hills had become a unique situation unlike that of any other public housing project he was familiar with. ⁸⁵

* As referred to in the previously quoted February newspaper articles. A Housing Authority staff person said his verbal attempts to explain to people that this was why the plans had to be changed for high rise buildings were never reported in the press. ⁸⁶

May was a month of several developments relating to both the housing project and the city's Corona high school compromise. At the very beginning of the month was the Times article on Simeon Golar's announcement that he thought bids for the Forest Hills project would be asked for by the end of May and that construction would start by July. In addition "he said he would soon announce the formation of a community advisory group in Forest Hills to 'enlist community support and assist in building bridges of understanding and goodwill.'"⁸⁷ This group was to advise on "tenant selection" and "needed community facilities and services."⁸⁸ But that announcement was never made. There was a community meeting organized which met once that month with Golar. It consisted of many of the same local leadership of rabbis and others who had gotten themselves together in the abortive 1966 attempt to work with the Authority in bringing public housing to the area. Again Rabbi Derby was elected chairman, and again the effort collapsed. The Housing Authority did not call Rabbi Derby back to continue the effort with a second meeting,⁸⁹ possibly because Simeon Golar decided that the composition of the group was not to his liking, perhaps because it was lacking any local politicians.⁹⁰ On the other side, when I asked one of the rabbis in the group why they did not pursue the matter with the city after the city failed to follow-up, he replied, "After all, we weren't motivated by real estate interests [as he believed some of the opposition to be] . . . We weren't crusaders. We had other things to do."⁹¹ (My emphasis.) He agreed that the previous lack of cooperation from the

Authority may also have affected things. So he and other Forest Hills clergy continued to publicly support the project, continued to be critical of the "negative climate arising out of emotional reactions to misinformation,"⁹² but did not get into a mass organizing effort and had no contact with the Queens Council for Better Housing and Community Development. For the more the conflict was viewed as a "political" conflict in traditional terms, the less this rabbi wanted to get involved.

Shortly after Chairman Golar's announcement, the Authority produced its "Fact Sheet" on the Forest Hills project. This was a seventeen page looseleaf document issued at intervals over a total span of a month or so, but which had its major portions dated May 5, 1971. It described the project's planned physical, social, and economic characteristics, as well as giving the Authority's version of the political history of the project, including its 1966 site selection, and the Authority's reaction to some of the objections to the project. It gave no prediction on the eventual racial composition or percent of tenant occupancy which would be receiving welfare payments other than saying "Residents of the neighborhood by regulation get first choice of apartments. The benefits to elderly people in the neighborhood will be immediately apparent."⁹³

The potential benefits of a document giving a coherent presentation of what was being built were offset by several things. First, in trying the risky task of writing a short history* of what was a political arrangement, the Housing Authority made a mistake, one which even

* The history part was written by the Director of Public Information. Other parts of the "Fact Sheet" were written and compiled by the Queens staffer of the Community Affairs office.

went against the Authority's own self-interest. Their version said not only that the housing project had originally been proposed for nearby Corona, but also that "the city's original plan was to erect . . . a new high school on the Forest Hills-Rego Park site" and that the two were then "switched."⁹⁴ As far as I have been able to determine this was the first time it was officially stated by any government official that the two were switched and that the city, in its official processes, had ever planned to put the high school on that 8 1/2 acre site. Before this date none of the many newspaper articles I read* ever indicated that the site had at one time been selected for a school, nor did any of the internal government memoranda to which I was able to gain access. Yet after this time many of the published accounts stated this switch as fact, and the publication of a simple plausible story in enough newspaper accounts had a domino effect that led to its general acceptance by journalists and academics writing later articles. So it would appear that the Housing Authority "Fact Sheet" was the source of this version, which encouraged people opposed to the project to believe that if the school could have been put on the site before, then it could be put on there now, rather than letting the Housing Authority use the Board of Education as the source of the objection to the site for the school. There was, however, some basis for this confusion (raised also at the February, 1971, protest), as there had been some local community discussion prior to 1966 about the possibility of using that site for the needed new high school. These discussions probably involved the local community school board and maybe

* These included all the articles on the Corona high school controversy and scatter-site public housing by the New York Times from 1966 to mid-1971.

Borough Hall. For the many people who did not understand the official site selection process nor the intricacies of the New York City government, these discussions were sufficient to lead them to assume that the site was going to be selected. * Rabbi Bokser, for example, believed in 1974 that the site had been selected for the school prior to 1966 (he can not recall by what particular branch of "the government") and said that there was opposition to it by some of the nearby Forest Hills residents, which led to its being moved to Corona. ⁹⁵

But this was only a very small part of all the factual material in the document. Since the document was intended to counter all the misinformation floating around, one might have expected it to be widely distributed, perhaps even door to door. But this was the second drawback. There was no attempt by the Authority to give it to the membership of the community planning boards or to distribute it door to door to the residents living in the blocks immediately around the project site, and the reason for this was embodied in the philosophy behind its third drawback.

* Similar misconceptions frequently occur in the capital budget process as the desire of individual city agencies to look good combines with sloppy reporting by small local newspapers to yield a result that is misleading to the public. For example, a local headline "City Plans New Fire Station for -- in '78" may easily have come from the Fire Department's publication of a booklet describing its planned 5 year capital budget. The article will then carry supporting comments from the local district's chief officer without seriously mentioning that the item is only a request which will probably not be approved by the City Planning Department or Budget Bureau because they can only approve one-third of the requests. But the memory of the headline will linger. Five years later some people will be resentful at what they will feel was another broken city promise, and when the facility is finally built 15 years later the thing people feel most is the resentment that it took so long.

For its third drawback was its negative characterization of the opposition in its conclusion:

While the Authority realizes that many of the objections to the project are really veils of discrimination against poor families of our city, it is also confident that the good sense of the community will prevail, and that the project will be welcomed as an integral part of community. ⁹⁶

Even if the Authority's assumptions about the anti-black and anti-poor biases of the opposition were true, why state it openly to them if one is trying to win their acquiescence or support, since they were the people whom the future residents of the housing project would have to live with? Why speak publicly about "good sense prevailing" when that carries the connotation to the people whom you are presumably trying to influence that they do not have good sense?

In fact the "Fact Sheet" was distributed mostly "in-house," to the press, and to its allies already supporting the project, especially the Queens Council for Better Housing and Community Development, ⁹⁷ as a way of bolstering their morale and enthusiasm for the cause. The opposition to the project was not to be won over, but to be over-ridden, in the classic way that political battles with racial overtones were fought out by a show of liberal support countering conservative opposition.

This liberal support, however, failed to materialize on the evening of May 20th when the City Planning Commission held another of its continuing series of public hearings in Queens on the proposed Master Plan, this time for the area of Community Planning District 6.

With the Times having reported a few days earlier that the Corona compromise was still pending in the state legislature the opposition to the housing project took full advantage of the setting, with its audience of 400 and the potential of press coverage. Members of the newly formed Forest Hills Residents Association "took control of the stage" after one of their co-chairmen,

Jerry Birbach, . . . , a large man with a voice to match, told Planning Commission Chairman Donald Elliott, 'We want you to tell us now that you will re-examine this project or nobody else will speak.'
 . . . They reviled the City Planning Commission for 45 minutes . . . and danced rings around the planners, chanting, 'Down with the Project, Up with the School.' '98

They also said that they intended to file a suit in a few days to stop the project. Taking the whole thing calmly, Don Elliott simply responded that he saw no reason to change his support of the project.⁹⁹

Although many of the local hearings on the "Master Plan" had turned into general gripe sessions and harangues about individual items, those had not received coverage in the Times. This one did, under a headline of "Forest Hills Homeowners Seize Control of a Planning Hearing," when there was no basis to say that they were homeowners instead of apartment renters other than the headline writer's own image of Forest Hills. The Times also, for the first time, affirmed the impression that the residents had been "robbed" by stating as a fact that a high school planned there had been moved to Corona.¹⁰⁰

An interesting sidelight to this hearing also took place there when the Queens representative of the Community Affairs office was

introduced to Jerry Birbach as being from the Housing Authority. Birbach was apparently somewhat surprised, as he recognized him as having been present at a lot of their meetings. However, Birbach never asked him for help in getting any information about the project nor was there any particular effort by this person to deal with the Birbach-led opposition on the merits of the project. ¹⁰¹

During the next two weeks the Corona compromise legislation collapsed in the State Assembly after unanimously passing the State Senate. Although Assemblyman Battista's bill had been defeated by the Assembly earlier in May, the bill favored by the city and sponsored by Assemblyman Lisa was bottled up in committee, ostensibly because Speaker of the House Duryea considered it unconstitutional. On the other hand, there were reports that the real reason was that Democrat-Conservative Battista had agreed to give Republican Speaker Duryea the vote that the latter needed in order to pass the controversial Rockefeller state budget in that year's very narrowly divided politically partisan House in return for Duryea's support on the Corona issue. These reports of a deal were, of course, denied, while Speaker Duryea proposed a bill which the city's Office of the Corporation Counsel said would not allow the compromise plan to be implemented. In early June the Assembly killed the Lisa bill, and both the Senate and Assembly passed the new Duryea bill, which was denounced by Mayor Lindsay and Deputy Mayor Aurelio. Battista replied that the city was now authorized to return all the homes to their owners (i. e. by not building the school on the Corona site at all) while the City Council discussed whether alternative

means, like a city-wide referendum, could legally save the compromise. Lawyer Mario Cuomo, observing that the bill was a "gamble" because the city could simply go ahead with the original plan to demolish all the homes, said he would take legal actions to stop any evictions in order to delay any action until the next legislative session. Throughout it all the affected Corona residents remained split in two groups over whether to accept the compromise or to continue fighting for more from the city, and the bill remained on Governor Rockefeller's desk for his signature.¹⁰² So for some people, at least, the high school issue still remained as an argument to use against the housing project, even though educational pressure groups that were concerned solely with school overcrowding wanted the city to go ahead with the Corona site because any change of site would delay construction for years while new architectural designs were drawn.

Another educational relationship between the housing project and the community involved the issue of the racial composition of the schools and the busing of minorities from the southern part of the local school district to Forest Hills, the magnitude of which was described in Chapter VII. Although it was not brought out explicitly in the media coverage of the controversy, it was clearly an important causal factor in exacerbating many people's fears of crime from blacks and poor people, especially young persons, as stories of individual conflicts among children in schools could be easily categorized, and more vividly remembered, as involving blacks. Parents' fears of drugs being brought into schools by students from lower-class areas, of schools "tipping"

racially with a subsequent drop in quality, of the problems associated with groups of kids hanging around schools - all these things were involved in the psychology of fear associated with the introduction of the housing project.

I was able to confirm that at least some of the Housing Authority staff were aware of this school busing pattern and the problems it was creating. In some of the private talks which a staff person had with some of the local citizens in early spring, the attempt was made by the Authority to suggest that it was "better to have blacks in your neighborhood than to have them bused in,"¹⁰³ but this was met with skepticism as people did not believe the Authority's word that the busing of blacks would be proportionately reduced as the local black residential population increased. Consequently, he then dealt with school district 28's superintendent, its board chairman, and other members on this issue. Despite the very strong efforts of one board member to convince the others, the local board refused to come out publicly in favor of scatter-site housing. It said it would be "inappropriate " and refused to publicly say that the increase of black students in the Forest Hills schools from the immediate neighborhood would be compensated for by a reduction in the number of blacks bused from Jamaica. This was reported in a memorandum to the higher levels of the Authority and, as far as my source knew, there was no follow-up on the matter by the top officials.¹⁰⁴

However, this is one of those lines of inquiry which I have not been able to pursue completely, and although I know of no effort by the

Authority to refer the matter to higher officials in the central Board of Education, I cannot be certain of what really happened or why. In view of the present debate over school busing and recent federal court recognition of the relationship between housing policy and school integration, this might be worth further investigation. In any case, there was no public comment by any educational officials on the matter throughout the rest of the long controversy, nor do I know of any hint of behind-the-scenes involvement.

Theoretically this was one area where the involvement of the City Planning Department would have been more credible and successful. After all, this kind of overall coordination to relate separate agency programs to overall goals was what people perceived its function to be. Both the degree of political clout and expertise in performing this kind of marriage between two agencies was greater in the Planning Department than in the Housing Authority. But this may be all academic, for it may very well be that the Planning Department was not aware of this situation at all, given the lack of communication between the staff of the Housing Authority and City Planning Department at that time.

It is interesting to speculate, although the question cannot be resolved, the extent to which the failures of communication came from bureaucratic barriers, and how much from particular personalities.

Policy determinations may be mirrored by changes in the power relationships among the staff of an agency and its head. The course of subsequent events may be determined by the whole dynamic of the resulting new interpersonal relationships which involve lines of com-

munication and trust. These grow out of not just the policy and philosophical values of people but also the personal working style of officials, including their degree of openness with other staff, their aggressiveness, the depth of information (and history) they require before making a decision, their flexibility, and the degree to which they accept personal responsibility for the direction of any situation with which they are concerned - even if it was inherited.

This "tremendous reliance on the personalities of individuals" was recently alluded to by Roger Starr in discussing what it felt like to be a new top administrator in city government after being a private citizen involved with housing issues. Calling it a disturbing facet of government that he "had never thought about before," he said that the absence of a simple market measure like profit in private industry means that there is no way to tell whether anyone is doing a good job other than by listening to different people's opinions, which may be based on opinions about events years old and frequently may be at wide variance. The "speculation and . . . emphasis on personality," he concluded, was both "frightening" and "fascinating,"¹⁰⁵ and this latter characterization is certainly applicable to the entire Forest Hills saga.

Within the Housing Authority, for example, one should note that general manager Joseph Christian pretty much dropped out of direct involvement with Forest Hills after April. For it was soon after that time that he left the Authority to go to the City Housing and Development Administration. There is reason to believe that he left simply because he did not like working with Simeon Golar, either personally or professionally.¹⁰⁶

In more general terms, the changing of operating policies of the Authority (running the gamut from rising admissions of welfare tenants to liberalizing the lease form to responding to legal challenges on Authority eviction procedures) were perhaps inevitably linked to a perception of new minority employees in the Authority versus the old-line white civil servants who had been working in the system for many years¹⁰⁷ - a phenomenon similar to that occurring in other city agencies. So as the Authority's clientele was changing, so was its own internal composition, and this was simultaneously linked with a narrowing of the circle of power and trust to persons closer to the Chairman's office. This restricted spread of information reinforced the perception within the Authority's administrative structure that the project was "political" from its very inception, since the site choice had been forced on the Authority by the Mayor's office. * Rather than getting an extra degree of detailed attention by the line staff, the project tended to get less; it was an exception to be handled by the top, which, of course, was busy with all the other operating problems of the Authority. Since there was also employee turnover among those acquainted with the project in all government agencies as the years passed, by the summer of 1971 I do not think there was any one person who could be said to know a complete and accurate history of its what and whys.

* This was especially true of those who viewed the racial integration of housing and the city's employment structure as a conventional political response to the fact that Lindsay relied on the votes of blacks and minorities to win election rather than as something which was socially desirable and right on its own face.

One of the best indicators of the lack of communication between the top and the bottom was the fact that a Community Affairs office person does not recall ever hearing the words "scatter-site housing" - let alone having a general office discussion about its implications - from the start of 1969 until after Forest Hills blew up.¹⁰⁸ It was only after the fact that he learned that the Latimer Gardens project, whose renting he had worked on, was a scatter-site project, and considered to be a model one at that! Also, the exclusion of this field person for Queens from the Chairman's strategy meetings on the Forest Hills projects certainly did nothing to encourage his sense of confidence in what he was telling people about the project, and, in fact, after a while he began to feel that there was much going on about the project at the top that he did not know and which might be contrary to what he was saying to people he was meeting with.¹⁰⁹

The tone of the Authority toward the Forest Hills situation, if there had been doubt in anyone's mind, was clearly spelled out during the second week of June by a speech that Simeon Golar gave at a dedication ceremony for the fully-occupied, 423 unit, Latimer Gardens project in Flushing, Queens. After citing the Flushing Remonstrance, a famous colonial document against religious oppression of Quakers by the government of New Amsterdam, Golar lashed out at the opposition, saying,

Now in 1971, in the nearby community of Forest Hills, the voice of discrimination is heard again. More subtle this time - the voice masks its intent in a hundred subterfuges.¹¹⁰

If there was any doubt about the schism widening, it was resolved by the public reactions to the speech and by other events that week reported by the Times. Racism and discrimination were denied by all. Jerry Birbach added, "Would he call Congressman Benjamin Rosenthal, Queens Borough President Sidney Leviss, and City Councilman Arthur Katzman racist? All of these people are committed to public housing, including me."¹¹¹ Another person raised the defense of overburdened subways, buses, and schools; and the Chairman of Community Planning Board 6, Joseph DeVoy

. . . also expressed indignation. He said of Mr. Golar, 'If there's anyone the Flushing Remonstrance would be addressed to, it would be him. If he is so interested in helping the poor and putting up low-income housing, why is he wasting millions of dollars that could be used for additional housing [a reference to the debate about the subsoil and need for pilings]?'¹¹²

The public hint that liberal politicians were also starting to be wary of the project came with the announcement that the Congressman for that district, Benjamin Rosenthal, had asked the federal General Accounting Office to investigate charges of fraud after receiving over 2,000 letters of opposition.¹¹³ Congressman Rosenthal was consistently at the top of the Congressional ranking list issued by the liberal Americans for Democratic Action. He also had asked HUD Secretary Romney to hold up funds for the project pending the results of the GAO investigation. Going even further was Congressman Halpern from the district covering Jamaica, who wrote the Forest Hills Residents Association that he opposed the project and "have been expressing my views in no uncertain terms with the appropriate parties at HUD."¹¹⁴

With this incident as an indicator of the direction things were going, one can say that this time of late spring and early summer marked the end of this phase of the Forest Hills project. It had clearly become a public issue. * The Housing Authority and opposition had taken strident public positions against each other with no indication of compromise between them and no communication either. The opposition had succeeded in getting attention with its vocal protests and in neutralizing any immediate show of public support for the project by local elected officials, as had been hoped for by the Authority and which conceivably could have occurred, given some of the very liberal politicians in the area. The local community support for the project was not well or-

* Although the role of press coverage throughout the affair was much criticized for ignoring the statements of support for the project and emphasizing the confrontation tactics of the opposition, one can speculate whether central city government officials - like maybe a planning commissioner or someone in the city human relations office - would have raised some questions about what was going on if more of the Times articles had made their city-wide edition. As in previous and later cases, the Authority - by luck or by connections - managed to keep the story of Golar's Latimer Gardens speech in limited circulation editions. While at the same time a much smaller article on opposition to the announced construction of a project in the Lindenwood-Howard Beach section of Queens (near the Bay and Kennedy airport) got city-wide coverage. In this case, which was also one of the original 1966-67 scatter-site projects, the Authority's representative at Community Board 10's hearing, James Messina from the program planning office took the opposite tack, telling 600 people that

'the Authority recognizes the paucity of facilities' but that they can be added and that the important thing is to provide housing in a good neighborhood for low-income people. 115

Whether the Authority really believed this and/or took any steps to work with the community planning board and other city agencies to obtain these facilities I do not know.

ganized, even though it clearly did exist, and some persons who might otherwise not have cared one way or the other about the project felt intimidated enough not to say anything that might be seen as supporting the project. (One example was the case of an elementary school principal, visited by an Authority representative, whose school was not overcrowded but who was unwilling to say that publicly to project opponents who were saying it was.)¹¹⁶

In early July the Forest Hills Residents Association filed suit against the project, the Housing Authority finally sought bids on the project - already one month past when Mr. Golar had predicted construction would be underway, and the General Accounting Office agreed to conduct an investigation. At the same time as these events of June and July were taking place, the Community Affairs office of the Authority started to phase out of the picture. The ending of the initial effort at raising community support, the fact that the battle was being fought elsewhere (as in the courts), and the belief that the decisions were being made at a higher level into which that office really had no input, all led that office to believe that its time and efforts were best spent elsewhere. *

Yet another factor contributing to the apparent slowing down in the pace of events was the simple fact that people in the community went on summer vacations.

* The Queens staff person worked with a couple of other projects and spent a major amount of his time in training staff to be tenant hearing officers as the Authority went over to a semi-judicial type of process to handle proposed tenant evictions.

They could go on vacation with at least a little sense of victory, for there had been a temporary injunction issued against the Authority during the latter part of July. Thus, for the rest of the summer it was no longer legally possible for the Authority to sign a construction contract, even though the low bid eventually came in six million dollars below what the Authority staff had estimated it would be,¹¹⁷ albeit many millions of dollars over the 1966 estimated cost.

2

CHAPTER IX - FOREST HILLS HITS THE FRONT PAGES

People laugh at me when I say this, but when you question the Lindsay people on Forest Hills you get the same kind of answer you used to get from the White House when you questioned Viet Nam.¹

-Congressman Benjamin Rosenthal,
an original supporter of the project
now opposing it.
The Village Voice, December 9, 1971

The good middle-class families of the Forest Hills and Lindenwood section[s] of Queens may not be the white bigots they are being called . . . But it is hard to tell . . . The look on the[ir] faces . . . differs little from the look on the faces of those 'bad white people' of Mississippi, Georgia, and Alabama.²

- "Politics in Black, "
The New York Amsterdam News
(a Harlem newspaper)
December 4, 1971

Press coverage and editorial opinion on the Forest Hills affair have hit hard on the theme that the protestors are either bigots or misinformed, or both. This is inevitable, perhaps, because the middle class doesn't make good news copy. They aren't like the lower-class Italian homeowners of Corona, full of colorful little ethnic details . . . The middle class speaks for itself . . . It's dull, ordinary, predictable, and supposedly reactionary in racial matters . . . This type of slander is effective in an emotional issue like racial integration, but it doesn't check out . . . People who share similar values and abilities can overcome racial differences. With an influx of low-income families, however, that value sharing is minimal and strained . . .³

-Article in The Village Voice
November 25, 1971

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We've never had a thing from the city. Not one damn thing . . . We're middle-class liberals. We're not supposed to fight back. Our picket line must have come as quite a shock to him (John Lindsay).⁴

-Joe Walderman, vice-president,
Forest Hills Residents Association
The Village Voice, November 25, 1971

I - Autumn, 1971

After a quiet, perhaps deceptively quiet, summer, Forest Hills blew up in late fall and winter in 1971, becoming a daily front page newspaper item. It reached the point where presidential press secretary Ron Ziegler began answering questions about it in his morning press briefings (and in an ironic commentary on future Nixon administration problems, one of his answers was then called a "lie" by Senator Buckley's office).⁵

During this quiescent summer, however, all had not come to a halt. At the national level the Department of Housing and Urban Development made known its intention to promulgate a new policy on the location of housing eligible for the various federal subsidy programs, a policy that had the intention of putting more (though not complete) emphasis on approval of projects outside areas of minority concentration. Publication of the new criteria asking for comment appeared in the Federal Register in June, 1971, and again in October, 1971. The final version, published on January 7, 1972, to take effect one month later⁶ was supportive of low-income housing in Forest Hills. HUD was not unaware of the relation to the project. William Green, the New York regional administrator of HUD, commenting on the effect of the new policy, said, "The highest

priority will go to projects like the Forest Hills project, which does produce integration. "7 His statement was published on October 10, 1971. It was only a month later that this project - the epitome of what HUD wanted to encourage localities to do - became nationally known by the opposition to it. Yet it was a project which ironically had been started at local initiative years earlier and which might have progressed much faster in its planning and design stages with more sympathetic processing by HUD. Further compounding the irony was the fact that by now, as a result of the long time differences between policy approval of housing development location in the city administration and the start of bricks and mortar, the city had shifted its policy to focus most of its federal housing subsidy funds in urban renewal and model cities areas "on the ground(s) that housing should be built in the ' areas that need it most, which in New York means the areas of minority concentration, ' as Deputy Commissioner Frances Levenson of the City Housing and Development Administration put it. "8

Also during the spring and summer, at what might be called a combined local and national level, the issue of the housing project began to be discussed by various Jewish organizations. Since Forest Hills-Rego Park has one of the heaviest concentrations of Jews in the city (estimated at two-thirds in 1963 versus 5% in 1930 by Nathan Glazer in his book, Beyond the Melting Pot),⁹ and since the national Jewish organizations have their headquarters in New York, any item of significant concern to the local groups could very quickly be transmitted to the staff at national headquarters.

