

Friends of the Upper East Side Historic Districts Newsletter

Vol. 3, No. 1

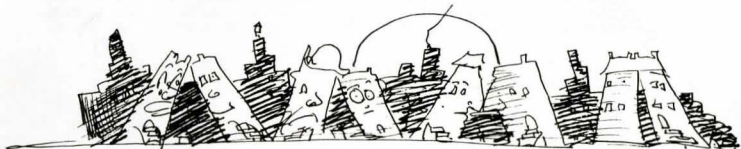
Spring, 1987

FOREWORD: George Bernard Shaw wrote in *Return to Methuselah*: "You see things, and you ask 'why?'. I dream things that never were and ask, 'why not?'"

Everyone who has ever done the type of work that FRIENDS does, day in and day out, knows exactly what Shaw meant. For dreams which we dreamt when we first started as an organization just four years ago, came through against odds. At this particular time, we have cause for much celebration. For in this very short time, we have tackled many things and surpassed our goals. As soon as we came together, we knew that one of these goals was to watch over the five Upper East Side Historic Districts and the 129 individual landmarks which make our area high in tradition and replete with architectural treasures. We proceeded to bring together and train over 120 volunteer monitors who, on a block-by-block basis, see to it that none of this will erode and disappear. The process works, not only because 99% of our "Reports" to the Landmarks Preservation Commission (LPC) result in "Violations" and "Stop Work Notices" being issued and some (if not all) of the unauthorized alterations being corrected, but also because our monitoring system has become a model for other areas of the city (even the LPC now has a monitoring program based on ours). Those of you who are our volunteer monitors deserve great praise. Thanks to your vigilance and care the designated properties will have a chance to survive. You can be very proud of the work you do, just as proud as we are grateful for it.

We felt that there was a need for a complete photographic record of all 1400 Upper East Side structures covered by the landmark law, as well as of some of the architectural details which made these buildings significant. Thanks to a grant from the J.M. Kaplan Fund we were able to commission Stephen Senigo to produce two sets of 2000 slides, one for the LPC and the other for us. We can now consult these pictures when changes occur and ascertain the effect of the work upon the landmark. Now that we have them neatly organized in special albums, we find these slides an invaluable tool for monitoring work and also for research. Recently we supplied copies to the American Institute of Architects; and when another organization, the Landmarks Conservancy, asked if we knew of any missing cornices, etc. which needed replacing, we just looked at the slides to provide us with the answers.

Because Historic Districts have limited boundaries defined by the significance of the sites which they encompass, and because the individual landmarks are relatively few, other means beyond the preservation process had to be