The fact that the issue was seen at least locally as one affecting Jews as a specific ethnic group, rather than one affecting whites in general, created serious splits between the local chapters of Jewish groups and their respective national organizations, as well as variations in the positions and approaches taken by the national groups. In the context of HUD's promulgation of the national site guidelines and the concomitant discussion taking place among groups concerned with race and housing, national Jewish organizations were in general adopting policies of support for scatter-site housing of both low-income and minority groups in more affluent white residential neighborhoods. * But when the generalities of national policy were confronted with the specifics of the Forest Hills project by affected local Jewish groups over the succeeding months in autumn, not only were relations between national officials and local members strained, but conflicts also arose within the national staffs themselves. The national organizations were thereby inhibited in taking an immediate firm stand, and when finally (if ever) announced, the impact of their supportive positions upon the public at large was reduced by knowledge of the local-national dissension. On the other side, the local Jewish disenchantment with the more liberal national Jewish organizations increased their alienation from that national leadership which did not represent them, a disenchantment reflected in a shift away from traditional Jewish voting patterns in the Nixon-McGovern race and in the 1973 New York City Democratic four-way mayoral primary race.

* One of my partners in the research for this study, Sylvia Chaplain, and my father, Morris Milgram, were both members of the American Jewish Committee's National Housing Committee.

As important as this topic is for Jewish organizational politics and for Jewish-black relations in general (over such issues as minority job quotas in affirmative action programs), it is beyond the scope of this paper to go into the details or internal significance of the many lengthy debates within the Jewish community on the issue. This paper will refer to the different organizations and their positions only when it seems appropriate to understanding specific developments in Forest Hills.

Also during the summer Governor Rockefeller, apparently agreeing with the city's position, vetoed the Corona legislation, an act which placed the whole matter in limbo. It also left as its legacy a once tightly knit small community that was now being torn apart with hatred and personal distrust as accusations of pay-offs, sell-outs, and other personal threats flew back and forth while two factions fought over the compromise proposal. All of this led Jimmy Breslin to say, around the middle of 1971,

No other city has ever condemned land and given it back. This is the only administration I know that would have done this thing . . . I wanted to prove what Norman (Mailer) and I said in '69 - that the health of a city depends on the survival of its ethnic communities. But now I'm sorry I ever got involved. It's a rat's nest. I used up all my credits in City Hall trying to help those bastards instead of myself. Now I owe favors. ¹⁰

Meanwhile, the low-income housing was presumably being held up by the preliminary court injunction, although in fact the Authority was secretly satisfied to let that be the public impression while it quietly conducted an engineering restudy of the piling foundation and reduced the weight of the buildings to be supported. ¹¹ In any case the Authority had no doubt that it would eventually win the case.

On October 29, 1971, it did win. * The State Supreme Court refused to rule on the social questions involved in the project's location, and said that the charges that neighborhood depreciation would result from low-income housing were not proven. The judge also said that because the funds involved were federal, the Court could not grant a permanent injunction even if there had been "waste," noting that the Court was deliberately skipping the question of whether or not any unusually high costs might be compensated for by any social benefits.¹²

But the more significant forerunner of things to come was the tone of the testimony at the City Planning Commission public hearing of October 13th on the Lindenwood public housing project (see footnote, p. 249). This five year old 559 unit development of 12 buildings, 3 to 9 stories high, was almost ready for construction, except that, unlike Forest Hills, it needed a final round of public approvals for changes in zoning and the city street map. Continuing the thrust of a line of objection that had been going on for at least a year,¹³ the testimony escalated from problems of lack of services to a widespread fear of crime and physical violence from black occupied public housing projects against Jews. It culminated with a written statement from a local Rabbi, Maurice Simckes, which said, "'It strikes me as tragic that all middle-class areas selected for low-income projects are Jewish areas.' It asked whether this was so because other ethnic groups 'fight back and Jews are not known to?' "¹⁴ The reaction from the two Jewish Planning Com-

* This was not the first court case involving the project. The judge noted in this decision that a request for a preliminary injunction had been denied in March, 1969, in the case of Cohen v. Lindsay (New York Law Journal, March 11, 1969, p. 16, col. 3).

missioners, Gerald Coleman and Prof. Chester Rapkin, was one of public shame and outrage, with Rapkin terming the statement as "paranoid."¹⁵ The conflict between the commissioners and the Rabbi was, of course, covered and circulated in the Jewish press, and in the long run the denials were less important than the very raising of the issue itself.

Activities focussed on the project now seemed to proliferate. Moreover, their significance broadened, for this was the time when there was rising political speculation about a presidential bid by Mayor Lindsay, a bid in which his presumed strength would be from urban liberals and blacks. By the same token, any possible bid by Simeon Golar, the highest black appointive official in the city and active in the Liberal Party, for Mayor or other high elective office would also need to rely on the support of the liberal and black constituency in the city.

The opening salvo came from the National Committee Against Discrimination in Housing, which in federal testimony in Washington, D.C. on November 3rd accused the city of "bowing to white resistance" in killing eight of the original eleven scatter-site projects. Calling New York a more subtle case than Chicago, it called for a cut-off of federal public housing funds, as had been done by court order a month earlier in Chicago in the Gautreaux case. Golar defended the city's scatter-site program, as having 1,700 units of 8,522 under construction being built outside of "slum" areas, with another 2,500 units planned. The last figure included the Lindenwood project, whose zoning and map changes had been approved that same day by the Planning Commission.

Much of the difference between the two sides, of course, lay in whether a neighborhood that was not a slum would satisfy the criteria of integrationists as being in an all white area as opposed to being in a "gray" non-slum area, one in which public housing, in the view of some, would merely accelerate a rate of racial change that was already underway rather than help in stabilizing an area. * The Housing Authority included those projects located in transitional areas and also those that were in all white areas but were designed for 100% elderly occupancy. But activist groups on the other side wanted projects in higher class non-gray areas, and the higher the percentage of elderly in a planned project, the less these were considered to fulfil the purposes of scatter-site housing, which included giving greater opportunities in a better neighborhood for families with children. **

Thus, aside from reasons of principle, Golar and the city administration needed to be seen as taking a strong, and visible, stand

* The executive director of National Neighbors, a national federation of inter-racial neighborhood organizations, confirmed to me that her member groups were constantly fighting plans of Housing Authorities and HUD to build public housing or publicly assisted housing in neighborhoods which her member associations were trying to keep viably integrated and prevent from "tipping."

** See "Scatter-site Housing: Forest Hills and Other Battles," New York Post (fourth article in a five part series), April 27, 1972, p. 41, for a discussion of the location and elderly make-up of 24 projects designated as scatter-site by the Housing Authority.

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on Forest Hills when it broke, for it was a major part of the scatter-site program for which the city was already on the defensive.

In the first week of November, the regional office of HUD acted on the one week old request from the Housing Authority for concurrence in the awarding of bids for the project and approved an official amendment of the contract with the city for the new funding amount by the local area HUD office. This in fact was one of those cases of judgment at the top in a situation where an agency could block something by following the rulebook if it wanted to, and the people in the agency were well aware of that. For the opposition had by this time raised the issue of the need for an environmental impact statement as per the National Environmental Policy Act before substantive construction had started. With that matter in doubt because HUD was disputing the general flat need for environmental impact statements on all housing developments in the country and especially on those planned before the date when NEPA was passed (1969), conservative policy would have dictated taking no action on the project. But the regional head of HUD wanted to keep the project moving now that the Housing Authority was legally and administratively able to start action. So he authorized the signing by HUD of the necessary new financial contracts and HUD's concurrence in the award of construction contracts by the Authority.^{16*} By making a determination that the project had no environmental impact, based on draft environmental impact documents provided by the city Hous-

* The formal approval was on November 8. The Annual Contributions Contract with the Authority was amended for a project cost of \$29,980,000.¹⁷

ing Authority on November 5, the agency legitimized its taking of a substantive action on the project without waiting for the production of a formal impact statement of its own. Nevertheless, it eventually wrote an environmental impact statement* even while claiming that it was not legally required to, rationalizing that it was its policy to do so in controversial cases. This was accepted by a federal court and thereby avoided a negative court decision which would have been precedent setting at the time.

On November 17, 1971, the project hit the front pages of the newspapers and remained there. Senator Buckley announced that he had persuaded HUD Secretary Romney to review the project. Congressman Rosenthal reiterated his opposition and accused HUD of breaking a pledge not to fund the project until after the General Accounting Office had completed its investigation (a charge which conveniently ignored his own statement earlier in the summer that he would not take a stand on the merits of the project until the report was in).²⁰ Mayor Lindsay re-

* The draft impact statement was released for complete circulation to federal agencies and other parties for comment on January 14, 1972. The final statement for the Council on Economic Quality and the public was released on March 28, 1972.

An official involved in the production of the one-half inch thick document said that the administrative effort involved had required many man-months and that if a similar effort were made for all federally sponsored projects everything at HUD would simply grind to a halt as a result of the administrative effort involved.¹⁸

One of the consequences of the process was the application of environmental standards not in force when the project was initiated. Airport noise standards which made an area housing over two million people in New York City either completely off limits or marginal for any type of federal housing investment or mortgage guarantees led to the decision to require air conditioning for all the units. The extra cost for heavier wiring and individual room air conditioning units for the 840 apartments was estimated at just under one-half million dollars.¹⁹ That, in turn, became another source of resentment for the Forest Hills middle-class residents about the "luxuries" provided for the poor.

sponded by asking whether "'political considerations' would be allowed to overrule a 'professional evaluation,'" (i. e., the approval by HUD staff) and said that this raised the issue of whether the federal government was willing to enforce its own guidelines.²¹ Romney responded in a press conference that being in an area away from minority concentration was one of only a number of criteria against which HUD judged projects, others being environmental impact, etc. The head of the Queens Council for Better Housing and Community Development, Herbert Kahn, joined the fray by requesting Romney to meet with representatives of his 25 groups in support of the project.

On the evening of Thursday, November 18th, a mass rally and torchlight parade protest at the site peaked briefly into just enough violence for the police to call for reinforcements and fire engines, as demonstrators tossed rocks and torches at the construction trailers which had been moved onto the site the day before. Although the "mob", as it was called by a police officer on the scene, had dispersed into small groups by the time the extra equipment arrived, and although no major damage occurred, the high level of emotions was clear. It was made more clear to the rest of the city the next morning with a four column wide, front page, New York Times dramatic photograph of a demonstrator in the act of hurling a flaming torch. And the message of the group was clear - a combination of fear of what they expected the project to bring and hatred of Mayor Lindsay.²²

Events quickly escalated in a matter of days. Lindsay denounced the incident, and the opposition denounced Lindsay in no uncertain terms.

NAACP head Roy Wilkins called the opposition racist, and the opposition continued to organize demonstrations at the project site despite a temporary restraining order which the city had obtained.²³ Senator Jacob Javits issued a statement in support of the project, the preliminary report of the General Accounting Office was publicized as raising some questions about the financial feasibility of the project with its high foundation costs,^{*} and Congressman Rosenthal - rejecting repeated telephone efforts by Dick Aurelio to get him to change his position -²⁴ said the city had not considered the level of public facilities or community attitudes in planning the project. Jerry Birbach and Simeon Golar traded accusations of "bigot" and "liar" with each other on a television debate,²⁵ the Queens Jewish Community Council accused the Housing Authority of deliberately trying to destroy Jewish communities, a firebombing of a Queens home was initially linked (possibly incorrectly) to the conflict, and the Federal Aviation Administration joined the Lindenwood residents in opposing that scatter-site project because of noise

* Actually, the final GAO report of December 1, 1971, found no indication of any improper costs or other irregularities. It concluded that the "ready to build cost of the site" of \$3.8 million (\$2.3 million for land and \$1.5 million for "abnormal foundation costs), or \$10.33 per square foot, "compares favorably with previous sales prices of comparable land parcels in the area."

It noted, however, that HUD's understanding that it would pay no more than \$1.7 million for pilings when it approved the site in 1968 was only verbal. So, to protect HUD the GAO said it should get a written agreement from the Housing Authority to pay any costs over \$1.7 million. This was because, as the report said, there was some degree of uncertainty over the length of piles needed until test piles were load tested, and there was no way of knowing the number of piles required due to rejected or broken piles until all work was completed.²⁶

Part of the long foundation history discussed in the report was the fact that in January, 1967, HUD's appraisers had recommended rejecting

levels from Kennedy airport. The Times review of the Forest Hills situation concluded that race was the major issue, and Jerry Birbach kept emphasizing the Jewish nature of the area and the Lindsay administration's insensitivity to Jews, citing as an example the fact that he was served on the Sabbath with a court order restraining further demonstrations. At the end of a week Secretary Romney said "he could not see 'any basis on which I can reverse prior firm contractual commitments' "28; Jerry Birbach told 500 people picketing the site that, nevertheless, the project could and would be stopped; and bulldozers started clearing the site on the same day. (The bulldozers were a public relations effort by the Authority to convince people something was happening, out of a fear they would lose the project otherwise.)²⁹

Things continued like this for weeks, with the political controversy rising and the issues on which the debate was taking place widening. The issue of community control reappeared in strengthened form, with the Mayor saying that no project in the city could be implemented without full community consultation, especially since it had to be approved by the City Planning Commission and Board of Estimate, a position which both supporters and opponents of the project said was not true. Various Jewish groups issued statements in support of the project

* (continued)

the site because of possible high foundation costs, but the matter was resolved over the following months. Also, a private developer, who between 1961 and 1964 had sunk test pilings as part of a plan to build two 23-story apartment buildings, was turned down in his request for an FHA insured mortgage because the FHA "questioned the marketability of a project with the high foundation costs." The project was then dropped by the developer.²⁷

while others reiterated the charge that the Jewish way of life in Forest Hills would be destroyed. The Queens chapters of the NAACP said opposition to the project was based on racial prejudice.³⁰ People argued about whether or not a majority of the Forest Hills residents were against the project.³¹

Among the most important politicians to take a stand was Congressman Herman Badillo, the former borough president of the Bronx. He said that some of the politicians opposing the project were "'copping out' of their responsibilities."³² He became the most articulate politician supporting the project and wrote an article in the December 2nd Village Voice attempting to refute on a detailed point by point basis the fears about the project, the statements that the city had thrown in no sweeteners to the community, and the claims of overstrained public services. For example, he asserted that local officials had never made any serious efforts to improve services, such as by meeting with the Planning Commission, and that it was therefore a phony issue.³³ This was then denied by Community Board 6 chairman Joseph DeVoy.

On the other side, lower Manhattan Congressman Edward Koch, whose Greenwich Village political club ultimately split with him by voting to support the project, became the first liberal congressman outside of Queens to be publicly against it. He was quoted in the November 25th issue of The Village Voice as saying,

The residents of Forest Hills are expressing two very real and rational fears. The fear of crime is a very real one, and second, it's absolutely rational to believe property values will decline in the area of a high rise project. Fear moves in and people move out.³⁴

To counter the claim that the opposition was necessarily racial in nature the article recounted Koch's recollection of a meeting in which the former black mayor of Cleveland, Carl Stokes, told fellow black politicians about his attempts to build low-income public housing in middle-class black areas. "'If you think it's only whites who don't want low-income housing projects in their neighborhoods,' Koch remembers Stokes saying, 'baby, you're wrong.'"³⁵

Also coming out against the project were Queens Borough President (and former city councilman) Donald Manes and Queens county political leader Mathew Troy.

Within the Queens Council for Better Housing and Community Development, the black membership eventually overruled the white liberals in deciding to have counter-demonstrations in support of the project at the construction site, saying, "We have to show-up these people's racism."³⁶ This resulted in simultaneous demonstrations separated by police lines, and the contrasts in the political, racial, social outlook, and geographic origins of the participants (some supporters being bused from other areas of Queens and the city) only tended to be emphasized.

On November 23rd a very significant decision was made by the Board of Estimate, which voted to kill the Lindenwood public housing project despite its two previous approvals of the project. Mayor Lindsay, Manhattan Borough President Percy Sutton, and Bronx Borough President Robert Abrams were the members to vote for the project. Reports

indicated that the last minute swing vote against the project behind the scenes was that of Controller Abe Beame. The surprise decision was interpreted by all as being a valid indicator of feelings about Forest Hills, and the residents of Lindenwood publicly thanked the Forest Hills people for making their victory possible. Percy Sutton, the only black member of the Board, commented on the decision that the last time he had felt so bad was when "he felt fear on a bus ride from Atlanta, Georgia, to Jackson, Mississippi."³⁷

On December 3rd a new suit by another Forest Hills group was filed in State Supreme Court against the project. The most important part of the suit was the charge that the project as being built was not the same project that was approved by the City Planning Commission and Board of Estimate in 1966. It was alleged that the change of the physical configuration of the structures within which the unit types were arranged - from one 22 story, three 12 story, and three 10 story buildings to three 24 story buildings - was so substantial that new legal approvals by the city were required.

Also in early December the Housing Authority said it expected the racial mix of the project to be 60-65% white, 35-40% black, with the first priority for admission to be those persons from the immediate area of Forest Hills-Rego Park and second priority to be Queens in general. However, since one of the problems was that the Housing Authority's credibility was so low that some residents did not even believe the statement that 40% of the units would be for the elderly, this one had little

effect. Or, to the extent people believed it, they would respond that after a few years Housing Authority projects went all black anyway, whether the Authority wanted to do it deliberately or not, as a result of changing population characteristics of the applicants for public housing - a trend they felt was beyond the Authority's control. On the other hand, Congressman Badillo wrote that he thought that having less than 35% minorities was grounds for "blacks and Puerto Ricans . . . (to be) outraged," for it indicated "that the city has bent over backwards to accommodate Forest Hills at their expense."³⁸ To which Nat Hentoff responded, "Does anyone doubt that sense of outrage exists?"³⁹

This difficulty, that "people there believe that low-income housing is for Blacks and Puerto Ricans only,"⁴⁰ was discussed in a very interesting City Planning Department memorandum (a memo directed to its public information office rather than to people in the field office because Chairman Donald Elliott had recently started talking publicly about tenant selection policy). It pointed out that Brownsville and other heavily concentrated minority areas of the city that used to be Jewish areas still contained many elderly Jews - Jews whom much of the larger Jewish community had forgotten about, who were too afraid to venture out of their apartments, and who in any case no longer had any local Jewish institutions to go to. For these people, it pointed out, the 40% elderly allocation was ideal, and would increase as well the attendance at the local Jewish institutions, institutions which had moved at a cost of

millions of dollars from former Jewish areas and were afraid of anything which might start a trend that would cause them to relocate again. It also suggested that preferential treatment for lower floor apartments might be given to elderly orthodox Jews who would not use elevators on the Sabbath, if in fact these lower floors were designed for the elderly. (They were not, in keeping with a policy of putting large family units close to the ground.) But, as a key section of the memo stated:

The problem we will have to overcome is that no one in Forest Hills believes that the city can be trusted to keep its word. I wrote to another rabbi arguing that the responsible Jewish position ought to be that the Jewish poor must be given an equitable portion of the housing. One response was the following: 'The most problematic part of your letter was the assumption that the Housing Authority will prevent the proposed development from becoming a Black enclave by ensuring an equitable portion of Jewish poor receiving apartments. Here, the Housing Authority record is not too encouraging.'⁴¹

As this memo indicated, in mid-December Planning Commission Chairman Don Elliott had added to his public defense of the project a suggestion that an advisory committee including Forest Hills people might help the Housing Authority screen prospective tenants. This suggestion drew less than unanimous praise, as there was uncertainty about whether he meant private citizens would have access to the details on an individual's application or would merely give guidance as to selection criteria and priorities. The Housing Authority and other liberal groups were willing to accept the latter position, but were strongly opposed to the former possibility as a dangerous intrusion on the confidentiality of an applicant's personal history, the responsibility for which rested with the Authority.

Meanwhile, at another level of action, efforts had been intensified to have the White House intervene after the refusal of Romney to stop the project. Spearheaded by Senator Buckley, who by now was charging that the selection of the site had been "dictated" by City Hall, there was a period of several days of confusion and contradiction. Buckley's office quoted powerful presidential assistant John Erlichman as saying that the White House was "actively" looking at, and "concerned" about, the project, and had not yet "foreclosed" on it. At the same time press secretary Ron Ziegler said that although the President would not intervene to stop the project then, that Buckley had "new" information which would be looked at, a claim which Buckley's office said was not true. On the next day Ziegler reversed himself and said the White House was still reviewing it.⁴² The Housing Authority, for its part, said it did not think the President had the legal power to stop the project.

Also in early December, the Corona situation re-emerged. A year after saying the compromise offer was "final," Deputy Mayor Aurelio, in one of his last acts before resigning to run Lindsay's presidential campaign bid, announced a new compromise that would leave 47 of the homes in place as opposed to the original 32, leaving only 13 homes that had to be physically moved to new lots. As Mario Cuomo tells it, he and Aurelio were sitting in Aurelio's office wondering what to do, with the site plan spread over the desk. And idly sitting there, "after the plans had been looked at by planners and engineers for six

months, I suddenly said to Dick, 'Dick, you're not going to believe this, but we can save ten more homes by moving this line 50 feet.'⁴³ What they had done was simply move the school building slightly over. This meant that the backs of the houses would then be up against the building, a situation which did not conform to the modern standards of school site planning. But, as Mario Cuomo said, this was a common situation with old school buildings all over the city and one which people could live with better than being completely evicted.

In Cuomo's view this was the kind of technical trade-off that planners should have made in dealing with the larger issues of preservation of people's homes versus ideal school sites, but which they did not. * And it is probably true that many of the original reasons for wanting schools set out in an open area, such as noise, light, fire truck access, etc., could be satisfactorily resolved during the detailed design stage of the process. To do this from the beginning would change the whole site selection process from the simple application of routine standards to someone being required to initiate and then follow through on small details throughout the years-long city processes. ** If nothing

* Planning Commission Chairman Don Elliott has always maintained that the compromise was a mistake. For one thing, he feels that the nature of the immediate neighborhood will be so changed by the high school that the people will regret having fought to keep their homes where they were rather than relocating.⁴⁴

** The touchy issue of architectural review, and the fact that the city does not hire a private architect until after a site has been selected, raises another set of complications.

else, it would complicate matters simply because it would require substituting another level of individual judgments in an area where a set of basic rules had guided the administrative system before and had made agreement between different agencies of government easier to achieve. It required, in other words, the institutionalizing of flexibility. *

This new plan, enabling legislation for which was to be submitted again to the State Legislature in January, did not settle the internal bitter split among the Corona residents. Assemblyman Battista and a faction headed by Lilian Manasseri still opposed it, and Mrs. Manasseri announced that her group would join the Forest Hills residents in opposing the housing project in order to put the school there.

* A start was made toward this end, under prodding from the City Planning Department, by having a consultant and study committee convince the Board of Education and the Budget Bureau in late 1971 that they should adopt a policy of 1) building much smaller schools, 2) leasing space for school use in a flexible manner in residential and commercial buildings. Smaller schools not only had less site problems, they also had less of a security problem as well as other educational advantages in terms of personal interaction.

The study was critical of building large over-designed structures with a life expectancy of 75 years when the educational usefulness of the building frequently ended much earlier. It suggested that all projects be re-examined in view of these new policies. ⁴⁵

The consultant for the study was subsequently appointed head of the school planning section of the Board of Education when its powerful and longtime head, Adrian Blumenfeld, retired. Although it seemed irrelevant to the high school and Forest Hills issue then, several years later it was going to enter into the picture in an important way.

(The fact that it took a year for the Corona "Fighting 69" people to come out in support of the people in the Forest Hills protest is an indication that there was no love lost between the groups, either ethnically or in the sense that the new residents of the apartments in Forest Hills-Rego Park were perceived by the old Corona people as the ones who were slowly forcing out their life style.) The split in the city administration was also made clear during the December hearings of the Planning Commission on the proposed school capital budget, as Don Elliott, getting pressure from parents groups about the need for more schools, accused Assemblymen Miller and Battista of being responsible for adding to school overcrowding by their opposition to the New Queens High School in Corona.

The manner in which Mayor Lindsay involved himself in the Forest Hills controversy is another matter of interest. The question must be raised of whether his activities furthered or retarded the resolution of the conflict, or, to look at it from a slightly different perspective, whether they furthered or retarded the short or long range future of scatter-site housing.

As early as the end of November the viewpoint being publicly expressed by the Mayor was that "In the final analysis, this is a fundamental test, and will be so viewed nationally, as to whether those who argue for integrated communities have the courage of their convictions."⁴⁶ At the same time, as he drew attention to the project by citing its significance, he continued a policy of not giving any degree of recognition to the

opposition by refusing to meet with them, which furthered their ability to say in the community that the city refused to even listen to them. In addition, with the emphasis on the racial objectives of the project, and with the self-serving argument being circulated within the neighborhood that they were picked because Jews were passive liberals not prone to violence, there was a visceral envy and resentment brought forth with the memory of the Mayor's much publicized visits to Harlem and Bedford-Stuyvesant when there was violence there. All of this seemed to coalesce in the feeling - somewhat bitter after the Mayor's support for the "black viewpoint" in the Oceanhill-Brownsville school dispute and subsequent teacher's strike - that one got favored treatment if one was black, especially if one was violent.

With the Mayor not seeing local people, the line administration official left to deal with all this was Simeon Golar who, after events of the previous eleven months, was hardly in a position to reduce tensions, despite his having a secret meeting with Jerry Birbach in the fall.⁴⁷ He just had to take the flack, and he took a lot, including being misquoted by some Jewish groups that the successfully integrated Pomonok housing project had no whites on its waiting list as a part of the overall dispute about the racial trends in public housing projects in Jewish areas.

With all this emotional undercurrent, the situation was not helped at all when the Mayor's press secretary said in November, even though it may have been true, that "the Mayor had not appeared in Forest Hills because the community was 'not on the verge of an explosion that

would involve human life and safety.'"⁴⁸ For people feeling ignored the implications of this were obvious. One of the consequences of this were the repeated public references - picked up in the press, of course - by Jerry Birbach that he would try to keep the weekly protest marches nonviolent, which was a very subtle way of implying the threat of violence without actually having to pay the price (legal and emotional) of violence.

On December 9th, Lindsay gave a speech at a groundbreaking ceremony for a public housing project in the Williamsburg section of Brooklyn (a low-income area with a mixture of Puerto Ricans, Hassidic Jews, and blacks) in which he said that that project in Brooklyn was of "worldwide importance" in that it showed, speaking as if it were already built, that "people of every race . . . [can]. . . live together in peace" and that "politicians do not have to lead them into war, ugliness, bitterness, and despair." He asked, "Will our civilization be remembered for its buildings or the quality of its justice?" and in a reference to the India-Pakistani and Arab-Israeli conflicts, asked why "political leadership, instead of appealing to the best in people, brought out the worst in them," and criticized "petty politicians." (This last remark was interpreted by some to be aimed at Senator Buckley, whose White House review of Forest Hills had started two days earlier. Lindsay denied this.) After the ceremony Lindsay said that as far as the Forest Hills project was concerned, "There is nothing further to be said. No compromise. No change in plans."⁴⁹ It was those last comments about Forest Hills, not the lofty ones about the Brooklyn project, that made the headlines on the newspaper columns.

The following week there was speculation in both the general and Jewish press that a "compromise" reduction in the size of the project was possible. Simultaneously, attention was given to a statement by "a vigorous supporter of the project,"⁵⁰ Rabbi Ben Zion Bokser of Forest Hills, that he still supported it, but "would prefer to see the project smaller."⁵¹ An opposition Sunday demonstration of an estimated 3,000 people was countered by two smaller supporting demonstrations, with the different parties separated by about 250 police.⁵²

In this atmosphere, a highly significant and controversial step was taken by John Lindsay. After being criticized repeatedly by both complete opponents of the project and some supporters of the project for refusing to meet with anyone from the local community to discuss the situation, * Lindsay, at his own initiative, and apparently without consulting officials like Simeon Golar or Human Relations Commissioner Elinor Norton,⁵³ called a large meeting on the project. Invited to the meeting, along with these two officials, were other top officials - including both deputy mayors, former Deputy Mayor Aurelio and Donald Elliott; a variety of black civil rights leaders; representatives of the opposition from Queens, including Jerry Birbach and Jewish groups; and Jewish groups supporting the project. Not invited were any elected of-

* An official of a Jewish organization trying to mediate the conflict was told by the Mayor's administrative assistant, "The Mayor doesn't sit down with local groups," a statement this official termed "bullshit."⁵⁴ State Senator Gold from Forest Hills (another person with a 100% A. D. A. rating) said the Mayor's "confrontation politics . . . [had] set public housing back 15 years."⁵⁵

officials nor the Community Planning Board 6 chairman Joseph DeVoy (an omission later termed an "oversight" by the Mayor's office after Jerry Birbach invited him, but one which led DeVoy to charge that it was typical of the way the Mayor gave "lip service" to the community planning boards).⁵⁶

The American Jewish Committee, which had not taken a public position on the project so that it could keep its lines of communication open with both sides* in an attempt to create a "rapprochement" between them, was horrified at the way the meeting was called and organized, with both hard line sides together in a public type meeting. It put on a last minute effort with the Mayor's staff to call off the meeting, and, failing that, attempted to dissuade the various Jewish groups and Jerry Birbach from going.⁵⁷ It was only partly successful with Jewish groups and failed with Birbach. Birbach, who had earlier been unsuccessful in getting a private meeting with the Mayor, said he went because he "owed it to my friends in the media,"⁵⁸ for which he held press conferences both before and after the meeting.

The meeting was opened by the Mayor saying there would be no change in the project.⁵⁹ And that was the tone throughout the 1 1/2 hour calm meeting - Birbach said little ("I didn't come to talk, I came to listen,")⁶⁰ but blasted the Mayor afterwards. Preparing for a chartered bus protest to the Mayor's home, Gracie Mansion, for the following day, he said in his news conference, "We are not interested in screening ap-

* As a result it was also able to get information about what was happening that it otherwise would not have been able to.

plicants to the project. The community will defeat the project."⁶¹ Civil rights groups were happy at the Mayor's strong stand, which was that any reduction in the size of the project would mean killing it because of increased costs and the need to go back to the Board of Estimate. Simeon Golar left early to catch an airplane flight and said there was no compromise but that "we are still trying to involve the Forest Hills people in the project" by forming an advisory community group.⁶²

Elected officials, who had fumed about not being at the first meeting, met with the Mayor a week later. This meeting, held just after Lindsay's hour-long meeting with civil rights leaders, was termed a "waste of time" by Borough President Manes because Lindsay refused to support a compromise to make the project 12 stories high, a change which Congressman Rosenthal said "would be a plus for scatter-site housing."⁶³ Manes, who as a city councilman had opposed scatter-site housing, particularly objected to Lindsay's use of the word "morality." "To talk about morality in this case is idiocy. We are for a project on this site. The disagreement is about size."⁶⁴ Civil rights leaders, meanwhile, issued a statement saying that the issue was whether one would have an integrated society, pointing out that scatter-site housing had been opposed all over the country. NAACP head Roy Wilkins put the stakes as high as they could go by saying that if Forest Hills were stopped, "it would mean the end of the program of scatter-site housing throughout the country. Even to make it smaller, he said, would be 'heralded as a defeat for scatter-site housing.'"⁶⁵

No politician mentioned publicly how to finance the reduction in the size of the project. Nor did civil rights supporters talk about what

was happening at that very time to New York's ongoing attempts to plan new scatter-site projects, both low and moderate income. Various undertakings were being withdrawn and defeated as politicians began reacting negatively to the proposals because of the very fact that they were considered controversial. Nor did anyone ask, publicly at least, how one could simultaneously try to convince Forest Hills residents that most of the project's occupants would be both local and white, as the Housing Authority had stated, when the project was being identified by national civil rights leaders as being crucial to blacks and other minorities trying to escape from the slums and ghettos.

On December 17, the same day as the first Mayoral meeting, the opposition obtained from a federal judge an order for the city to show cause on January 18 why the project should not be stopped for environmental reasons. ^{*66} It was for this case that HUD was preparing the environmental impact statement referred to earlier. The Housing Authority, which had so far only been clearing land at the site, was given permission by the judge (as is apparently routine in these cases) to drive 18 test pilings as long as it gave the other side notice. ⁶⁷

This produced another one of those little anecdotes about the nature of relations between the two sides. Haskell Lazere of the American Jewish Committee, trying anything that might change the public tone of conflict, said to Dr. Alvin Lashinsky (president of the Queens Jewish

* Donald Elliott's comment on this was that for five and one half years no one raised the issue of noise or environmental impact, and then it was used by the opposition as one more method to haunt the project. ⁶⁸

Community Council, which was one of the first Jewish groups to oppose the project in the beginning of the year) that the test pilings represented an "agreement" between the lawyers of the two sides. So he suggested that Lashinsky, who had boycotted the Mayor's meeting, call Housing Authority vice-chairman Walter Fried (as Golar had just taken the airplane trip) and issue a joint release describing the agreement. Lashinsky did so. "Fried called back saying 'We are litigants. Our policy is not to issue press releases during litigation, and besides, we don't want to issue any releases with you.'"⁶⁹

Among the other events taking place during the last two weeks of December were State Senate hearings on the project, hearings which led to a variety of angry exchanges between Jerry Birbach and the State Senators when Birbach said he was not opposed to the principle of scatter-site housing but would like to see two-story garden apartments for the elderly of all races.⁷⁰ The issue was further exacerbated, both at the hearings and otherwise, by a counter demonstration of 200 people in front of Birbach's company, a real estate office on West 91st Street in Manhattan which owned and was renovating properties in and around Manhattan's West Side Urban Renewal Area.⁷¹ The hearings also heard the black organization N. E. G. R. O., represented by its head Dr. Timothy Matthew denounce scatter-site housing as "genocide."⁷² Planning Commission Chairman Elliott reiterated the original criteria for selecting sites for scatter-site housing and the importance of continuing the project once such difficult to find sites had been approved. He said that the schools could accommodate the project and that any reduction in its size

"would kill it" because of federal cost limits.⁷³ William Green, the Regional Administrator of HUD, talked about the recent Chicago scatter-site public housing federal court decision.⁷⁴

At other meetings around the city, various state legislators discussed legislation to require community planning board approval of public housing and legislation to require the New York State Urban Development Corporation to build a school or middle income housing on the site. Jerry Birbach was appointed by Borough President Manes to be a member of Community Planning Board 6; the Liberal Party criticized officials whom it previously had endorsed for election who by now had supported the idea of a scaled-down compromise on the project; and calls continued for a moratorium on construction to allow a study of the project. As 1971 drew to a close, the Forest Hills Residents Association, following Jerry Birbach's expressed thesis from the beginning of the year that you have to make things political, said it was planning to demonstrate in Miami and other places where Lindsay was going to run in the presidential primaries.

By this time it is clear that the controversy had created a high level of personal antagonism and emotionalism among people in the area, with the "intensity of . . . anger and fear" so high that it was extremely "intimidating" to most local people who supported the project, who feared "community sanctions." Words like "Communist" or "nigger-lover" were hurled around at project supporters,⁷⁵ for Forest Hills was not monolithic by any means. There were supporters of the project among the residents. One woman, for example, told a reporter,

[I]f this community could spend as much energy working with the project as it has trying to keep it out, this could be a model community. But people won't do that. Some of my old progressive friends tell me I'm crazy now not to fear blacks . . . I read about violence in other projects like the Baruch Houses, and I get a little scared. I guess it might be a little more dangerous here if they build the project.

But I always remember a book I read about years ago, 'But Not Next Door . . . '* And that's what keeps happening throughout the city. Frightened people are saying put them somewhere else, but not here, not next door. So the hostility and fear keep getting worse.

'It's got to start somewhere,' she said. 'I know it could be difficult, but "next door" might as well be here.'⁷⁶

Yet, as the reporter sadly noted, for this woman was speaking with the kind of calm tone that he wished the politicians would use, "one of the most disturbing things I learned in Forest Hills was that the woman who made those remarks wouldn't let me mention her job or her name for fear that the community might indict her as a treacherous radical."⁷⁷

But for a whole variety of reasons, envy of the Italians in Corona for having the will to fight against the city, racism, fear of crime - whatever the reason in each individual case - the fact remained that a significant number of people were bitterly opposed to the project. It did not even mat-

* But Not Next Door by Harry and David Rosen (Astor-Honor, 1962) is a book about the attempt by Morris Milgram to build a private, suburban housing development with homes for sale on an open-occupancy basis in Deerfield, Illinois, in 1959. The town condemned the two parcels of land, which had houses under construction, for use as public parks. The developer's suit in federal court was lost when the United States Supreme Court refused to hear the case in 1963.

ter whether they were a majority or not, as some kept asking, for that was a false issue. In many situations, including neighborhoods, a large enough minority with strongly held views is sufficient to outweigh by its actions the views of a majority which remains passive, whether those actions be either active, such as demonstrations, or passive, such as by putting up for sale signs, and fleeing. Whether such fears are rational does not matter if they form the basis for people's actions and one cannot convince people otherwise.

It may indeed be "scary," as writer Nat Hentoff said, that there was "so much ugliness in anticipation of so few of 'them.'" For, after going through the detailed demographics of the project and Forest Hills and showing that "after the hordes have encamped, only about three percent of Forest Hills will be non-white," he said he was forced to ask with a sense of incredulity, "I mean, this is a tipping point?"⁷⁸ His article then went on to discuss the constitutional issues involved in the case.

Unfortunately, that low a percentage may indeed be a tipping point, not necessarily to those among the 100,000⁺ who live in Forest Hills, say, a mile or more from the project, but for those who lived near it. For a percentage gives a total distribution, while the reality, in another sense, has to do with a particular location and people's feelings about how close they are to it and to what degree they feel they will be affected. Fear is a contagious commodity, and it can be self-fulfilling. One of the things which started happening in Forest Hills, and which was not known unless one was very close to the situation, was blockbusting. In mid-December of 1971, in an effort to stop such activity before it had gone too far, Haskell

Lazere, director of the New York Chapter of the American Jewish Committee, let it be known in the area that his organization was taking action to stop such illegal activity there.⁷⁹ In fact, as he privately revealed, he did not have resources to take any monitoring action and made his announcement as a bluff in the hope that it would put enough fear in local real estate agents to prevent them from engaging in such activity.⁸⁰

II - The Controversy Continues Into 1972

During the first six weeks of 1972 the tempo of actions continued at a pace consistent with a controversial issue. The Housing Authority, in announcing that it had started a record 10,008 units of public housing in 1971 (including 1,201 acquired or leased) out of its goal of 14,000, was now ironically in a position where it felt obligated to publicize that it was building most projects in low-income areas:

While the focus of publicity has been on the 840-unit project in Forest Hills-Rego Park, 30 other low-income projects were started throughout the city in 1971 [in all boroughs except Staten Island]. The vast majority are in low-income neighborhoods, giving the lie to the recent impression that public housing is not being built in low-income neighborhoods as well as outside of them.⁸¹

Indeed, according to another Housing Authority document, almost 90% of the units were in low-income areas.⁸²

With that statement in mind, and remembering that construction starts did not necessarily represent present planning policy for new projects, it is interesting to look at a size distribution of the projects the Authority did start, as follows:

TABLE 15
 Size Distribution of Public Housing Projects
 Whose Construction Started in 1971

Number of units in Project	Number of Projects
30 - 99	4
100 - 199	8
200 - 299	7
300 - 399	7
400 - 499	1
500 - 525	2
840	1 (Forest Hills)
936	1
Total 8,807 units	31
Average 284 units per project	

Source: New York City Housing Authority
 News release, January 14, 1972

Whether or not a smaller project would have created less opposition is one of those questions which can never be answered, for there is no single answer to a complex situation. But it is clear that Forest Hills was at the high end of what was being built that year by the Authority. Also, one must not forget that that is only one way of looking at a project - how the units are distributed in terms of building heights is another measure that may or may not be important at a given time, as is density. (As a case in point, when the Cuomo compromise later halved the project, using the Latimer Gardens total project size and building heights as a guide, two members of the City Planning Commission objected that the resulting density of the Forest Hills project would be much lower than that of the Latimer Gardens.)⁸³

Early January also saw public announcement of the formation of the first organized effort of local people who said they were not necessarily in favor of the project, but wanted to "accept the project as a fait accompli and labor within that framework to calm the passions and fears which have been aroused" and to work for a program "to effect a smooth transition for present and future inhabitants of Forest Hills."⁸⁴ The group, Forest Hills Neighbors, was headed by Paul Sandman, who said that the new organization had about 100 to 150 members. He took pains to emphasize that although the Housing Authority was "most enthusiastic" about his group they were not connected with the city administration.⁸⁵

This, in fact, was true, and it is interesting that the Housing Authority was partially correct in its long-held philosophy that once people

believed a project was real they would start to try to make the best of the situation rather than continue to fight. An Authority staff member said:

About December, when it became evident a project would be built, we began getting telephone calls and feelers from people we hadn't known, saying, "I was not in favor of it, but I want to help the community get together."

The Community Affairs office compiled lists and tried to get these people in touch with each other. This was viewed as a valid Community Affairs office job because it did not seem political. We didn't do much, but we started the process going.

Community Affairs was taking a low-key approach because organizing would kill the legitimacy of any grass roots group. We talked with Forest Hills Neighbors and gave them information when they asked for it, but they were meeting and organizing themselves on their own.⁸⁶

Such grass roots efforts, however, were not carried out without cost to the individual. In what was only to be the start of the personal price which Paul Sandman was to pay for his efforts, the inclusion of his home telephone number in one of the early local newspaper articles about the organization's formation led to so many threatening calls that he had to get an unlisted number.⁸⁷

The Authority followed-up in January, 1972, with the publication of a White Paper on the project. It said in the document that it was taking this step in a "spirit of genuine reconciliation" in an "attempt to re-open some reasonable discussion about the issue."⁸⁸ Toward that end Simeon Golar reiterated his interest in "the establishment of a broadly-based Forest Hills Advisory Committee which can assist this

Authority in a broad variety of ways to make the new project in Forest Hills a constructive addition to that community."⁸⁹ This time the Authority again detailed the great need for public housing in the city and its responses to all the objections to the project in as conciliatory and positive a tone as possible. For example, whereas its earlier fact sheet had said a new high school would be open when the project opened, it now said,

For the next eight to ten years, the project will contribute relatively few high school students. There are plans for new high schools . . . [which] will be built long before the younger children from the project are ready for high school.⁹⁰

At its heart the hope for a document of this type rested in government credibility, which was sadly lacking by this time and was not helped by the studious avoidance in the White Paper of any mention of mayoral involvement, an involvement that was widely known by now. But what was most fascinating about the document was that, by refusing to mention or acknowledge the names of the opposition groups and by not offering to sit down with them directly, the Authority was still engaged in the same kind of posturing that combatants at war employ, where sitting down with the other side means a form of acceptance or recognition of a viewpoint which you feel is not just wrong but closer to "evil" or "immoral."

However, while the Authority was partially correct in its view that some people in the Forest Hills area would start taking a more positive view about the situation, to the degree that it was incorrect about the opposition it was very incorrect. By this time the people most

strongly opposed simply dug in harder. Because the issue had escalated, the people in leadership positions of the many organizations making pro or con statements about the project made them out of perceptions about the issue and out of a view toward the "principles involved," and they were physically too far from the immediate locale of the project to be influenced by it in their own personal lives. The issue escalated into a bitter debate over whether or not the Lindsay administration had "neglected" Jewish interests in the city with a speech made in February by the President-elect of the New York Board of Rabbis, Rabbi Berkowitz, who linked the Forest Hills project with a "City Hall sellout" of Jews.⁹¹ The Mayor's office responded by releasing a memo from a mayoral aide listing various things the administration had done for Jews,⁹² the Times immediately printed an editorial criticizing Berkowitz for "inflaming latent racial prejudices,"⁹³ and the level of press coverage increased as various Jewish organizations and leaders throughout the city felt obligated to make their own public statements on Rabbi Berkowitz's charges. Roy Wilkins, while agreeing with the Times criticism of Berkowitz's speech, objected to the part of the editorial that said, "There are ample reasons for opposing in its present form the huge low-cost housing project that is being so brusquely dumped into the Forest Hills area."⁹⁴ In particular he objected to the words "brusquely dumped," saying

This suggests, erroneously, that, prior to the recent weeks of rabble-rousing protest, the community knew nothing of the housing plan. In truth, the project goes back at least five years and opponents of the project have voiced their protests at designated hearings and have lost in each voting . . .

Rabbi Berkowitz, whether he intended it or not, has confirmed the suspicions of those in the black community who have insisted all along that the racial issue was the basic one. The Times, although properly condemnatory of the Berkowitz language, does not help itself in the search for a solution by feeding the dubious and suspect charge that this housing project was "brusquely dumped" upon the community.⁹⁵

At the same time word began leaking out that the Mayor's office was thinking about calling a meeting between blacks and Jews on the project. (Whether or not the Mayor had personally come up with the idea is unclear.) Simeon Golar, asked about these reports on the day after Rabbi Berkowitz's speech, said he was opposed to such a meeting and added bluntly, "Forest Hills is not a matter to be bartered between blacks and Jews."⁹⁶ The very fact that City Hall was talking in these black-Jewish terms horrified a number of the people involved - people who were on both sides of the issue - because they didn't want Forest Hills to get created as a black-Jewish issue, which it would if enough people simply kept talking about it enough in those terms. But one of the problems in these situations was how the parties involved could get out of a meeting with the Mayor gracefully, and after some phone calls between various parties, Roy Wilkins sent a telegram to the Mayor expressing his feeling that the meeting would not be constructive and that he would not attend. The proposed meeting was called off.⁹⁷

Meanwhile, John Lindsay continued campaigning in the presidential primaries - now putting heavy emphasis on Florida - being followed all the way, and especially in the Jewish areas of Miami Beach and other resort towns, by New York City Jews opposed to the housing

project. And any suggestion, as occurred at one of the private meetings between Lindsay and Queens Jewish leaders, that he was meeting with them because of Jewish hostility in Florida, caused Lindsay to become furious, a factor further complicating the equation of human emotions and political symbolism.⁹⁸

On February 16, Justice Irving Saypol of the State Supreme Court, which despite its name is actually a lower court, agreed with the plaintiffs and ruled that

While the original plan was legally adopted in 1966, the marked changes in design, number, and juxtaposition of structures in the present fourth or fifth plan of 1970 - from seven to three buildings, from one tallest of twenty-two stories to three of twenty-four stories, evolving internally in the defendants without the required public hearing demands judicial condemnation.⁹⁹

The "required public hearings" meant submitting the project to the City Planning Commission and the Board of Estimate for reapproval, and the tenor of the times was such that there was no doubt among project supporters that the Board of Estimate would kill the project now if it had the opportunity to vote on it. Forest Hills had become a political liability, one so great that while supporters said that standing strong on Forest Hills would strengthen the cause of scatter-site housing, the administration was being forced to drastically revise, or withdraw, other scatter-site public housing or subsidized housing, such as one in the East New York section of Brooklyn.

Although the city was eventually able to obtain approval to continue sinking pilings while it appealed Judge Saypol's order to halt con-

struction, the effects of the decision were far-reaching, both on the immediate course of events and in its legal implications for the future of any new public housing in the city.

In the latter case the problem arose from the fact that the New York Public Housing Law distinguished between a "plan" (defined as a "plan or undertaking for the clearance, replanning and reconstruction or rehabilitation of a substandard and insanitary area . . .")¹⁰⁰ and a "project" ("a specific work or improvement to effectuate all or any part of a plan . . .")¹⁰¹. For some thirty years the city had been approving a "plan and project" for public housing simultaneously, which was why the wording of the resolution from the Housing Authority to the city describing the proposed physical development was always put in terms of "tentative," "approximately" or "probably." Detailed engineering and architectural work had not yet been done because those private professionals were not hired until after a site was officially approved. After they were hired it was not uncommon for the physical nature of the proposed project to change greatly while keeping fairly close to the general specifications about number of units, percent of elderly, etc.

The specter facing the city if the decision were upheld was the necessity to first have a "plan" approved by the city, with the requisite public hearings, and then to go back through all the administrative and legal approvals a second time several years later for the "project" in all its exact details. Not only was this the lack of administrative flexibility frightening for those familiar with the problems of getting anything at all built in the city, but even more serious was the belief that no public

housing project would ever be able to make it through the political process of public hearings and the Board of Estimate twice because of the increased leverage which local community groups would have. Thus, the Housing Authority was forced to state in its legal appeal that that which planners, architects, social scientists, politicians, and real estate developers know to be frequently the case in the real world was not true legally:

The Court should not entertain objections pertaining to the height of the buildings or the number of buildings to be constructed, since these are matters which have no valid community impact and are not the concern of the City Planning Commission and the Board of Estimate.

Building plans with respect to the height and number of buildings are frequently modified and there is no requirement in the Public Housing Law that approval of such modifications be obtained.¹⁰²

The immediate impact of the Saypol decision was on the various negotiations and proposals for trying to resolve the conflict that were underway at the time. One scheme, worked out by Dick Aurelio and the Mayor's aides, involved reducing the size of the Forest Hills project by one third and resurrecting the Lindenwood site for a project of about 300 units, which was slightly over half the size of the project rejected by the Board of Estimate four months earlier. This had the symbolic sweetener for the supporters of the project that the total number of units would be twenty more than the original total in Forest Hills. But whether or not it would have been acceptable to supporters or opponents, particularly to Borough President Manes who had managed to kill the Lindenwood project, was unknown. It never was to be known,

in fact, because Aurelio floated that trial balloon on the same day that Justice Saypol announced his decision, which had changed the entire psychology of the situation.¹⁰³ Essentially the Birbach-led part of the opposition, with its slogan of "no project, no way," now saw no reason to compromise. It was buoyed by its success, a success that got further moral encouragement from a meeting arranged by Senator Buckley that a delegation had with President Nixon's aides, who said "the President regarded the fight over the Forest Hills project as having 'national significance.'"¹⁰⁴

Another proposal in its formative stages that was scuttled was one that the American Jewish Committee had been working on for a month and a half, one to which the City, after an initial failure to respond to the idea, had agreed. That was to use professional crisis resolution techniques and put all the major participants together in a controlled and isolated setting under a professional consultant's supervision. There were to be a series of conditions, such as the key one that there had to be an initial agreement on an agenda, that a person would have to stay throughout the entire process until agreement was reached, that upon consensus there would be implementation of the agreed upon action, etc. But the "confrontation lab" idea ended when the Jewish Committee and Dick Aurelio* agreed that the Birbach opposition would simply "laugh in our faces" at the suggestion of the lab in view of Saypol's decision.¹⁰⁵

* Aurelio, despite his resignation as Deputy Mayor in December, was still the key Lindsay advisor making decisions on these types of matters.

Also, in a different variant of this type of approach, sometime during these months there had been a highly secret request by the Mayor's office to two professional mediation firms asking them to explore the possibility of mediating the dispute. After very quietly examining the situation, they refused. One of these firms was headed by the highly respected black politician Basil Paterson (a former state senator from Harlem, he was elected vice-chairman of the national Democratic Party later in 1972), and the other was the well-known labor mediator and mass transportation advocate, Theodore Kheel.¹⁰⁶

In yet another event during the week preceding Saypol's decision - an event unrelated directly to the Forest Hills project but indicative of the complex nature of people's feelings about the physical and social nature of their surroundings - 2 twenty story middle-income buildings of 400 units under construction by the Lefrak organization in the Forest Hills-Kew Gardens area were, after vigorous local opposition, blocked by the Board of Standards and Appeals on a technical ruling of fact. In this case the building was going on under continuing one year extensions excluding a developer from the requirements of the new 1963 zoning ordinance, requirements which had been tightened to prohibit buildings higher than three stories on the land in question. Again the widespread community and political opposition was based on fear of overloading community facilities and a desire to keep high rise buildings out of the neighborhood, and, again, the lawyer involved in the case was Mario Cuomo. Cuomo, commenting that he had not been

very sure of winning the technical case before the Board, added, "I think this means our system can work. It shows that if a community group is right and if they apply themselves they can work through the system."¹⁰⁷ (The Board of Standards and Appeals decision was later overturned by the state courts.)

From the time of Judge Saypol's February decision until early May, much of the attention Forest Hills got was focused on the political and legislative scene, although local community meetings pro and con continued on a regular basis and the appearance of a black-Jewish rift intensified with acrimonious charges and counter-charges after a secret meeting of black ministers and Jewish rabbis was revealed by one of the participants.¹⁰⁸ I say appearance because in fact there was by no means unified support among all blacks for scatter-site housing. A number of blacks - planners and architects, as well as community activists - favored the building of low-income housing in slum areas as part of an internal black community development effort, and they were finding this difficult to do with the federal housing guidelines and lack of money.¹⁰⁹ There had even been sit-ins by Reverend Tim Matthew's group N. E. G. R. O. in the offices of the NAACP in January. However, this type of issue did not get very much or accurate coverage in the "white" press. There, it on the whole managed to be hidden under a general call for more federal housing dollars for all public and subsidized housing, as that was one thing which both sides agreed on, but the philosophical schism was wide indeed. It was just as wide as the split between the black supporters of scatter-site housing and the Jewish white opponents.

The State Assembly passed in March a bill sponsored by Assemblyman Miller that would require a county-wide referendum on public housing projects, including a retroactive provision to cover Forest Hills.¹¹⁰ Afterwards, Miller, invoking the rhetoric of "community participation in education" and "neighborhood government," called the measure a "devotion to democracy." He also pointed out that the bill did not cover nursing homes or elderly housing, presumably because they did not "vitally affect [people's] daily lives."¹¹¹ Yet, in an ironic commentary on how fast social issues change, by early 1974 widespread community concern had caused the City Planning Commission to pass special zoning legislation to restrict the concentrated proliferation of nursing homes in certain neighborhoods.

This carrying of the issue to the domain of the State Legislature intensified the political split locally, for State Senator Gold, whose district included Forest Hills, had refused to come out against the project, and, in fact, was publicly opposed to the anti-public housing bills. Consequently, he was faced with the prospect of a Democratic primary battle, which he got when Jerry Birbach announced for his seat. In April, despite Gold's denunciation of it, the State Senate took a route different from the Assembly and passed a bill requiring all public housing projects not beyond the foundation stage within five years after initial local government approval to be sent back to the local legislative body (the Board of Estimate in the case of New York City). The Senate added a provision that the bill should be deemed to have been in effect since

September, 1971, thereby putting the Forest Hills project retroactively beyond the five year time limit provision. This version of the bill was overwhelmingly passed by the Assembly on May 2, 1972, and went to the Governor's desk for signature.

As if the Forest Hills project had not had enough problems already, the point of reference from which the public at large related to physical design issues suddenly shifted drastically. At the same time as the Assembly was approving the bill, and only three months after the Times' architecture critic Ada Louise Huxtable had blasted the design of the Forest Hills project (as discussed in Chapter V), the most drastic high rise public housing failure in the country was emblazoned on the public consciousness. National network television news showed movies of high rise public housing buildings collapsing in unison from simultaneous dynamite charges; and a two page wide color photograph of the buildings in mid-collapse was printed in the May 5th issue of Life magazine,^{*112} with a circulation of over six million. Pruitt-Igoe in St. Louis became a symbol of the failures of high rise public housing to the public as well as it had been earlier to housing professionals.

On another battlefield the political fortunes of John Lindsay had not gone well in the presidential primaries. Having switched from the Republican Party to the Democratic Party, he finished fifth in the March 14, 1972, Florida election, and in the April 4 Wisconsin primary he finished sixth. He withdrew from the campaign the same day the Wisconsin race ended.

* The same photograph was used to illustrate the back cover of Defensible Space by Oscar Newman.

The conventional political wisdom about the effect of this on the Forest Hills issue was discussed in a five part series, "Scatter-site Housing: the Battle of Forest Hills," published in the New York Post in late April.

Lindsay's withdrawal . . . has raised few hopes of a compromise. In fact, with the pressure off from his advisors who may have feared his embarrassment by hecklers, he is now in a firmer position to make a stand on principle, observers noted.

' Politics play a role, ' said Marvin Schick, Lindsay's special assistant for intergroup relations, ' but not presidential politics. The factors that inhibit compromise, like cost, court decisions, what the community and politicians will accept, are independent of presidential candidacies. ' ¹¹³

Adding yet another complication and uncertainty to the political and legislative equation was the position of Governor Rockefeller. In late March, at the same news conference in which he had announced he supported President Nixon's proposed Congressional moratorium on court-ordered school busing for racial integration, he said he would rather "develop areas that have deteriorated . . . so they become attractive areas . . . [This] would avoid exactly the kind of conflict which exists now [in Forest Hills]. " ¹¹⁴

With this and the existence of a long term Lindsay-Rockefeller "feud" as a background, Lindsay, in a May 3rd interview, said he would ask the Governor to veto the anti-Forest Hills bill. But he "indicated he was pessimistic" that Rockefeller would do so. If the bill became law he said the city would then challenge its constitutionality in court.

Furthermore, he said that if the Forest Hills plan was resubmitted to the Board of Estimate (my emphasis), "A compromise is better than nothing. I'm sure that there'll have to be compromises," he said, because "I think it's going to be very difficult to get it through the Board of Estimate again." He added that the project had "generated 'intense political heat' and said that 'the Board has never been known to be completely firm in the face of political heat.'"¹¹⁵ Lindsay's remarks were interpreted by the Times as the first sign he might be changing his prior position. Simeon Golar refused to comment on the Mayor's remarks, and Jerry Birbach said his people were not interested in a compromise.¹¹⁶

City Planning Commission Chairman Donald Elliott was at least one person who had not been consulted about this. For I was interviewing him on May 4th when the Times published the story. When asked about it and the possibility of a compromise, he said that there wasn't any and that the reporter must have misunderstood the Mayor.¹¹⁷

Simeon Golar was also now bitterly opposed to any compromise, so much so that in Mid-April he saw no point in having any meeting whatever with the vocal opposition. He did not feel a meeting would be productive, not even for talking about community relations after the project was fully built.¹¹⁸ One of the complications was that he had apparently proposed some changes which had been either turned down by the Mayor's office or had been failures, and now he felt he could only go forward with the project.

On that same May 4th the Appellate Division overruled Judge Saypol. It said the general provisions of the State's 1939 public housing law should be liberally interpreted in order to give the Housing Authority the flexibility it needed to fulfill the act's intention of providing public housing. It concluded that the changes in number and heights of buildings and number of dwelling units were minor as compared to the basic purpose of the "package" approved by the Planning Commission and Board of Estimate, namely the building of public housing on the site in question.¹¹⁹

With this victory by the city, one might have thought, as per the conventional political wisdom, that the city would simply continue to ride through the storm and build the entire project. Things also now seemed to be going the city's way in a related matter. For in late April the Corona compromise bill sponsored by Assemblyman Lisa and Senator Ferraro and supported by the Lindsay administration had been overwhelmingly passed by both branches of the State Legislature, as had also been the more general bill of Assemblyman Battista. Thus the choice of which bill to sign was left to Rockefeller. This situation, though still fraught with uncertainty, was nevertheless promising, since the Governor had supported the City's Corona compromise the previous year.

However, one of the Mayor's advisors felt that with "Lindsay's presidential bid now over, with the Court decision in his favor, and with the mood so ugly, he could now compromise."¹²⁰ As this person later explained his view of the history of the situation:

The City was taking a firm position, since the city could ride it through. But Lindsay announces for the presidency, and makes Florida the test, with all the transplanted Jews, and another opportunity for the opposition arises. They could cause trouble there, and, boy, did they. It set a tone that didn't help him. Given that, if he succumbed at that point, it would have been untenable. The blacks would have nailed him. It would have been very artificial and made him look like a man of no conviction. So, the Mayor had to be out of the campaign.¹²¹

This attitude presumably meant that the compromise schemes floated earlier, like the Lindenwood one, would only have been approved by the Mayor if they had been totally acceptable to the liberal black community, whereas now there could be more latitude.

This official further explained his position by saying

My biggest disappointment was that the liberals folded, and then when the New York Times folded, it was the final irony . . .

That community, more than most others, could accommodate it. No project in the city is perfect . . .

But I do acknowledge this - because polarization developed, that became a factor . . . I was all in accord with CPC [i. e., Don Elliott] and the HA [i. e., Simeon Golar], but there were new factors, . . . the collapse of liberals and the demagogues. It wasn't worth proving you were right. It was the responsibility of government to take some of the edge out of it.¹²²

The belief that the city could have ridden things through if Lindsay's presidential bid and Florida had not happened has been disputed by others close to the situation.¹²³ In any case, it was true that polarization was increasing, for both in Corona and Forest Hills the opposition had moved more strongly into the political arena, with Jerry Birbach running

against State Senator Gold in the Democratic June primary, and Lillian Manasseri, leader of the Corona group opposed to the moving of any homes, challenging Assemblyman Lisa in the primary.

There ensued within the Mayor's office consideration of a number of routes to take on Forest Hills. The idea of a three member special committee was rejected. Then, as has been confirmed from several authoritative sources, Jimmy Breslin and Dick Aurelio, talking about Forest Hills, hit upon the name of Mario Cuomo. Breslin's opinion was "I bet Mario could solve it."¹²⁴ Aurelio, who had respected Cuomo so much after the Corona compromise that he had tried, and failed, to convince Cuomo to accept a city government post, fought hard to convince Lindsay to appoint Cuomo to deal with Forest Hills.¹²⁵ But other members of the Mayor's top staff were opposed to Cuomo on the grounds that he was totally unpredictable. In other words, "his good features are what make him unacceptable to us."¹²⁶ Another informed source believes that one of the factors leading to Cuomo's appointment was that Breslin told Aurelio, incorrectly, that Cuomo had already worked out a solution to the project, one that would have three eighteen story buildings,¹²⁷ and that this reduction, viewed as "only symbolic" was acceptable to Aurelio.¹²⁸ However, how much this incident affected the final judgment, as compared to the other factors surrounding Cuomo's reputation, is unclear.

On May 13 Governor Rockefeller vetoed the anti-Forest Hills legislation.* Although he made it clear that he was less than enthusi-

* A second concern about the legislation was its effect on other public housing projects. Although the retroactive provision could reasonably

astic about scatter-site housing, he noted that local housing authorities had to comply with federal guidelines,^{*} and he also encouraged the Mayor to fulfill his prior indications of a willingness to compromise on the Forest Hills project.¹²⁹

Four days later Mario Cuomo's appointment by John Lindsay "to make independent explorations of possible revisions" in the project was announced. The job was to be non-salaried.^{**} Construction of the project - still the driving of pilings - was to continue during the study, which Cuomo hoped would be completed in six weeks.¹³¹

Reactions to the appointment varied. Golar, publicly opposed to any reduction in the project size (although, as previously mentioned, there is reason to suspect that privately he had already indicated support of trying to convert some of the units to moderate or middle-income use, a very complicated and difficult idea)¹³² phrased his support of the effort in terms of trying to "end the bitterness and division."¹³³ It

* (continued)

be expected to be declared unconstitutional as an ex-post facto law, the real worry of many housing officials was that many other low-income projects in the long housing pipeline would be affected. It was felt that having to resubmit these projects to the Board of Estimate would add at least a year's delay to each one.

* Rockefeller was not the only one to use the rationale of federal requirements. Simeon Golar believed that during the controversy Elliott, Flatow, and others did some harm by creating the impression that scatter-site was Lindsay's idea because it obscured HUD's site requirements.¹³⁰

** Cuomo also turned down reimbursement of his expenses by the city so that he could not be accused of having any financial connection with either side.¹³⁶

split the ranks of the opposition for the first time, with the president of the Queens Jewish Community Council calling it "a step in the right direction" and Jerry Birbach saying in effect that he was willing to meet only with the Mayor.¹³⁴ The editorial comment of the Long Island Press was that the selection of Mario Cuomo was "excellent," calling him "bright, young, articulate and knowledgeable about the area and its problems." It went on:

If anyone can find a way out of the Forest Hills morass, we think Mr. Cuomo can. His integrity is unassailable. He has the respect of city officials and deserves the confidence of the community. He neither owes nor expects any political favors . . .

Now it is up to the opponents of the project - who said all along they only want a compromise - to demonstrate their good faith. The initial reaction from Jerry Birbach . . . is unacceptable. He says he won't work with Mr. Cuomo.¹³⁵

Perhaps more interesting is the fact that the announcement that the Mayor was willing to even consider some kind of compromise came as a surprise to the Housing Authority staff because they thought they had won the battle in that there was starting to be a "whisper of community support."¹³⁷ The future of the immediate neighborhood, however, did not depend on the balance of support for the project. Even if only a minority of people were opposed, if their feelings were sufficiently strong to cause them to react violently against newcomers or to move out of the neighborhood, then it would jeopardize the future not of the project per se, but of the reason for putting it there, which was the existence of a stable middle-class neighborhood.

How seriously one took this threat, whether one considered it a bluff by residents or not, and how one responded to it as a government official, were matters of judgment over which people differed widely. Liberals might tend to minimize popular opposition by questioning who was financing Jerry Birbach's political campaign. Yet, even if it were true that the real estate developers had gotten together an anti-Forest Hills project fund for which Sam Lefrak had been assessed \$10,000, as Simeon Golar said Sam Lefrak told him¹³⁸ - even that, no matter how upsetting that might be to liberals, could not change the reality of people's fear, founded or unfounded. And that fear continued.

Nine days after Mario Cuomo's appointment I and two other M. I. T. planning students attended an evening citizens meeting on the project held in the auditorium of the elementary school across the street from the project. Though all three of us had been at community protest meetings before, this was an eye-opener. A year earlier, a high city official trying to get support for the project from rabbis had expressed shock at hearing them say that they were troubled because the community was upset, and he later commented that "rabbis are supposed to lead, not reflect" community feeling.¹³⁹ Now some were leading, but not the way he had wanted.

One rabbi said the real issue was the right of a government to impose something on a community, and, citing the example of the St. Louis Pruitt-Igoe project being dynamited, called on people to "stand fast . . . There is not a single bigot in this audience tonight. All we

nt is a stable community." Another said the issue was not racial integration, which the "New York Jewish community has matured enough to accept," was not economic integration, which "admittedly some oppose . . . but I don't," but the issue was one "ignored by the politicians: crime, vandalism and deterioration of the community . . . [caused by] multi-problem families."

He continued,

If you want to solve the problems of society, we will help you, but not at our expense. They will be solved by scientific solutions, not by old liberal ideas.

Our greatest problem is our liberal friends, especially in the Jewish community . . .

The time has come when the Jewish people of the city must speak as an ethnic group, and this we were taught by our black neighbors. They have a right to do it and so do we. . . .

For the sake of Israel we must keep alive the greatest Jewish city in the world.

Other speakers spoke even more strongly. The vice-president of the Queens Jewish Community Council said the issue facing the 2 1/2 million Jews of New York was an "historic and great event - the dissolution of the New York City Jewish community, the heart of the American Jewish community . . . The whole world of Jewry is watching you." Another speaker likened John Lindsay to Adolf Hitler. The head of the National Jewish Community Rights organization, Professor Seymour Segal, said that he was involved because "the liberal people in this community were about to have their community destroyed." He said, "We pleaded

with the city 6 months ago to appoint a mediator, but instead Lindsay tried to put group against group . . . and then, . . . after Florida, without asking us, he chose a mediator." Declaring that "whatever the motives, the reasons, or the stupidity [of the city], a compromise is coming," he said he was willing to meet with the mediator, but demanded, as a "show of good faith," an immediate moratorium on construction, a theme repeated by various groups over the next several weeks.

The audience lapped it all up - the comments that the only reason the protest had managed to get as far as it had was because of the city's stupidity, the patently untrue exhortations that "all of New York's Jews are behind you," and the calls for "Let the Mayor come to us, not talk to the press. We're reasonable . . . We will fight for our survival."

Finally, to a standing ovation, Jerry Birbach was introduced. Starting with the statement that "he was only unhappy with one word, 'compromise,'" he launched into a rousing anti-Mario Cuomo, anti-John Lindsay speech. "The problem of the Mayor is that he believes in preferential treatment. He's forgotten the middle class." He then ranged from saying that every civic association from Staten Island to the Bronx is "behind us" [and it was true that there had been joint meetings of the civic associations called in Queens]¹⁴⁰ to pointing out that when the Housing Authority tried to evict a "problem family" they were

stopped by the American Civil Liberties Union. Proclaiming that "liberals are the biggest bigots in God's creation," he went on:

It was wrong for me to get up to lead you people, but we had no elected people who would . . .

We're sincere about finding a true viable solution. But I don't start with 24 stories and come down. I start on the ground and go up. . . At no time will anybody or any group make any deal with any mediator or so-called fact finder without the participation of the community . . .

Now I'll get political, and you'll have your chance on June 20th.¹⁴¹

For the two months following his appointment Cuomo met with hundreds of people as he pursued his investigation. * Calls for a moratorium on construction were rejected by the city. Ideas about various compromises were publicly floated, one being that some of the units should be reserved for Viet-Nam veterans, on the theory that this would be likely to increase security in the project.

Just as the investigation was starting, a semi-related event in late May demonstrated the complicated bind the Housing Authority was in in trying to respond to its many different pressures. A federal judge ruled that the Housing Authority's agreement to give preference to Jews for a new public housing project in a Lower East Side Manhattan urban renewal area because it was near a very old synagogue was illegal in that it meant that persons who had either been relocated from the building site or who had lived in the neighborhood, both of whom were now

* For a detailed account of his study, see the publication of the diary which he kept, Forest Hills Diary: The Crisis of Low-Income Housing, released by Random House in August, 1974.

largely black and Puerto Rican and not Jewish, were losing their priority rights. Months earlier, this situation had been cited to me by a knowledgeable Jewish official as an example of one of the effects of Forest Hills. He said that Simeon Golar, "abused so much that this has taken years off his life," had "overcompromised himself" in order to "show he's nice to Jews" by making "a secret deal with rabbis to have 80% of the Seward Park Extension project Jewish in a Puerto Rican area," a deal that the minority groups found out about and fought. ^{142*}

On June 20, in an election which was perceived by many as a referendum on the Forest Hills project - though this was disputed by some - Jerry Birbach lost the State Senate nomination to incumbent Senator Gold by a vote of 12,851 to 9,848. Lillian Manasseri also lost her challenge to Assemblyman Lisa.

With the Forest Hills project now clearly at a point of major decision about its future, with everyone awaiting the recommendations from Mario Cuomo, I tried to change my perspective of the situation from one where I was doing an academic historical study to mentally putting myself in the position of being back working for the New York City Planning Commission and being faced with making my own decision about the future of the project. ** This meant that whatever I decided

* After the court battles, in which the Authority claimed a right to do what it had done because of the legal requirements for racial integration (a right an Appeals Court agreed with), the issue was quietly and successfully mediated under court supervision after a couple of years, with each side getting some units.

** I should note that not all the material presented in this paper was known to me at the time.

had to not only meet my objectives from a planning viewpoint, but also had to be put in such a way as to have a chance of being implemented by the political process. During the middle of June, while I was in Manchester, New Hampshire, I decided that there should be changes in the project, worked out the details of my compromise proposal, and telephoned several people whom I knew from working in New York for their planning and political reactions to my proposal, reactions which were encouraging. On Saturday, June 24, I met for four and one-half hours with Cuomo in his Brooklyn law office to present it.

Our talk covered a wide range of topics, from the history of the project to the role and powers of planners in a democratic society with a representative form of government. Cuomo's questioning of the way planners had handled the social aspects of scatter-site housing led to a discussion of the history of planning. This included the facts that it had only been a little over half a century since the first American zoning law embodied such a basic concept as the physical separation of residential and manufacturing uses, and that, in comparison to the hundreds of years in which law had been a recognized profession, it had only been about forty years since planning had first become a recognized university graduate degree.

My proposal was that the project should be reduced in number of units rather than trying to change the mix of income levels in the project, and that this should be accomplished not by eliminating one building

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but by reducing the heights of all three. Because the project had become so symbolic and for other reasons, I felt that construction should proceed as fast as possible with no stop for redesign. This meant leaving everything overengineered and simply removing selected floors from the plans in such a way as to adhere as closely as possible to the original percentage distribution of apartment sizes and elderly units. The politically face-saving way that the supporters of the principle of scatter-site housing could accept a reduction in size, I felt, lay in the rationale used to determine how many units were to be built. Therefore, I said that the project should be changed to what had originally been advocated by the city for the scatter-site project, the 509 units for the Corona site.

I proposed that the financing of this reduction should be borne by the city but in such a way that it would force the elected officials in Queens to shoulder some of the budgetary responsibility along with the rhetoric of "community control" that they were espousing and also force them to be more honest with their constituents about the "fiction" of a number of items that were in the capital budget from previous years but which were now never going to be built. This would also be an aspect of the total package that I thought would appeal to the Lindsay administration officials in the Planning Commission and Budget Bureau. I knew that they had previously tried, and failed, to convince the Board of Estimate and City Council to officially eliminate some 60 school projects which had been put in the budget in years past but which because

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of changing population and school enrollment patterns were not going to be built. In essence I wanted an equivalent dollar value of Queens projects that were either never going to be built anyway or which were very low priority projects to be stricken from the budget. This, to me, meant that minority and low-income groups from the rest of the city would not be so easily seen as contributing their tax dollars to pay for potential housing that was now being withdrawn from them. At the same time it left open the possibility for the Queens politicians to reinsert those projects they still wanted and could justify into the following year's capital budget.

Since my proposed unit size reduction was 39.5%, if one assumed that there were no cost savings from smaller buildings in either materials, labor, financing fees, etc. and also assumed that the federal government would not share in the increased per unit costs because HUD was at its legal limit (which, it turned out, it was not), then the potential cost that the city would have to bear was, proportionally, \$11,842,000. (For comparison, the total cost of a typical elementary school was then running about 5 to 6 million dollars.) To the extent that most of these cost assumptions were to some degree obviously not valid, then the cost born by the city would be less. But this could only be determined by Cuomo's working out the details with the Housing Authority and HUD.

I also said that the proposal should be submitted to the Board of Estimate worded in such a way that if the compromise were rejected, then the original project would be built. I felt that the act of going back

to the Board itself was desirable at a time when the responsiveness of government was in question and when people could get away with saying that a project was being built based on the 6 year old approval of a Board whose members were totally different. Going back to the Board would make its present members vote for a scatter-site project, albeit subtly forced. The political accommodations necessary for that act itself would put enough of a seal of political legitimacy and finality to the controversy for a time long enough to get the project built in a less tense atmosphere. The act of going on record with a vote would be sufficient for most of the politicians involved to take it off their speaking agendas. It would also be enough to make the citizen opposition feel that they had been listened to, which, after all, was one of the underlying emotional issues.

I hoped that these results would be reached because of my judgment both of what was needed for the success of that particular project after its future residents moved in and of the kind of atmosphere needed for the city to be able to build any more scatter-site housing in the future. These requirements will be discussed in the chapter on conclusions.

In early July, just after Governor Rockefeller had signed the city supported Corona compromise bill, there was one of those rare occasions that brings out the contrasts and ironies, as well as the very personal and human side, that exist in such conflicts. A celebration party was held by many of the Corona people at Jeantet's, a local restaurant. * Yet absent was an early leader, Lillian Manasseri, who,

* The owner, Marino Jeantet, headed Queens Community Board 3 and was trusted a great deal by Cuomo.

still battling, * had joined a very angry picket line of Forest Hills residents outside the restaurant, a picket line which John Lindsay needed a police escort to get through. While the pickets reviled the Mayor, while Jerry Birbach called Cuomo a "fraud" and termed his appointment a "political ploy" by the Mayor, and while Mrs. Manasseri was injured on the picket line, the Italian women inside smothered the Mayor with kisses and hugs, something which in fact they had not wanted to do before the party but which they had been convinced they had to do for the occasion.¹⁴³ The party also showed how much the Mayor had been changed in his years of tenure in office, for whereas he originally would have simply announced that he was going to attend, this time he telephoned to ask if it would be all right for him to come, at which point an invitation was issued.¹⁴⁴

I might just note, with regard to Birbach's charge of a Mayoral "political ploy" that one of the initial comments I received about my proposed compromise was that "I don't know if it will be politically acceptable. In politics it's dangerous to go backward and not forward . . . Jerry Birbach has lost the election . . . Lindsay has already made his points by asking for a compromise (my emphasis) . . . But go ahead with your idea"¹⁴⁵

On July 7 New York's highest court, the State Court of Appeals, upheld the Appellate Division's approval of the project by a 6 to 1 vote. Judge Charles Breitel wrote

* She pointed out that the city was still sending them monthly rent bills for their own homes and asked what kind of victory that was.

Viewing the issue in a functional frame of reference the change in number and height of buildings is not a material one. Quite different, for one example, would be a change from [a] garden apartment scheme to high-rise vertical elevator buildings . . .

[The approval process] was never contemplated to prevent nonessential changes in the project designs, nor for the community or anyone else to change in essence or stop altogether a project once approved.

The remedy to change this project, if that should be, is no longer in the hands of the local legislative body or the courts, but with the administrative branch of the city, politically responsive to the people of the city and the community within it . . . 146

CHAPTER X - MARIO CUOMO RELEASES HIS COMPROMISE PROPOSAL

With a final favorable court decision now in, and with the project approaching the completion of piling and the start of the above ground phase of construction, which would make any compromise that much more difficult to achieve, Cuomo intensified his work. On July 25, 1972, the report was published, the culmination of an investigation which involved meeting with hundreds of government officials and private citizens, including many volunteer professionals of all types, various community groups, and ordinary citizens. It included research into the legal and moral aspects of scatter-site housing, and attempted as best as possible to briefly review the history of the project, starting with the City's 1966 scatter-site program and the original site in Corona.

He recommended that the project be reduced to about 430 units in 3 twelve story buildings, with the occupants to continue to be all low-income and 40% of the dwelling units to continue to be reserved for the elderly. On the one hand, he pointed to the constitutional requirement that government funds not perpetuate patterns of racial segregation, as expressed in recent court decisions, which made it clear that all federal housing funds for such housing in the city would quite likely be cut off unless significant funds were spent on low-income housing for non-whites in white areas. Acknowledging that approaches other than building low-income projects might be theoretically better - in particular the Section 23 leasing program - he accepted the pragmatic position of the city that such

programs presently consisted of such small numbers of units^{*} that total reliance on them would in fact be "mere tokenism." "(I)t would be nothing but cynicism, or worse, to suggest it as a complete alternative to project housing."¹

On the other hand, whether scatter-site housing was viewed as a legal necessity or as a sociological one, in that one wanted to avoid large concentrations of low-income people irrespective of race,

. . . its effectiveness . . . depends necessarily on the survival of a middle class environment and upon the receptivity, or at least lack of hostility, on the part of the middle-class community . . . [A] change in the character of the community so that it became a racially concentrated low-income area [would mean that] the scatter site project would be self-destructive.²

Describing the degree of fear, hostility, or concern about the project as being almost directly proportional to the distance Forest Hills people lived from the project site - to the point that some parts of Forest Hills had a majority of people either not afraid of, or supportive, of the project he said that the opposition of the "community immediately affected . . . exists in substantial enough degree and in large enough numbers of people so that it might eventually lead to large scale departures.

* In 1972 there were fewer than 4,000 leased units in the city, with most of the ones there were in Queens being in racially concentrated areas.³ The resistance of private owners to lease apartment units in middle-class areas, plus the problem of the costs involved for the Authority in a tight housing market, are illustrated by the fact that although the Authority had leased units in Sam Lefrak's Brooklyn buildings, it had none in his thousands of Queens units as of April, 1972.⁴

I sought to resist this conclusion at the outset of my investigation and regarded the evidence offered me skeptically. But now, . . . I am persuaded . . . the possibility . . . is a real one."^{5*} Whether the reasons for people's fears and complaints were "reasonable" or not, he added, was irrelevant. For, he argued, if that concern

could be allayed by intelligent disputation, that would have occurred already. The Chairman of the Housing Authority has made many persistent and articulate attempts to defend the project in its present dimensions. He has appeared publicly, debated, argued, and caajoled, all to no avail. One must conclude that if the community is not now convinced that a project of 840 units is workable, it never will be.⁶

Cuomo used the Latimer Gardens project in Flushing as his starting point in recommending 432 units in 3 twelve story buildings, saying that he agreed with Simeon Golar that it was an example of how scatter-site housing could work. He rejected various income-mix proposals because of 1) difficulty of getting federal 236 funds; 2) problems in finding private sponsors for a New York State Mitchell-Lama project because of marketing difficulties that would exist for a project with such a "spectacular history"; 3) the widespread fear that whatever income mix was adopted initially would simply revert to all low-income in the future, thereby not being a proposal which would tend to immediately reduce community fear; and 4) his belief that the project was too large, both in terms of number of people involved (for their effect on community services and because it was big enough to create

* Although he did not give the exact data, for fear of further exacerbating the situation, apparently the vacancy rate of nearby apartments was rising.

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a community of its own rather than melding into the surrounding community) as well as in terms of the scale of the buildings. He said that the objections about needed schools and transportation facilities were not "substantially refuted"⁷ and the fact that similar complaints would probably be heard anywhere else in the city that one tried to build a project this large did not make them any less important. Furthermore, as to the assurances that needed services would be developed to meet the need (such as more bus service and the new express subway line, in addition to the Corona high school), Cuomo remarked, "One should not be surprised at the skepticism of a community which is asked to wait for an indeterminate number of years for relief from problems about which they have complained for decades."⁸ He also discussed the suitability, or lack thereof, of high rise buildings for either families or the elderly in low-income projects, commented that the buildings were indeed higher than those immediately next to it, and concluded that " -- it seems to me not a persuasive answer to point to other buildings in the general vicinity which are regarded with equal distaste and repugnance."⁹

The costs of various amounts of reductions in building sizes were estimated by HUD for Cuomo. For the three twelve story building recommendation, they felt that the total development cost could be reduced from \$31.2 million to \$23.8 million through the redesign and reduction in size of such elements as the structural steel, etc. (and any

weight savings also reduced drainage problems). However, per unit costs kept increasing,* so that whereas the original project was \$2 million underneath the federal limits, at 12 stories the project would be \$2.4 million above federal limits, which the city would have to pay as an equity contribution.¹⁰ This amount, he said, should and could be paid from the city's capital budget, since Budget Director Edward Hamilton had indicated to him legal changes by the State in the city's debt limit now made an amount in the range of \$2.5 million to \$3 million fiscally possible.

Legally, Cuomo stated, the Court of Appeals recent decision was not clear as to when a reduction in project size had to be resubmitted to the Board of Estimate. But he recommended that it be done in any case, along with a public hearing, no matter how "painful" that hearing might be, given the passion with which both sides held their views, "since any compromise would depend for its efficacy largely on the receptivity of the community at large." The caveat, though, was that any resubmission be done via a "tandem proposition," which he thought was legally possible, so that "under no circumstances" would it be possible for the Board of Estimate to kill the entire project once it had been placed upon its agenda.¹¹

A number of other recommendations were made. Some dealt with ways of insuring the success of whatever size project was built, such as the city's working with various Jewish organizations to provide

* From \$37,172 to an estimated \$54,990.

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ongoing social services and programs. Others involved suggestions on how to implement better ways for planning and producing more scatter-site low-income housing, both throughout all of Queens and the rest of the city in order to alleviate the tremendous problems faced by the Housing Authority. Among them was an idea advanced by Planning Commissioner Martin Gallent that the site selection process be changed by having the central Planning Commission allocate to each Community Board a certain number of scatter-site units for which that Board then had to find a site(s) for.

Closing his report by noting that he had recommended a reduction in the size of the project because he believed that the loss of units now might make possible many more in the future, whereas to build the whole project might "jeopardize scatter-site housing in this city for many years to come," Mario Cuomo concluded:

It seems to me it is easier to take one of the extreme positions - for or against the entire project exactly as it is. There is a tendency to regard the fiercely articulated, simple, extreme posture as the more courageous one. It has the advantage too, of assuring the concurrence at least of those on one side of the controversy. To me these are easier positions to take because they avoid many of the subtleties and exquisitely balanced conflicts that merge to make this situation the conundrum it is. I have been driven to the middle position not out of a desire to seek shelter, but by the inexorable cross-currents of closely matched competing considerations.

The position I recommend will call for political courage on the part of those who assume it, since criticism and pressure from both sides is inevitable. Hopefully, however, the criticism will be

outweighed by a predominant reasonableness which recognizes and appreciates what was stated by a great man long ago:

'All government - indeed every human benefit and enjoyment, every virtue and every prudent act - is founded on compromise. . . .'

Edmund Burke
Speech on conciliation with America
March 22, 1775¹²

The political maneuvering over whether to accept or reject Cuomo's report started before it was released. In addition, as is unfortunately the case too many times in politics, some people took their position before they even knew what the report was going to say, out of a sense of political loyalties or considerations of images of political power.

The private position of Queens Borough President Donald Manes was that he could not accept Cuomo's report, no matter what it said, "even if it was perfect."¹³ The fact that he himself had advocated a reduction to twelve stories the previous December did not matter. For the longer the conflict dragged on, the less willing the opposition was to accept reductions that it would have welcomed much earlier. By contrast, another important Queens politician, hearing from a contact shortly before the report became public that Cuomo expected trouble with his report, telephoned to offer his support, saying that it didn't matter that he had no idea of what the report was going to recommend should be done.¹⁴

The Mayor's office was provided with a draft of the report in advance and was very unhappy with the size of the proposed reduction. The Mayor's chief of staff, Jay Kriegal, observed that "blacks will be

enormously upset."¹⁵ John Lindsay, caught in a dilemma because his initial reaction was to reject the proposal and because he also felt that he was committed to accept it, was told by Cuomo that that was not the case, that he was only committed to publishing the report as Cuomo wrote it.¹⁶ So the report was released with a noncommittal statement from the Mayor that it "deserves thorough study."¹⁷

Simeon Golar, however, minced no words. He said his reaction was "disappointment followed by a lawyer's respect for an impressive job of advocacy to achieve an outrageous result." He used such words as "manifestly absurd," "a technical and fiscal nightmare," and "not a rational solution," in continuing his description.¹⁸

On the other side, Jerry Birbach called the report "totally unacceptable."¹⁹

As the weeks went by there ensued a complicated series of political maneuverings as Cuomo attempted to get his compromise implemented. In some cases the problem was one of making someone feel important enough to have influence over the decision process while at the same time not ending up with an "unworkable" result.²⁰ In other cases people tried to refute Cuomo's conclusions out of a feeling for the principle of public housing. In still other cases people opposed it out of a feeling for the neighborhood. Thus, one had such situations as Manes going on vacation to Europe and Israel saying that Lindsay should submit Cuomo's plan to the Board of Estimate while he refused to say

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whether or not he would vote for it;^{21*} Golar saying the costs to the city would be millions of dollars more than Cuomo said;²² Cuomo being upset that Golar did not immediately initiate the start of redesign as a precautionary move before a political decision was made and before construction proceeded too far in order that the cost savings HUD had estimated could actually be realized;²³ and a whole host of other compromise proposals being mentioned which different people and groups said they would be willing to accept as positions slowly changed over time. (For example, Golar refused to reduce the size of the buildings but endorsed changing one 24 story building to a middle-income Mitchell-Lama status if low-income units were provided elsewhere, saying that he could accept that because it was consistent with his previously stated belief that only mixed income developments should be built rather than straight public housing. At the other extreme Birbach said he wanted no project but rather wanted the city to subsidize the rents for 840 families to be "scattered" in existing Forest Hills buildings.)

* This was clearly untenable for the administration. Without knowing, at least privately, that Manes, and, by implication, a majority of the rest of the Board would vote for such a proposal, Lindsay could not afford to submit it, nor would it resolve any community protest.

A scenario of Lindsay and Golar submitting a plan to halve the project and then having to continue building the whole project after the Board's rejection would have escalated the community protest and increased political polarization. The opposition, encouraged by the administration's shift and even more outraged by the whole project, would continue pressing for the total cancellation of the project. All except the most liberal members of the Board would defend their votes against the compromise by saying they wanted it still smaller, and the political rhetoric and pressure would increase.

If the administration implemented the Cuomo plan without a Board of Estimate vote, then civil rights groups would clearly have challenged it in court, leading to the likelihood of years of more delay, and the certainty

The Times editorially endorsed Cuomo's proposal a few days after it was released.²⁴ Three weeks later, on August 19, Mayor Lindsay said he was "reluctantly" accepting the report of Mario Cuomo as "the basic guideline," though noting that he "realistically" might have to accept the view advocated by Borough President Manes that there be a mix of income levels. Simeon Golar said that he was "disappointed" by the decision but as an appointee of the Mayor would cooperate by having his agency submit the requested change to the city government,²⁵ a change he said would cost the city \$10 million, not \$3 million.

The approval process then started again with very stormy public hearings all along the way. Community Planning Board 6 in Queens held a hearing on September 12 and decided to continue opposing both the original project and the Cuomo plan as well. The City Planning Commission held its public hearing on September 20. Two weeks later the physical changes recommended by Cuomo were approved by the Commission on a 4 to 2 vote (one seat being vacant). Don Elliott, who for years had said that any change in the project would mean killing it, and the majority said that although the cost was high, both in terms of dollars and lost housing units, "If it can move us from the tactics of confrontation and the excesses of emotionalism and the racial epithets toward a more reasonable and humane society, it will be worth it."²⁶ Of the two dissenters, one was John Zuccotti, later to become Commission Chairman with an avowed purpose of making the Planning Com-

* (continued)

of keeping the matter before the public in the form of speeches and rallies. Neither of these would allow the time and breathing space needed in Forest Hills to allow emotions to calm down before the project opened for occupancy.

mission more responsive to the desires and needs of New York's local communities and neighborhoods. He and Commissioner Ivan Michael said, in answer to Cuomo's quote from Edmund Burke about compromise,

It could also be urged in reviewing the history of the proposal, that a quote from Ralph Waldo Emerson would be at least as equally appropriate: 'All compromise was surrender and invited new demands.'

A reasonable compromise can be the best way for reasonable men who hold different points of view to find common ground and so begin to work together. But, there are unreasonable compromises, too, as Solomon understood. We find the present compromise would be retrogressive and fiscally imprudent . . . ²⁷

The matter was now scheduled for a Board of Estimate hearing. In the final stages of negotiation, Borough President Manes, told he could not have an income-mix within the 12 story building limit because Golar would not accept any further reduction in the number of low-income units,²⁸ then proposed the idea of converting the project to a low-income co-operative.²⁹ Community Board 6 then added the occupancy issue to this, saying it could accept a low-income co-op of 12 story buildings if 65% of the tenants were elderly and 35% were veterans, which Manes then also proposed.³⁰ Birbach countered by proposing a 100% elderly co-op in 3 eight story buildings.³¹

Although almost everyone (HUD, the city, and the community) agreed they were interested in the idea of a co-op, no one had any idea as to how all the legal and financial complexities would eventually work out, with such questions as whether sweat equity would work in modern

high rise buildings, whether the money was available to bring the monthly charges down to the level where elderly poor could afford them, and what the moral and legal situation was with regard to tenant selection by the proposed co-op's Board of Directors.

For these and other reasons, Mario Cuomo and others privately opposed the co-op idea. They believed that the chances for success in working out the details were so low that they were merely opening the door for another conflict one year hence, when Jerry Birbach and others would charge that the city had deceived the local community once again.³² But with the need to solve the present political problem and with the trend toward the idea of home ownership, Lindsay and Golar on October 23, 1972, finally accepted the co-op proposal in principle, and the Housing Authority submitted an amendment to that effect to the Board of Estimate agenda.³³ Golar then successfully blocked Manes' bid to legally mandate a 65% elderly occupancy mix by saying that would require a physical change in the buildings - due to a need to redesign the apartments - beyond that mandated by the Cuomo proposal, and that under the terms of the tandem proposal he would then go back to building the original 24 story buildings.³⁴

On October 26, in a twelve hour hearing that featured a sit-down and was described as "the roughest in my three years"³⁵ by City Council President Sanford Garelick - who, as presiding officer, had "threatened many times to clear the chamber"³⁶ - the Board of Estimate approved the Cuomo compromise with the co-op modification. * The vote was 20 to 2,

* For an excellent account of the hearing, see The New Yorker, November 11, 1972, pp. 169-182.

with Manhattan Borough President Percy Sutton casting the negative vote. The Board also passed a non-binding resolution that it was the "wish" of the Board to have the occupancy be 65% elderly and 35% veterans. Jerry Birbach capped off his campaign by getting himself arrested for disorderly conduct in trying to lead a march down Broadway and got a ride back to City Hall in Donald Manes' limousine.³⁷ Mario Cuomo, who had intended to speak against the co-operative amendment, realized from the tenor of the hearing that there would be "bedlam" if he did so, and at the last minute he decided to remain silent.³⁸

Construction on the revised plan continued. The battle of Forest Hills was over - at least temporarily.

CHAPTER XI- AFTERMATH

Today, in the summer of 1974, more than 1 1/2 years after the Board of Estimate reduced the size of the project, construction continues. The brick skin on the buildings is almost complete, and occupancy is expected to start in late fall or early winter of 1974.

After over a year of uncertainty HUD, in June, 1974, approved the financial and legal restructuring of the project into a cooperative.¹ The delay was said to be due to the fact that this was to be the first large scale public housing cooperative of its type in the country, with a completely different set of income limits (slightly higher) and operating financial system from those of standard public housing, so that it came under close Washington scrutiny.

Tenant selection by the Authority has not yet taken place, but over 10,000 applications have been received specifically for this project. With the higher income limits allowed under the cooperative system, the long application list, and the Authority's stated admission priorities, some civil rights groups have begun to object that a majority of the residents would probably be white and that the minority persons getting in would not be from the central city ghettos.

Organized community opposition virtually ended for about a year, as the Forest Hills Residents Association became inactive and its

president, Jerry Birbach, moved to a more expensive part of Queens. A period of calm and resignation took hold.² However, in late 1973 and early 1974 some of the survivors formed a new organization and began protests again, much smaller than the ones of 71-72. They demanded that no welfare tenants be admitted into the project, that it be 100% elderly, etc. They were rebuffed in their attempts to get sympathetic action from the first Jewish Mayor of New York, Abraham Beame (though it has been reported that he was active in trying to get the co-op approved by the federal government); and what opposition there is is termed as "rumblings"³ that have been largely ignored by the media. Nevertheless, the current head of the Housing Authority expects that there may very well be trouble when occupancy of the project starts, though the Housing Authority did use the respite it had gained to try to open up direct communication with the citizens in the opposition,⁴ but only time will tell how successful that effort will be.

Simeon Golar in 1973 resigned as Chairman of the Authority to be the Liberal Party's candidate for City Council President. His successor is Joseph Christian, who was appointed by John Lindsay to return to the agency where he had been general manager, after a two-year stint at the city's Housing and Development Administration,^{*} and he was reappointed as chairman by incoming Mayor Beame.

* As a deputy commissioner at HDA Christian was directly in charge of the West Side Manhattan Urban Renewal Area. As that project has been marked by years of community discussion and debate over racial and economic class composition, he got plenty of experience in dealing with citizen conflict. In the article "West Side Debate Echoes Forest Hills," the Times reported Christian's observation "that in the last year there has been more discussion with West Side groups than there has been with people from the other 39 renewal sites in the city combined."⁵

During the 1973 political campaign Golar defended his record at the Authority by saying that he had made one pledge, to get public housing built, and the record showed that he had succeeded at that. His Republican-Conservative Party opponent, architect Thomas Galvin, a former chairman of the Board of Standards and Appeals, publicly opposed scatter-site housing. As part of his campaign, Galvin filed suit to stop construction of the Forest Hills project on the grounds that new public bidding for construction was required because the project was not the 1966 one for which bids had been originally solicited. The Forest Hills issue also split the various candidates for mayor, though it caused even those most supportive of continuing the Forest Hills project to be more cautious about future scatter-site housing in general.

Also on the political scene, Mario Cuomo made the dinner circuit rounds exploring the possibility of running for mayor in 1973,⁶ but eventually decided against formally entering the race. In 1974 he did declare for the office of Lieutenant Governor, won the Democratic state convention nomination, but was defeated in a three way primary.

Queens Borough President Donald Manes in 1974 campaigned hard for the gubernatorial nomination, using as his campaign pitch his "proven" executive ability in managing the affairs of a county of two million people. He eventually was forced to withdraw from the Democratic race.

At the national level, in September 1973, the Nixon administration proposed a housing allowance program for low-income families

to replace a program that was oriented toward housing production. HUD Regional Administrator William Green 'said Forest Hills 'absolutely was one reason the program was suggested. ' '7

The new high school in Corona, meanwhile, has moved even farther away from reality than it was in 1972, when all the parties involved had agreed that its construction should be expedited. In 1971-72 the education section of the City Planning Department, with Donald Elliott's active support, spent a year working with Adrian Blumenfeld's successor at the school planning section of the Board of Education, August Gold, to formulate a new policy for smaller schools (see footnote on p. 272). They were finally able to overcome the opposition of the engineers at the Bureau of the Budget (as represented by Assistant Budget Director George Zandalasini) when Don Elliott took the matter up with Budget Director Dave Grossman. ⁸

This new policy for high schools of 2,000 students was later applied to the Corona situation by the Board of Education in 1973. Consequently, with the school board refusing to commit itself to build the 4,000 seat high school but favoring a complete redesign for a smaller school, the City Planning Commission refused to include construction money for the school in the 1974-75 capital budget. It said it would reconsider the matter for the 1975-76 budget. ⁹ Since this total redesign might use a smaller site, none of the Corona houses have been physically demolished or moved to new sites pending resolution of the issue. There is, however, apparently still agreement among city agencies that a total

of 4,000 new seats are needed for the central portion of Queens, so building a 2,000 seat school would also require the initiation of the whole site selection process again for a second school somewhere, creating further delay. However valid the issues might be for the educational planners now, the people of the area only know that there is still more delay in the city government's acting to reduce the heavy overcrowding at the existing high schools.

Finally, in order to respond better to community needs, the Planning Commission instituted a policy for its 1974-75 capital budget deliberations of asking for, and publicly responding to, the top five priority projects which each local Community Board submitted. Queens Board 4 selected as its number 2 priority the acquisition of the semi-vacant Hagen industrial property for playing fields because of a shortage of recreational space in the neighborhood.¹⁰ This was the same land that had been proposed as the athletic field part of the alternative high school site in 1967 but which the Planning Department had felt was a viable future industrial area. The Commission agreed the request had enough merit to warrant consideration for the 1975-76 capital budget.

CHAPTER XII - OBSERVATIONS ON PLANNING PROCESS AND POLICIES

A Summary Statement

The directions of the Forest Hills and Corona conflicts could have been changed at many points. For any individual planner to have influenced events in another direction, he would have had to have both the information and knowledge necessary for a wider perspective and a personal willingness and ability to act. The summary below presents the more important conditions under which a staff with these qualities can be developed or maintained, as they have emerged in this study, and the attitudes conducive to successful effort. A more extended and personalized discussion of the salient points follows the brief summary statement.

1. Planners must learn from history and not think that their case is unique, either to the period of time or geographical location. When similar projects facing similar difficulties can be undertaken in various cities with earlier experience given no consideration by the later planners, it is apparent that something should be changed in the ways planners are educated and kept informed during their working life. This is particularly obvious in the Forest Hills situation, which paralleled that described in a "classic" publication in the planning literature.

2. The negative effects of bureaucracy on widespread information flow, individual initiative, and dissent from official policy

must be countered if a planning agency is to retain sufficient foresight and flexibility to respond creatively to a society that is experiencing more rapid technological and social change than ever before. This requires

- a. Initiative by individual planners in crossing barriers to communication that develop within and between agencies without waiting for direction from above or going through hierarchical channels.
- b. Reducing the tendency for specialists to have knowledge only in their given field. The ability of planners to influence decision-making is justified only by an ability to understand social and physical interrelationships better than other people do, and this depends on their constant awareness of new information and theory gained by other planners and professionals with diverse specializations and backgrounds.
- c. Recognizing that some persons in a planning agency may not be planners and it may, therefore, be inappropriate (or more appropriate, as the case may be) for them to handle certain issues.
- d. A clear policy within the agency that job security will not be penalized by individual disagreement with a consensus.

3. Planners must recognize the limitations of arbitrary standards, just as building codes are slowly being changed from specifications to performance codes.

4. Planners must also recognize that any social changes involving overtones of race relations, ethnic community identification, and economic class hostility can at any time burst into a full-scale conflict, and that media coverage of such events is likely to inflame the situation. Despite the wish of the highly educated white collar professional to believe that such behavior is no longer a part of a modern civilized society, America has a long history of violence related to social and economic movements; and it continues to be a country that is reluctant to put any effective curbs (either legal or by social mores) on the production and distribution of guns, ammunition, knives, or fireworks. The remedy to this should not be an attempt at the artificial manipulation of the media but rather a continuous concern with promotion of communication, to reduce inflammatory rhetoric and rumors so that a matter is not considered "newsworthy" in the usual sense of sensationalism.

5. The escalation of a specific issue into a battle of "principle" between liberals and conservatives may be counterproductive in housing and school integration disputes. The planner must be willing to make the hard social choices between accepting what looks attractive as a short-run victory even though it may lead to long-run defeat, and working for

long-term goals which may look like an immediate defeat. In doing this, he must be willing either to become publicly identified with the recommendation or, if necessary to achieve it, to remain silent and let someone else take the credit.

6. Time itself must be recognized as an important factor in the planning process. Not only is it frequently difficult to predict how larger social values can change and what specific events will arise seemingly from out of "left field" to affect a situation, but it is also certain that over time the likelihood of a political consensus falling apart is increased, and, as participants change and memories become blurred, so is the probability of rhetoric being believed as fact. Thus, in debating various issues of merit, ranging from budget to quality concerns, one must question whether the time lost in debating the issue at hand is more important than immediately resolving the dispute, either by paying the extra funds needed or by giving up on one or another of the technical issues. For there is always an unpredictable aspect to the future and a concomitant risk.

Some specific issues of planning policy, as opposed to those of planning process referred to above, are

7. Programs to continue the aims of a scatter-site housing program, to encourage racial and economic integration, should be continued. But no one program will meet all the different circumstances in various localities, and therefore one should not push for one major type of program at the expense of all others but rather support a variety of programs.

Programs of a rent subsidy nature will be appropriate in some situations, production-oriented programs in others, and fair housing programs for the private market in others. To abandon such programs at the same time that attempts to foster school integration lead to efforts like busing to counteract residential patterns is clearly counterproductive.

8. One should recognize that the issues of siting public housing, schools, and other facilities are at heart a question of land use. In areas of dense urban growth there is a need to build in a way for persons in the future to be able to correct for what inevitably are either mistakes or things not considered at the time of the initial determination of land use, whether by private market forces or public decision. Mechanisms like land banking, public ownership of all land, or ways to make the relocation of persons from occupied land more palatable deserve further investigation.

Introduction

In one form or another I have been living with the Forest Hills and Corona issues for over two years, with my involvement fluctuating from very intense at times to very little while classes were in session. As stated in the introduction, the experience has led to a great deal of introspection about the role of the individual who, as a planner, is personally and professionally liable for fulfilling his "social responsibilities"* and who, at the same time, if employed by the government, must

* As I do not propose to try in this paper to define "social responsibility" I refer the reader to the American Institute of Planners Guidelines for the

exist and survive within a hierarchical and bureaucratic administrative system that ultimately tends to reflect the socio-political goals of the government's elected leadership. For the Forest Hills-Corona situation encompasses in a microcosm the essence of much of the social dilemma facing America today, that is, how government can effect racial and economic integration, both school and residential, at the local community level at the same time that it tries to pursue such other goals as the provision of a decent home for every citizen. These goals must be accomplished within the framework of a democratic political system in which, by definition, government policy must in the long run be responsive to "the people," but a system in which it is now in dispute as to what group of people constitute "the community" to which in a particular situation any level of government is to be responsive.

Obviously, then, there are a tremendous number of topics and issues arising from the long Forest Hills-Corona affair that could be discussed. What follows are observations on some of them which seem of importance to me.

* (Continued)

Social Responsibility of the Planner, which includes responding to the needs of minorities and low-income persons, dealing with the people "affected by the planning process," "appropriate coordination among functional planning . . . (to) assure that activity in one function does not cancel out the social effectiveness of actions in others," etc.¹

Historical Precedents

One of the things that struck me during this study were the many similarities between the Forest Hills-Corona situation and that discussed in the classic study by Martin Meyerson and Edward Banfield about site selection by the Chicago Housing Authority, Politics, Planning, and the Public Interest.² The desire to get a large package of sites approved by a generally unreceptive legislative body; the different perceptions of and criteria about sizes, designs, and images of public housing projects; the escalation of the issue into one of principle and the subsequent political postures which both sides assumed; the widespread opposition by neighborhood Jewish groups to a couple of sites in Jewish areas, along with the rise of the suspicion that Jewish areas were chosen because Jews were known to be liberal, and the just as widespread support of the projects by city-wide Jewish organizations; the effect of the position which the press took on public housing: all had comparable features in Forest Hills. Coincidentally, the book discussed in some detail the parallels and differences between the planning and political process for public housing in Chicago and New York City.³

So, not only do we have this well-known study of a public housing battle fought over the principle that public housing should be sited for integration purposes on vacant land in developing areas, but it was written long enough ago that we also have the ability to see the long range results of the conflict. The proponents of public housing had claimed that they had won a victory in Chicago, but in fact in the long run they

lost. The very fact that there had been a long and politically costly struggle meant that almost no one, especially the politicians, wanted to go through another. Thus, scatter-site public housing actually died in Chicago, as is evident from the early 1970's Gatreux court case. The political resistance to such a program by then had grown so great that the city was even willing to forfeit public housing in the ghettos rather than approve such housing for white suburban areas.

Thus, one of the lessons to be gained from this Forest Hills study is what would seem to be obvious, that planners or other government officials should not act as if each situation is unique, but should make an effort to inquire if there were similar programs attempted in the past by other cities from which they could gain useful information. Furthermore, a planner cannot assume that an official of a specialized agency, say for housing, is aware of the information in the field which a planner might consider to be common knowledge. Even more important, persons in the planning agency may also be unaware of relevant studies because they are not specialists in the particular subject or even may not be trained as a professional planner. For example, two people of the Housing Authority, who had been involved with scatter-site housing and with whom I happened to raise the question, had never heard of the Meyerson and Banfield Chicago study.⁴ In another case, a staff planner in the Queens city planning office, who had responsibility for the Forest Hills and Corona areas during 1970-71, had come into the Planning Department several years earlier with a background of two

years as a social worker and an undergraduate major in French. He stated to me that he did not consider himself a planner and was proud of the fact that he did not have an academic planning degree.⁵ In addition, people like Planning Commission Chairman Donald Elliott, the then executive director of the Planning Department, Edward Robin, and Housing Authority head Simeon Golar, were trained as lawyers, not planners. In other words, at the two opposite ends, both the policy-makers at the top of the planning agency and the person in the field who is supposed to give early warning that problems are developing in the implementation of plans, were making decisions based on their personal opinions as derived from their own prior experiences and personal philosophy rather than on anything that could be termed a "professional" planner's judgment.

Institutions and Planners

People who are professional planners must also deal with the institutional structure within which they are working (see pp. 154-156, 161 and 167). That function of planning which involves the coordination and overall monitoring of the implementation by other agencies of previously approved plans requires the planner to counter the negative effects of other bureaucracies while he himself is part of a bureaucracy. This needs particularly independent and sensitive people if it is going to be successfully achieved, and the more the Planning Department becomes a traditional bureaucracy, the more that kind of innovative person is discouraged from remaining in it. As that bureaucratization proceeds, the

effectiveness of the planning agency itself will go down. For the ability to see in advance when things are going wrong, for social or other reasons, and then to do something about it, requires someone who is willing personally to be identified as having an unconventional viewpoint and who is willing to try tenaciously to convince others of what he believes. He must simultaneously be able to accept defeat at times, while also being self-confident about his own abilities so that he does not let concern about job security deter him from what he thinks is right.⁶

I say this because Forest Hills and Corona provide examples of two contradictory types of difficulties which planners can get into. During Donald Elliott's tenure as head of the Planning Department, the agency more than doubled in size, reaching a level of about 400 employees. As a part of this expansion, offices for each borough were created, and in 1969 these offices were moved from the main Manhattan office to locations in each respective borough.

Obviously the function of these offices was to bring the work of the Commission and Department closer to the neighborhoods of the city. At the same time, they created many problems. There were jurisdictional difficulties, both in terms of power to influence decisions and in terms of taking responsibility for a given issue. The physical separation of offices restricted the flow of information, both about policy matters and New York affairs and also about what was happening in the field of planning in general. The department's library in the main office, for example, became less accessible to people in the field, and notices of occasional department lectures on current planning issues were deliberately not sent to borough

offices, with the rationale that the room couldn't hold the whole department so the borough offices were skipped rather than attendance being on a first come-first in basis for the entire agency.⁷ The logistical difficulties imposed by physical considerations were exacerbated by employee turnover and expansion, which meant that lines of communication and trust between staff became attenuated, as well as making it more difficult for the lower staff to know what policy was in anything other than the specific project or specialty in which they were involved. This was especially true in the many cases that general policies were not spelled out precisely, but rather were merely the accumulation of individual decisions on the assorted issues that came before the Department and the Commission.

In the Corona case the then head of the City Planning Department's Queens office in 1970 in fact did feel the school site was inappropriate and tried to convince Chairman Don Elliott of that. He failed, not because of a lack of a physical plan, for one similar to the ultimate Corona compromise had been worked out in cooperation with one of the technical staff at the main office of the Planning Department, but rather, in his words, because he could not overcome Elliott's belief that "once a decision is made you have to stick by it and if you change your mind in the city you'll live to regret it."⁸ This Queens office director, who has planning and architectural degrees, said he disagreed with Elliott on this. He believed, he subsequently said, that "recalcitrance to change from an earlier decision is more a cause of later setbacks than the fact that the city did change. If they had moved quickly to change a bad decision that would have ended it."⁹

Some directors and other staff in the Planning Department at times made known to the Planning Commission, either at executive session or privately, * their disagreement with any position advocated by the Chairman. However, the Queens director's perception of his role was that the Chairman was his boss and that he "would not have gone behind the Chairman's back and tried to play hero."¹⁰ He believed he had to either support the Chairman's position or leave the agency, and he did not see the other six members of the Planning Commission as an appropriate, or legitimate, body in which to make known his dissent. For he further rationalized his position in this particular instance by pointing out that the Commission did not technically have the City Charter responsibility for school site selection, whereas the Chairman did, in his role as director of the Planning Department. To the argument that this was a technicality, since a refusal by the Planning Commission to approve the street closings would void the entire site, he responded that if the Commissioners had wanted to, they could have pursued that issue, but they did not. Furthermore, as he added, the Commission, with its part-time Commissioners, was hard pressed to keep up with its heavy load already, "without adding site selection to it."¹¹

* On much rarer occasions a few planners had either testified at the public hearings of the Planning Commission and the Board of Estimate against administration positions or had helped citizen groups in opposing something. This, of course, had to be done very carefully if those people were not to lose their influence with higher officials in the Department, let alone their jobs.

Ironically, Commission members agreed with that view of their work load, and for that reason they were forced to rely on the staff to point out where there were legitimate alternatives in a given issue.¹² Since the staff did not in this case, they had no reason to dispute the Chairman's version of the situation, so there was no serious effort by the Commissioners to override the Chairman. Further illustrating the discrepancy between philosophy and practice in this regard, when I pointed out to the Queens director this practical reliance by the Commission on department staff, it was his opinion that the Commissioners could "confront the problem of no staff by confronting the Chairman," especially since he felt that the position of Commission Chairman "was supposed to be a bridge between the Commission (and staff), not a buffer."¹³ But he did not, obviously, see this view of the way the situation should be as a reason to change his mode of operation. In fact, whether he was aware of it or not I do not know, but the Commissioners had repeatedly requested that a staff person be assigned directly to them. This had never been acted on by Elliott, and the Commissioners did not have sufficient cohesion or willingness to trade their votes among themselves to band together to block any administration proposal in return for a staff person - the kind of political horsetrading that the Borough Presidents had learned to use in the Board of Estimate.

Thus, the solution in Corona arrived at in 1970-71 was one which this planner and others in the Planning Department had supported and had indeed thought of earlier, but in the end, people outside of government, such as Mario Cuomo, Jimmy Breslin, et alia, had more to do with

originating it than persons in the government. Rather than planners in the Department having been able to convince the Chairman of the Planning Commission, change was forced upon him by the Mayor's office.

Corona thus was a case in which the local planning office, which had been created for the purpose of better dealing with neighborhood matters, withdrew from direct participation with either the citizens or the other governmental agencies because it had been overruled by the head of the Planning Commission, who was handling the matter personally. The Forest Hills housing project was different, insofar as this section of the Planning Department was concerned. Here, according to the head of the Queens planning office, although "the process by which it [the site] was originally selected, the precise number of units, etc. , I might have changed, I agreed with the housing project [being there]." ¹⁴ In other words, he viewed it as a matter of principle - a viewpoint which, as I think I have made clear, I believe was wrong in this case, but about which there can certainly be a reasonable difference of opinion. However, one would have then thought, with the Queens office and the Chairman in agreement, that the Queens office would have made a major effort to deal with the community problems that arose in connection with the project. This was not the case, for a variety of reasons, not least of which was the opinion of its director that "the decision, once made, became a political decision, and it would have meant little for us to intervene." ¹⁵ This is yet another of the many ironies, for many people both in the public and in the other agencies of the city

viewed the Planning Department as "political,"¹⁶ and therefore did not trust it or like its interference in their affairs. But, the question remains, if the planners will not get involved with social issues when they become politically very hot, then who will provide the staff expertise to help guide the politician?

Throughout this paper I have pointed out the great strength of institutional arrangements in establishing a direction and momentum of decisions which the individual planner or, indeed, politicians and elected officials, can rarely change, especially since each change they see themselves as possibly making seems to require simultaneous changes by other persons, changes which they view as so unlikely as to be not worth the effort to try. Yet it is also clear from the very fact that compromises were brought about in both Corona and Forest Hills that these forces are not all-powerful. These constraints can be broken by the community if enough people are sufficiently aroused to seem a political threat, as was the case in these two projects. Or, possibly not broken but certainly bent, by the determined action of individuals who are part of the bureaucracy itself.

Standards and Information Flow

Yet another lesson planners should draw from this experience is that one should not apply arbitrary standards but must be flexible, as I think is shown by the original school site selection dispute in 1966. Before such flexibility can be implemented, particularly in such a large city

as New York, changes would have to be made to overcome what I shall call the "frictions" of government in communication of information and knowledge. Some of these, as they relate to the Planning Department, have been mentioned on page 344. But there are others, and with the long time needed to implement any project in New York, they involve not only the lateral set of circumstances at one time but the longitudinal history of what was done, why, and by whom.

With turnover of people inevitable over the time-spans involved and with so many parts of the governmental system that must approve some aspect of any development along the way, the ability easily to trace the history of a development becomes crucial at the time many years later when an issue suddenly becomes important enough to reach the attention of top government officials. For at that stage the official wants to be given a summary of the situation, usually in a rush. Furthermore, that kind of detailed information is crucial to the bureaucracy's ability to function with non-rigid standards, for rules and rigid standards were created to facilitate the processing by a large organization* of a constant flow of paper, as well as to reduce the suspicion of corruption which can arise on any government project.

The nature of the system in New York City, however, frequently makes it impossible to obtain an accurate version of a history, even if one is willing to go to great efforts. In the first place, it seems that the

* New York City government is the largest American governmental organization outside of the federal government, with 340,000 employees.

higher the level of the official making a decision, the less likely the reasons for that decision are written down and placed in a file. Furthermore, the person who at some point replaces the first official and then deals with the situation in his turn is unlikely to have the same set of unspoken criteria as those under which a project was approved. By then, other elements may also be changed. This was the case, for instance, when in 1966 an official in the Lindsay administration accepted the principle of moving the public housing site from Corona to Forest Hills, but only with a complex set of conditions, never written down: that a slight increase in the number of units might be required for political reasons, and that a personal quid pro quo had been made with a high Housing Authority official in return for the site's "being forced down the Authority's throat"; and that a city capital budget amendment would be gotten to provide a subsidy if subsoil conditions at the site caused serious enough foundation problems to jeopardize the concept of keeping the public housing buildings "low."¹⁷ But this administration official's responsibilities were changed before the details of the project were approved by the Board of Estimate in December, 1966,¹⁸ and, under the direction of another official, the number of units went up significantly, and the capital budget amendment never was implemented.

A second area of friction lies in the public hearings, which take on a more important role in communication along with the growing emphasis on community participation. As citizen groups have proliferated and the planning process has been decentralized, both administratively

in the Planning Department and through the formation of community boards which also hold their own public hearings, the sheer number of people involved in talking about an item has increased geometrically, and so has the potential for misinterpretation and different versions of past events, particularly since personnel in each group changes over the years. But the city's system of communicating what took place at a public hearing has not changed. The published summaries of the hearings are little more than a scorecard, listing the number of people for or against an item and its final disposition.* This procedure is hardly conducive to promoting rational discussion, which might be encouraged if people knew that the content of the debate, in the form of transcripts, would be open to all parties to refer to and use as the basis for subsequent discussion of the matter, as is the case with federal public hearings. Stenotype notes of hearings are made, but they are not transcribed unless either a government official wants them or a member of the public, including the press, is willing to pay one dollar per page. Furthermore, it may take weeks to receive the transcript after it is requested, too late to influence a decision. Compounding the difficulty,

* The official published records of Board of Estimate hearings are in bound volumes at the Municipal Library. Dating back for about one hundred years, they give the technical disposition of items but are not a help in understanding why decisions were made or a helpful part of the process on a real time basis for decision makers.

For example, the published version of the October, 1966, Board of Estimate meeting at which the agreement was announced to put the high school in Corona and the public housing in Corona gives no inkling of that at all. Technically, the item at hand, a public housing site in Corona, was simply held over for discussion at a later date, and that is what the official record indicates.

each request for the same item is considered an original request, requiring fresh typing -- Xeroxing is not permitted -- and reimposition of the one dollar per page charge.¹⁹ Moreover, since one usually cannot know whether significant information was presented in the public hearing so as to make it worth the cost and effort to get a transcript, the normal inclination is to skip the whole thing.

One of the consequences of the difficulty of obtaining a transcript is an increased reliance on newspaper and other media accounts of what happened at public hearings. This can be disastrous, given all the problems of the quality of the reporter, the need to make deadlines, etc. Even with competent reports, it becomes more difficult to check the accuracy of subsequent statements of what happened in respect to specific actions, since a newspaper cannot include everything. For example, in 1971, New York's public television station was trying to determine the truth of charges by a councilman that the Board of Estimate had broken a promise made by the Queens Borough President to continue its December, 1966, consideration of the Forest Hills housing project on Monday because many of the orthodox Jews had to leave the late Friday night hearing to observe their Sabbath. But the station could not afford the estimated \$300.00 to have a transcript of the public hearing typed.²⁰ No complete transcript has ever been made of that hearing, in which the project was approved after 11:00 P. M. *

* I later found out that a private citizen had made a tape recording of the meeting, which proved helpful years later to a staff person of the Housing Authority, but its existence has otherwise remained unknown.²¹

In the last few years the 31 community school districts and 62 community planning district boards have assumed much more important positions of responsibility, with all holding public hearings and negotiations with the city operating agencies, the City Planning Commission, and elected politicians. New York City, however, has not made any institutional changes in its method of keeping track of what transpires at all these public meetings, let alone at the private executive sessions of the Planning Commission and Board of Estimate. With the long lead times necessary before any development is completed in New York City; the certainty of turnover in the composition of all the boards, civic groups, and paid staffs that are involved in these talks; and the inevitable misunderstandings and rumors that must occur when so many people are involved in anything, especially when no one individual can personally know all the people involved in a matter and with the reliance on verbal communication, I predict that in a few years there will be a proliferation of community-government disputes over just what was or was not agreed to in prior negotiations.

The institutional and informational changes discussed earlier in this chapter could also have a serious impact on the level of performance of the staff in the New York City Planning Department. With the borough offices of the Planning Department generally assigning a different person to cover each community board, and with the phenomenon that at any meeting that representative is "the government" insofar as those people are concerned, it becomes all the more important for

those planners to have a general knowledge of the functional city-wide policies and programs that could have a bearing on any specific matter within their area of geographic responsibility. For a broader perspective enables the planner to put a specific planned facility or zoning change into a different context - one which helps him in his formulation of ideas for his specific field of responsibility that are consistent with the higher level policies, in his understanding of the purposes of a particular project whose genesis was prior to the time when he became responsible for it, and in his ability to explain these to the community groups involved.

A good description of the scatter-site housing program and a map (see Appendix III) of the various sites in the city planned for it and the vest pocket program in Model Cities areas was contained in the December, 1968, report by the Community Renewal Program arm of the City Planning Department, Between Promise and Performance . . . A Proposed 10-Year Program of Community Renewal for New York City. But this report did not, as far as I can tell, become a working document in the Planning Department. It can only be a matter of speculation whether the reactions of the members of the staff would have been different if they had been familiar with it in those cases in the late sixties and early seventies when the Forest Hills project came up in isolated instances, such as in 1969 when Board 6 Chairman DeVoy called the Queens office of the Planning Department. The Queens office did not have a copy of the report for general staff use; I never saw a copy of it during the two

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years I worked in the Staten Island office; nor, indeed, did I ever hear of the term "scatter-site housing" during the two years I was in the Staten Island Office of the City Planning Department, despite the fact that one of the few 1966-67 public housing scatter-site projects to be finished was under construction on the Island at the time.

Part of the problem appears to be that when new staff are hired there is no attempt to provide a structured education in what the overall policies of the Planning Department have been by having them read and discuss the general policy documents the agency has produced. This failure encourages the continuation of the feeling by so many in the governmental bureaucracy that they do not have a personal responsibility for the implementation of overall policy in their daily work. This problem continues to manifest itself in various ways among career employees of the agency as well. And whatever else may be said, if staff is not aware of the policies which the agency and the city have previously publicly advanced, then the reality of the sum total of many small decisions - individual zoning changes, site selections, etc. - do not in fact reflect what is supposed to be an overall policy.

In contrast to the lack of use of Between Promise and Performance, the Plan for New York City has received a great deal of day-to-day use, not its main volume of Critical Issues, which was the one that got the attention of the press and the American Institute of Planners, but rather its five volumes on the boroughs. They provided people for the first time with vital basic information about each community district, such as a

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large-scale map that showed the block by block location of all public facilities in an area, which could be compared to an aerial photo and zoning maps at the same scale. It is this kind of hard information which has been used by staff people in improving the making of day-to-day decisions, helped in no small measure by its wide and free distribution and the fact that it was physically produced in such a way that it could be rolled up and torn apart for easy use in the field. At the same time I suspect that most persons in the City Planning Department have not thoroughly read the Critical Issues volume (let alone the borough volumes) despite the insight it could provide on historical trends and planning policy because it did not seem helpful to them in the solution of the immediate problems on which they were working.

In complete disregard for the power which information can be for decision-making, the formulation of new ideas, and the application of ideas and programs which others have used elsewhere, the City Planning Department's library was eliminated in the last two years. Its extensive planning reference material has been scattered in a random fashion, and the accumulation of current urban literature and journals, which the library institutionalized for the use of staff in a convenient manner, has now been left to the resources and initiative of each individual employee, a situation which obviously hinders information dissemination. That the Planning Department for a city of 8 million people no longer maintains a library is a situation which I think is incredible and should be rectified immediately. The consequences of

the failure to do so will not be evident immediately but it will show in the long-range quality of work which the agency produces.

Another problem of communication, one specific to housing in New York, is that over time the meanings of the words "scatter-site" and "vest-pocket" have become hopelessly confused, both among professionals and the public, just as it is meaningless today to try to distinguish between urban "renewal" and urban "redevelopment."²² Whether they imply a "small" development (whatever "small" means to both the listener and speaker), or a kind of neighborhood, or buildings of a height and scale consistent with those next to the development has become very garbled.* Because of their symbolic context, however, despite this confusion, their use influenced decisions pro or con, as individuals and the New York Times editorial writers took positions that were based on a perception of what "true scatter-site" meant, and whether or not the Forest Hills project really was one. Moreover, since people in ordinary conversation use a few words of description in discussing a concept, rather than spelling out the details of building plans, the use of such catch-terms introduces another possibility for conflict. For if words don't mean the same thing to all people, it is very easy for someone to jump to the conclusion that he was deliberately misled, and once one starts suspecting motives, the problems of planner-community interaction just multiply.

* For example, New York State Housing Commissioner Charles Urstadt wrote a letter to the Times in December, 1971, saying that the term vest-pocket only referred to the size of the lot and did not imply any particular building height.²³ On the other hand Simeon Golar said that the Lindsay administration people's confusion of Forest Hills as a vest pocket project rather than a scatter-site project made it seem that the project was too large and its buildings too high.²⁴

Issues, the Compromise, and Liberals

I would like to conclude by discussing the liberal attitude on a number of issues, their opinion of those opposing the public housing project, their opposition to any compromise, and the reasons for my personal belief that a compromise was essential.

The escalation of the Forest Hills issue into one of principle meant that specifics could no longer be discussed in calm terms and that the grounds for conflict increased on both sides. It made the question of whether the reasons for specific objections to the public housing project had "merit" really superfluous.

Perhaps the point to start with is the observation that exactly the same question concerning public housing in general or the Forest Hills site in particular could be raised by two different people, and the reaction would differ based on the assumed motives of the speaker. The issue of welfare recipients in public housing, which was closely identified with the issue of violent crime, is an excellent example. When raised by people in the area of the proposed public housing, it was viewed by some liberal supporters of public housing as an expression of racism rather than as a legitimate issue. But the same reservations concerning welfare tenants in public housing were publicly voiced in early 1971 by both the city Housing and Development Administrator (and former Housing Authority Chairman), Albert Walsh, and by Housing Authority Chairman Simeon Golar. Walsh, in January, "warn(ed) that unless extensive social

services are made part of public housing, (it) will decline to the level of 'welfare hotels, ' ' and he said that "40% of those admitted to public housing projects in '70 were on welfare."*25 In February the Times had a lengthy interview with Simeon Golar, who

. . . said he was worried that the wholesale admission of families on welfare into public housing would create 'social problems' in some cases, but he argued that past practices of screening families for 'social criteria' had led to housing projects that were 'lily white.'

About half of those admitted into public housing today are on welfare, Mr. Golar said, whereas the current population of welfare families is 30 percent. 26

Of course, neither of these two people was seen by either the liberal or black communities as raising these issues out of an objection to the principle of more and better housing for low-income people (who might or might not be black), because each had a visible record already which made it possible for them to be categorized as friends. But most people have not been visibly involved in an effort for public housing. When someone cannot be identified as having been for something in the past, his raising of an objection to a project when it affects him can readily be viewed as an obstructionist tactic. Once this started, it was fairly easy for the construction of the project to be seen as a principled

* The welfare issue also led people like Congressmen Koch and Badillo to debate how many people in public housing were welfare recipients. This dispute over facts, augmented by a controversial assertion by the Authority that "crime" was lower in public housing than in surrounding neighborhoods, made intelligent discussion of cause and effect relationships that much more difficult. See Appendix II for data on population trends in New York City public housing.

issue, in which a person was either on one side or the other, with people who wanted to be identified as "liberal" or "pro public housers" being those who favored no change at all in the original project. This solidification of positions, in turn, made it that much easier for more people to take a stand on the issue without knowing the details or the history of the project, but on the basis of the company of persons with whom they wanted to be associated. And the stronger statements one issued, the more commitment one was deemed to have.

In the long run this was self-defeating. For, as Jerry Birbach acknowledged in a radio interview in 1974 in answering the question of what was the key to "mobilizing the middle-class," it was that you "have to put the emphasis on headlines and the media. I might have been the catalyst, but without the headlines I couldn't have done it."²⁷ He further acknowledged that the charges of his being a racist were helpful "because it meant they were focusing on Forest Hills. If not (for that), maybe it wouldn't have made headlines."²⁸

A whole series of other issues arose in connection with the Forest Hills issue. I would like to briefly discuss two of them, community control and the stability of the neighborhood.

Community control, as Walter Goodman wrote at the height of the controversy,

. . . was a highly selective principle, useful mainly for baiting the white Establishment. No one ever really meant that communities should be put in the control of the anti-busing housewives of Pontiac, Michigan, or the Ku Kluxers of Birmingham, Alabama, or the burghers of Queens. Yet, in all fairness, are

not these citizens entitled to take to the streets with their fears, their rages, their greed? Thus argued the residents of Lindenwood, another white middle-class section of Queens . . .

What community control would mean in general practice is that little low-cost housing would be built anywhere, outside of Indian reservations. This rule would also cover hospitals and other institutions that everyone considers desirable but nobody wants next door . . . The 19th-century New England town hall still holds its charm . . . but the idea that our century's cities can be operated in bits and pieces is an invitation to immediate chaos and eventual stagnation. If the Forest Hills experience only puts the quietus on propaganda for community control, it will not have been a dead loss.²⁹

The reference here was to the argument of community control of schools and other institutions advanced by blacks in the late 1960's, especially in the New York City school decentralization debates. I agree with the thrust of Goodman's reasoning, but I think it important not to overreact to the concept of community control with the Forest Hills example. Rather it should be used to clarify the distinction between those types of large-scale decisions that must remain with a higher level of government and those decisions that are in many ways just as important as the larger decision, but which are at a different scale of values and can be carried out within the framework of the larger decision. Community control of schools in New York, for example, never meant that the local community had the ability to decide to spend money for the construction of a new school, which was the type of decision with long-range impact that, once implemented, could not be reversed. The decision as to which community school districts in the city got new schools remained a decision of the central planning agency, whereas the local

district had control of more day-to-day decisions, such as hiring, within overall guidelines, such as the rule that hiring could not be discriminatory.

The same type of process can be constructed for the housing of low-income households in middle-income areas, if that is the policy which the central government feels it wants. City Planning Commissioner Martin Gallent suggested one possible process - having the Planning Commission allocate a certain number of units to each Community Board, which would then have to select sites.³⁰ But there are many other variants possible to take in a wider range of circumstances, and these could include the choice of type of housing - new, rehabilitation, leased units, cooperative or rental, etc. - as an input into the city-wide housing plan to be submitted to HUD for federal funds. Other options include discussion on architectural design. (A case in Cambridge comes to mind in which the local citizens committee insisted on wood frame buildings with basements as essential for a subsidized development even at the expense of smaller bedroom sizes. The ultimate residents now agree that those features are part of what make the development so successful.) Clearly, however, this type of community input is not by any means a cure-all for all situations. With such possible problems as a community's refusing to cooperate at all on the implementation of its unit allocation, there can be no substitute for good judgment on the part of higher level governmental officials on when to step in to overrule a local group.

Another issue to consider is just what does lead to instability in a Jewish or other ethnic community. Most people considered Forest Hills a stable community, and therefore, readily able to absorb the housing project. Yet it suffered from physical problems of transportation congestion and increasingly dense development, and had an aging population (see Table 10), a combination which can mark the beginning of downgrading in a neighborhood. Nathan Glazer argued that the primary reason for the migration of people from the older sections of the city to the newer Jewish areas was a search for safety rather than a fear of minorities,³¹ but it was also a search for an improved physical environment and higher status. One could at least question whether Forest Hills was not in its turn becoming somewhere to move from, to places like suburban Suffolk county, whether or not the housing project was built.³²

As a person who considered himself a liberal in support of integrated housing and scatter-site public housing, I found the "principled" viewpoint appealing, as it was expressed by Donald Elliott in late 1971 in an official letter to the HUD area office and again in December, 1971, in the State Senate Committee public hearings. In essence he stated that the tests to be met for scatter-site housing were that a site be on vacant land, that community facilities be adequate (by New York City standards), that it be in a stable middle-income non-minority neighborhood, and that the project meet federal cost limits. Once these tests were met, he argued, the principle of "open housing" had to be upheld in siting public

housing in the city, just as suburban large lot zoning was being attacked as exclusionary. This required that once the site was legally approved, we must build public housing on it "or abandon the ideal we say we pursue."³³ He then jumped from the ideal to the specific by saying that any change in the project would mean killing it, and that one should support the project as planned. His reasoning was expressed in an earlier letter: "Our analysis of the opposition to this project shows that there are virtually no substantive issues. Our concern is rather that . . . (the city approved the project in 1966 and that) since then, for nearly five years this project has been delayed while largely irrelevant issues have been raised in an attempt to block this project, which will provide housing for those families and older citizens who need it most."³⁴

That all sounds very good, especially to those who did not know the project's history and would accept the implication that obstreperous citizens, rather than governmental problems, had held up the project for five years. But I grew up in a family in which the construction of integrated housing in the all-white housing market was an item of daily personal concern, and I have learned that nothing is simple about racially integrated housing, let alone economic integration. I had no personal problem in maintaining my sense of identification with the causes of open housing and housing production and at the same time, when I had seriously gotten into the study, being critical of the Forest Hills project and the situation that had developed. I did not, and do not, share Roger Starr's discomfort with the concept of scatter-site housing and the economic integration of neighborhoods,³⁵ nor do I accept the premise of his state-

ment that "If, by definition, scatter-site housing cannot be numerically significant, its significance must be symbolic: it must demonstrate that higher-income families stand ready spontaneously to embrace these newcomers, or that city officials will force their acceptance."³⁶

I do share Simeon Golar's concern for the reality of the situation he faced, so that even though one might feel that such approaches as mixed income developments should be built instead of straight public housing,³⁷ one had to work as a local official with the tools one had until the federal policies and funding had changed. But unlike Simeon Golar, who asked rhetorically during the Forest Hills controversy, "When does the consultation process come to a halt? When can we rely on commitments once made?"³⁸ I think in the complicated field of integrated housing one must keep changing to adapt successfully to the social situation at hand. Consultation itself never ends in any field, for there are always problems to resolve. What changes are the nature of the problems and the scale of the issues discussed.

It is true that the ability of a society, through its government, to resolve problems depends upon its citizens' belief that the commitments it makes at any point in time will in fact be carried out. Frequently the resolution of a current issue is hindered by the refusal of people to believe that a particular detail of a proposed agreement will be carried out (such as whether the government actually would build expensive park decking over a proposed new West Side Highway on the Manhattan shoreline). But government commitments are a two-way responsibility. Until the government actually carries out a commitment, there is always the possi-

bility that it can and should be changed to meet changing conditions, just as urban renewal plans are constantly being revised during their implementation, or as a commitment to build popular facilities like new schools are sometimes cancelled for lack of funds, or changing population trends, years after the original agreement. The question in a case like Forest Hills is not whether nothing can be changed, but rather how to distinguish between the principle of the original commitment, which should be adhered to, and the details within it that can be changed. That is a matter of political judgment on the part of an administrator, and it is a crucial decision.

A fact that became all too clear to me, both in my experiences as a planner and in my exposure to the problems my father faced in his efforts to bring about open housing, is that while the details of an individual project are critical in one sense because they may drastically affect the lives of those who will use it in the future, they are at the same time only marginal if one wants the same type of thing to be repeated over and over again throughout society, but such repetition does not occur. For it will be repeated again only if it is considered a success, and success in racially or economically integrated housing is measured by what happens over the long run to the occupants. There is nothing more successful than a project that no one has ever heard of except for experts in the field of housing and race relations because there has been no controversy over it.

The hard fact is that the overall social objective of integrated housing is to have diverse people live together, and living together is the antithesis of emotional conflict. From a liberal viewpoint, there has never been a substantive reason for any of the emotional problems that have had to be overcome in the field of human rights: why people would throw bricks at the house of the first black family to move into a neighborhood, why blockbusting is a problem, why there is a fear of people of different income levels living together. But these problems do exist, and they are not resolved by talking of the adequacy of schools and community facilities in terms of numbers, but by a process of dealing with people to show them by experience over time that their fears are unfounded and in trying to deal with problems when they are justified. And this depends on people's perceptions and images. As Simeon Golar put it so well, "Images are reality in human affairs, and the serious thing now is the image of public housing."³⁹ But he was both dead right and dead wrong when he said, "The wellsprings of human motivation are complex and obscure and are probably meaningless to the process anyway."⁴⁰ They are critical to the process if one is going to be successful.

Obviously, at times it is difficult to decide what the just thing to do is, and sometimes one has to make a public battle. But one also has to keep the overall objective in mind and not just assume that the glory of the "good battle" will lead to winning the war. In the case of Forest Hills it became clear to me that throughout its entire history, its development was littered with problems, many of which arose from misunderstanding or confusion between rhetoric and deed. For example, in

contradiction to the assumption held by Sylvia Chaplain and me when we began this study that no effort was made to "bribe" the community with additional facilities in return for acceptance of public housing, plans were changed for this purpose. This effort, however, failed because communication was so poor that the community did not perceive that it was getting anything that it would not otherwise have obtained. The confusion about the "switch" of the high school site has already been discussed. This shift, combined with the use of strict boundary lines to define the "community" that was receiving capital budget funds, made it possible to "show" in the middle of the controversy that the Forest Hills Community Board 6 was getting the smallest amount of capital improvement funds of any board in the city.⁴¹ This only increased resentment and suspicion toward the government and ignored the fact that the very expensive high school to be built a few blocks past the Board's boundary line was to serve many Forest Hills students.*

In another case, in March, 1968, the Planning Department's specialist school planners helped bring about agreement with Adrian Blumenfeld of the school system to sign a long-term lease with the Housing Authority to pay for the pre-school facilities, thereby allowing the Authority to build them into the project. This, it was agreed at the three agency meeting, "would soothe some of the tensions within the community caused by the project,"⁴³ but as subsequent events showed,

* The loss of funds for a new library - part of a citywide elimination of planning funds for any new libraries - also contributed to charges of government retaliation against the Forest Hills opposition to the housing project.⁴²

this failed because the process of communication with the community was such that it did not realize that in fact a special effort had been made to respond to its needs.

Yet another fascinating aspect of the process is that with all the furor about a black - Jewish conflict that the project was creating, the only city agency that had institutional knowledge and staff expertise in dealing with complicated race relations problems, the Human Rights Commission, never was involved.⁴⁴ While I do not expect that planners should necessarily be specialists in the complex field of integrated housing, I do think that the planner, in overseeing and monitoring an overall process, should recognize that the subject is complex. He should be aware that the Housing Authority, with its credibility problems and its institutional inability to deliver on any promise of future community services from another city agency, cannot be left to deal with the problems that arise, and that the planner should intervene himself or - depending on circumstances - make sure that a person who is a specialist in the delicate subject areas involved does get called in.

For all these reasons, and with the belief that the lives of the people who ultimately would move into the housing project would be difficult enough, given the stigma that neighbors frequently attach to public housing anyway - let alone to one with a history of conflict and the potential of even more serious trouble if the upward spiral of passions were not reversed - I felt that the project size should be reduced, and I

proposed my compromise to Mario Cuomo. I believed, based on my planning knowledge and the experiences of my father in developing integrated housing for the last twenty years, that it was essential to reverse the trend of rising emotional conflict, both to give the project itself some chance of success by promoting a feeling of normality about it and its ultimate residents, and to try to save any chance of getting scatter-site housing through the political process in the years following the project's completion. But I also believed that judging an issue on its merits and having a compromise were not mutually exclusive in the Forest Hills case. Irrespective of community opposition, if I had not believed that recent experience has shown that the Forest Hills project's size and physical configuration made its chances of ultimate success that much more difficult, I would not have proposed a change.* For I felt that any change had to be intellectually honest in its rationale and not solely a reaction to community pressure. Despite the opposition of some people, I still believe that considerations such as the economics of neighborhood provision of goods and services, the impact on population composition of neighborhood schools, changing trends in employment patterns, and a whole host of other factors still make racial and economic integration of housing important goals to pursue.

* A reliance on costly management services to compensate for negative aspects of a facility, for example, becomes increasingly difficult to rely on in the future in view of the rising costs of operation that have outpaced rent levels.

Because long-range success is composed of many short-run successes, I proposed a compromise. Its success did not rely on everyone in the community supporting it verbally at a public hearing but rather on 1) enough support so that their behavior patterns would change after it was adopted, and 2) the total ambience or community life style in and around the public housing project itself being better than it might have been otherwise. Only time will tell if the compromise that was adopted was right, and whether in the long run the causes of both racial and economic integration and the provision of more and better housing for low-income people will have been served. For that success, the providing of the proper physical structures and the framework for a better atmosphere at the opening of the development is only half the job. The other half now lies ahead, in the proper on-going operation of the buildings and in fostering the friendly day-to-day personal relationships as these are formed by the adults and children living in the buildings and the surrounding neighborhood.

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35. Roger Starr, "The Lesson of Forest Hills," op. cit., p. 46.
36. Ibid., p. 45.
37. Simeon Golar, "Black America IS America," New York Times, November 10, 1971, p. 45; and interview with Simeon Golar.
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APPENDIX I - CHRONOLOGY

- January 1, 1966 John Lindsay sworn in as Mayor; transit strike hits city.
- March, 1966 Special interagency committee appointed by Mayor to select public housing sites, headed by Ed Robin, deputy counsel to Mayor.
- Spring 1966 Housing Task Force submits recommendation to merge 9 housing departments into one agency. Edward Logue hired for further study.
- April 20, 1966 City Planning Com. hearings - residents of 6 middle class neighborhoods attack HA for proposing projects in their areas.
- May 11, 1966 CPC hearings on proposed public housing projects in Kingsbridge (Bronx), and Woodlawn and Flushing (Queens).
- May 11, 1966 N. Y. Times reports special interagency committee bars Borough Pres. veto of sites in advance, seen as move to spur integration. Borough Pres. split in opinion of new procedure.
- May 31, 1966 Letter to CPC Chairman, William Ballard, from Adrian Blumenfeld, Administrator of School Planning and Research, Board of Education, stating that proposed housing

project site in Corona coincides with potential high school site and that alternative high school site "will be difficult, if not impossible, " to find.

- June 1, 1966 CPC hearing - Queens Borough Pres. Cariello asks delay on Corona and Howard Beach (Lindinwood) sites until fall. Ballard refuses on grounds that Federal aid hinges on site selection by June 30.
- June 7, 1966 Lindsay announces plan to build low-income units in rehabed and "small" new buildings averaging 6-8 stories, mainly in 4 slum areas.
- June 15, 1966 CPC hearing - 700 Queens residents oppose public housing in middle-income areas; United Taxpayers Party chairman, Vito Battista, opposes projects; Cariello says CPC uses 'steamroller tactics'; Councilman Manes says projects will encourage flight of middle-income families; Human Rights Commission chairman Booth says program is only hope to get people out of ghettos.
- June 21, 1966 CPC approves last 4 Housing Authority scatter-sites, including 5 1/2 acre Corona site; hears testimony on plan to build 4,000 low-income units in slum areas.
- June 28, 1966 Board of Estimate hearing on Housing Authority request for approval of Corona site for public housing deferred because Board of Education requests site for high school.

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- October 1, 1966 Study under Ed Logue recommends building 450,000 apartments in 10 years and placing all city housing and planning functions in one agency.
- October 27, 1966 Board of Estimate - Exec. Assist. to Mayor, with Queens Borough Pres. Cariello's concurrence, requests layover of Corona public housing site (Lewis Ave. and 100th St.) to December 9th meeting in order that necessary steps to locate a high school there and the public housing at 108th Street and 62nd Drive (Forest Hills - Rego Park) may be commenced. Cariello says "this planning solution, which we have sought for so long, is a victory for everything that is good and visionary for the Borough of Queens."
- November 9, 1966 Housing Authority requests plan and project approval for public housing for Forest Hills site from CPC.
- November 16, 1966 Board of Education refers Corona 12 acre high school site to local school board.
- November 23, 1966 Housing and Development Administration Superagency created by Lindsay. Jay Nathan appointed head. Walter Washington appointed chairman of Housing Authority. Donald Elliot, counsel to Mayor, appointed CPC chairman.
- November 30, 1966 CPC hearing on proposal for 828 units of public housing on 8.4 acre Forest Hills site.

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- December 2, 1966 CPC approves plan and project for Forest Hills by 7-0 vote.
- December 9, 1966 Board of Estimate approves plan and project for 828 units for Forest Hills by 22-0 vote.
- January 18, 1967 Development program for 848 units received by HUD.
- January 18, 1967 Simeon Golar named deputy City Administrator.
- January 25, 1967 Board of Education submits Corona high school site to Site Selection Board.
- March 20, 1967 Site Selection Board hearing on Board of Education's request for 12 1/2 acre high school site in Corona. Request is approved.
- March 31, 1967 Mayor approves high school site.
- May 29, 1967 Housing Authority notifies CPC of change from 828 units to 848 units.
- June 8, 1967 CPC writes Housing Authority that change in units is minor and does not affect prior approval.
- June 19, 1967 Site Selection Board re-hears high school site because of litigation.

- July 13, 1967 Lindsay names 5 leading architects for 6 public housing projects in move to get away from stereotyped design.
- July 24, 1967 Site Selection Board re-approves Corona high school site by 3-2 vote necessitating condemnation of 69 homes (Mayor's 3 appointees for, B. P. Cariello and Comptroller Proccacino against); Cariello says he had worked out alternative sites that would have saved most homes and have met facility requirements.
- September 1, 1967 Mayor approves high school site.
- September 7, 1967 Walter Washington resigns as head of Housing Authority to become first Negro executive of major U. S. city - Washington, D. C.
- October 26, 1967 Original development program for Forest Hills housing approved by HUD.
- November 2, 1967 Site approval authorized by HUD.
- November 9, 1967 Annual Contribution Contract executed by HUD for project (total devel. cost of \$17,155,000).
- November 27, 1967 Housing Authority designates Franzen Assoc. as architects.
- November 28, 1967 Lindsay formally creates HDA superagency after City Council approval and names 23 officials; Eugenia Flatow

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as head of Model Cities, Frank Kristof for Programs and Policy, Robert Hazen for Development, etc.

- 1968 Oceanhill-Brownsville school decentralization dispute and lengthy city-wide teachers strike.
- August 26, 1968 Title vested to Forest Hills Housing site.
- February 1969 Simeon Golar appointed Chairman of City Commission on Human Rights.
- February 1969 Snow storm makes Queens streets impassable.
- May, 1969 Court of Appeals confirms lower court decision that Board of Estimate is not required to hold a second hearing on a capital project after the Site Selection Board has approved site for high school.
- September 5, 1969 Franzen Associates fired as architects for Forest Hills.
- September 12, 1969 Sam Paul hired as architect for Forest Hills project.
- October 1, 1969 Title vested in high school site.
- November 1969 Lindsay wins re-election over Mario Proccacino and John Marchi.
- January 1970 Paul's Phase 1 design submitted to Housing Authority.
- January 1970 Simeon Golar appointed chairman of Housing Authority.

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- April 14, 1970 Agreement reached on modifying Phase 1 design by eliminating 8 low rise buildings and adding those units to high rise ones.
- April 21, 1970 Agreement of April 14 confirmed by letter from HUD to Housing Authority.
- July 9, 1970 HUD authorizes HA to proceed with design, based on one of two of the submitted site plans.
- August 1970 CPC approves map change closing streets on Corona High School site.
- August 20, 1970 Phase II design submitted to Housing Authority.
- September 1970 Governor Rockefeller asks State Commissioner of Housing and Community Renewal, Charles Urstadt, for report on Corona high school site.
- Late October 1970 Urstadt report says 2 other feasible sites exist for school - Flushing Meadows Park and the site of a "defunct" public housing project in Forest Hills.
- November 13, 1970 Board of Estimate unanimously approves map closings of streets at school site.
- December 1, 1970 Mayor Lindsay announces first proposed Corona compromise, negotiated between Deputy Mayor Richard Aurelio and lawyer Mario Cuomo, to reduce school site size, put recreation in park, return 31 homes to owners, and physically move others to new lots.

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December 1970 Assemblyman Battista and others oppose Corona compromise - want entire school site moved.

January 1971 Simeon Golar announces goal of starting construction on 14,000 public housing units in year.

January 1971 Community opposition to Forest Hills project starts organizing. Jerry Birbach takes leadership role.

May 1971 Housing Authority issues Forest Hills Fact Sheet.

June 1971 Golar gives Flushing Remonstrance speech.

June 1971 Congressman Rosenthal asks for General Accounting Office investigation.

July 6, 1971 Bids for Forest Hills project advertised by HA.

June-July 1971 Corona compromise enabling legislation fails to win State approval.

July 24, 1971 Injunction issued against Forest Hills project.

August 10, 1971 Bids opened by HA.

October 29, 1971 Court approves Forest Hills project.

October 29, 1971 HA requests HUD concurrence in award of bids.

November 5, 1971 HA submits draft environmental clearance worksheet to HUD.

November 8, 1971 HUD amends Annual Contribution Contract for project and concurs in award of contract (total dev. cost of \$29,980,000)

November 16, 1971 Senator Buckley says HUD Secretary Romney will review project.

November 18, 1971 Large protest rally makes front page of Times because of threat of violence.

November 21, 1971 Birbach and Golar call each other "bigot" and "liar" in TV debate.

November 23, 1971 Board of Estimate kills Lindenwood public housing project.

November 23, 1971 HUD Sec. Romney reaffirms approval of project, saying he cannot see "any basis on which I can reverse prior firm contractual commitments."

November 24, 1971 20 month study by Urban Design Council of New York recommends radical changes in city's "Kotka^{af}-like building process.

Mid-December 1971 Construction of Forest Hills project begins.

December 4, 1971 Dick Aurelio proposes new Corona compromise.

December 16, 1971 Application for preliminary injunction to stay construction filed in Federal District Court, alleging HUD failure to comply with National Environmental Policy Act of 1969.

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- December 16, 1971 Several Jewish groups refuse to attend meeting with Lindsay on 17th, but American Jewish Cong. and Anti-defamation League will go.
- December 17, 1971 "Secret" meeting held in Lindsay's office at which he declares project will be built and no compromise is possible.
- December 19, 1971 Jerry Birbach's West Side Manhattan real estate office picketed.
- December 20, 1971 State hearings on scatter-site housing .
- January 14, 1972 Draft environmental impact statement released for comments by HUD.
- January 18, 1972 Housing Authority releases White Paper on Forest Hills project.
- February 2, 1972 Secret meeting at Gracie Mansion. Lindsay suggests secret meetings be held between Jewish and black groups.
- February 8, 1972 New York Times' architectural critic, Ada Louise Huxtable, criticizes Forst Hills project's design and praises Franzen's.
- February 9, 1972 President elect of N. Y. Board of Rabbis says Forest Hills project is a "city hall sellout" and part of

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Lindsay's aspirations for the Presidency. Attack gets split reaction from Jewish leaders.

- February 10, 1972 Construction of high rise middle-income project of Sam Lefrak in Forest Hills-Kew Gardens stopped by City Board of Standards and Appeals. Lawyer for opposition is Mario ^CLuomo.
- February 15, 1972 New York State Supreme Court Judge Saypol issues order halting project on grounds that current project differs markedly from that approved in 1966 by CPC and Board of Estimate in terms of building's height, but execution of order is stayed. City appeals.
- February 17, 1972 Opponents meet with aides to President Nixon (arranged by Senator Buckley). President reported as feeling project has "national significance."
- March 10, 1972 Panel of black housing experts support Forest Hills project.
- March 13, 1972 New York State Assembly passes bill (80-49) to require County referendum for public housing projects, with a retroactive provision tailored specifically for the Forest Hills project. City believes bill unconstitutional.
- March 14, 1972 Lindsay places fifth in Florida presidential primary.
- March 28, 1972 Environmental Impact Statement issued by HUD.
- April 4, 1972 Lindsay places sixth in Wisconsin and withdraws from presidential campaign.
- May 3, 1972 Lindsay says compromise on project is possible.
- May 4, 1972 City wins appeal of Saypol decision.

- May 5, 1972 Life Magazine prints color photo of Pruitt-Igoe Public Housing project in St. Louis being dynamited.
- May 13, 1972 Rockefeller vetoes bill requiring Forest Hills project to go back to Board of Estimate for approval.
- May 16, 1972 Lindsay names Mario Cuomo to "make an independent exploration of possible revisions in project."
- June 1972 Legislation for Corona compromise approved by State.
- June 21, 1972 Birbach loses primary election to Gold.
- June 24, 1972 I meet with Cuomo.
- July 25, 1972 Cuomo report recommends halving project size and building heights.
- August 20, 1972 Lindsay accepts Cuomo recommendation; Golar unhappy but will comply.
- September 5, 1972 Queens Borough President Donald Manes proposes making project a cooperative.
- October 4, 1972 City Planning Commission votes 4-2 to accept halving project.
- October 26, 1972 Board of Estimate votes 20-2 to halve project and make it a cooperative.
- Winter, 1973 Planning Commission denies construction funds for 1974-1975 budget for Corona high school because Board of Education wants to redesign school for one-half size.

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- June 1974 HUD approves plan to make Forest Hills project a cooperative, the first of its type in U. S.
- July 1974 Housing Authority has over 10,000 applications for project. Occupancy expected to start in fall, 1974.

APPENDIX II

TABLE 16

Occupancy Characteristics by Percent,
New York City Public Housing Projects,
January 1, 1973 and Changes Since January 1, 1965

	White	Negro	Puerto Rican	Other	Total
Number of Families	25.3	50.0	22.8	1.9	100.0
Percentage point change, '65-'73	-14.5	10.6	3.2	1.9	100.0
Number of Persons	19.2	52.4	26.4	2.0	100.0
Percentage point change, '65-'73	-14.8	9.5	3.3	2.0	100.0
Percent of Household Heads 62+	49.0	18.7	11.7		
Percentage point change, '65-'73	16.0	8.7	3.7		
Percent of Broken Families	8.5	33.6	28.4		
Percentage point change, '65-'73	-2.1	9.6	13.2		
Percent of Families on Welfare	15.0	37.0	43.9	32.7	
Percentage point change, '65-'73	9.6	23.7	27.6	22.0	

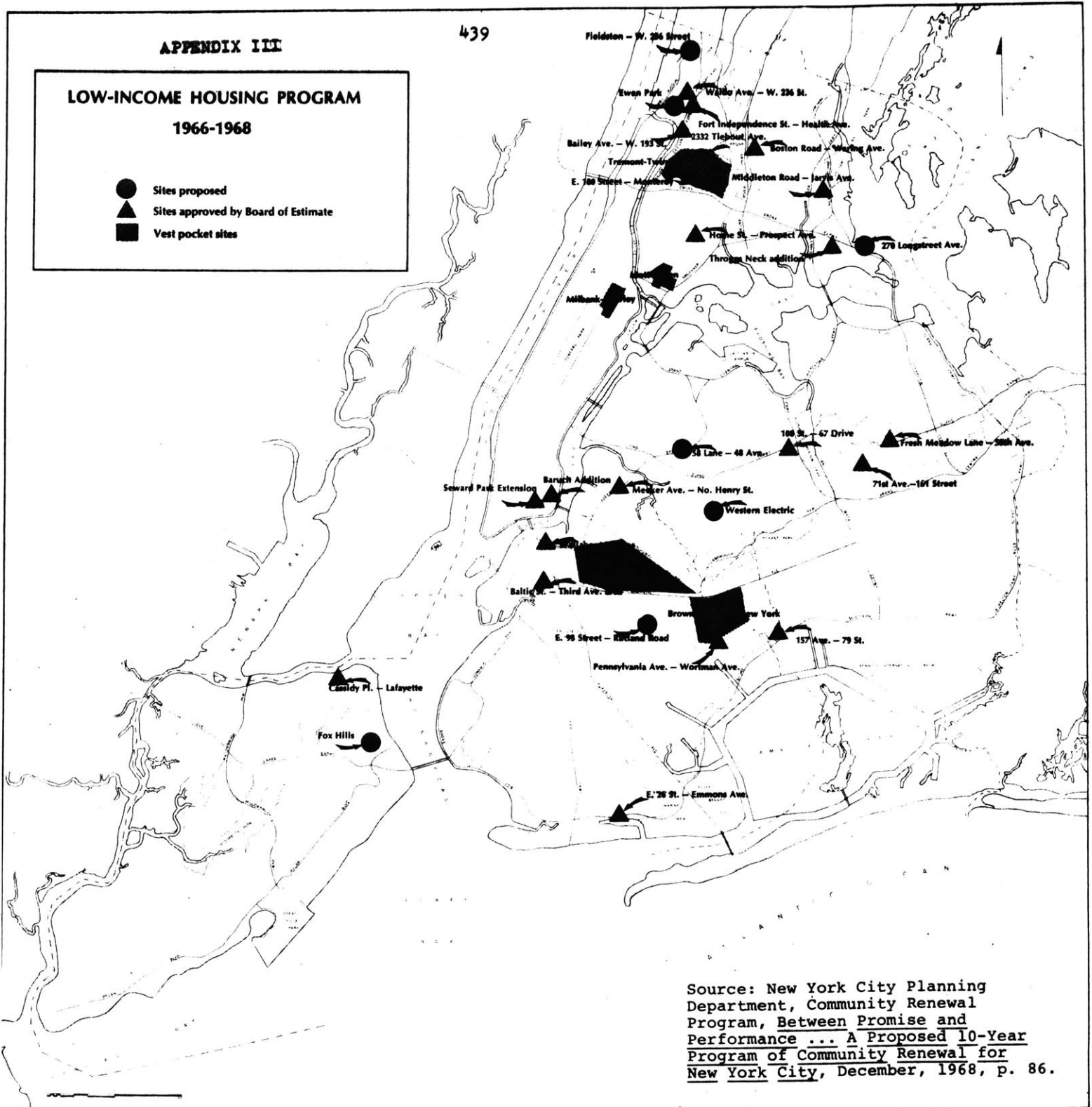
Source: Table 1 and
New York City Housing Authority
Confidential Material

APPENDIX III

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LOW-INCOME HOUSING PROGRAM
1966-1968

- Sites proposed
- ▲ Sites approved by Board of Estimate
- Vest pocket sites



Source: New York City Planning Department, Community Renewal Program, Between Promise and Performance ... A Proposed 10-Year Program of Community Renewal for New York City, December, 1968, p. 86.

To Forest Hills-Rego Park residents and concerned Taxpayers everywhere

ACT NOW SAVE FOREST HILLS!! SAVE MIDDLE INCOME COMMUNITIES EVERYWHERE

THE BIRBACH PLAN

- Garden complex for Senior citizens.
- Geriatric center and recreational facilities.
- Placement of lower income families in existing buildings throughout the community for TRUE integration so . . .
- . . . the poor would have a true middle income environment.
- Evaluation of program to determine the effects of true scatter site housing.
- Approved by Forest Hills-Rego Park communities.

THIS IS TRUE SCATTER SITE HOUSING

Thursday October 26, 1972 is destined to be the most crucial day to the communities of Forest Hills-Rego Park and middle income communities everywhere. On this day Mayor John V. Lindsay and the Board of Estimate will determine the outcome of the proposed 108th Street project. Voice your opposition, your presence is a must.

For 2 years the Forest Hills Residents' Association has been leading the fight against John Lindsay,

THE LINDSAY PLAN

Forest Hills tomorrow



- 3 welfare towers
- Cost approx. \$70,000 per apt. (can you afford a \$70,000 home or condominium?)
- Project stigmatizes the poor—Isolation not Integration.

Simeon Golar and Donald Elliot in their plan to build "warehouses for the poor" in Forest Hills-Rego Park. ACT NOW! Join us in our fight and you will win. Remember! Board of Estimate hearing October 26, 1972 at 10 AM in City Hall. Imperative your voice be heard. Don't allow Forest Hills-Rego Park to be destroyed or your community will be next.

JOIN US IN OUR FIGHT AGAINST CITY HALL. HELP US! HELP YOURSELF!

TO QUEENS BOROUGH PRESIDENT MANES

As our elected representative, it is your duty to do the job that has not been done by . . .

- Congressman Benjamin Rosenthal
- State Senator Emanuel Gold
- Councilman Edward Sadowsky
- Assemblyman Alan Hevesi

It is up to you to lead the way for the other Board of Estimate members or you will be as guilty as the Mayor of destroying middle income communities.

I support your effort. Enclosed, please find my check made out to the Forest Hills Residents' Association, Inc.

(Please check one) \$5___ \$10___ \$25___ \$50___ \$100___

NAME: _____

ADDRESS: _____ Phone: _____

FOREST HILLS RESIDENTS' ASSOCIATION, INC.
62-32 102 St., Forest Hills, New York 11375

Paid For by the Forest Hills Residents' Association, Inc.

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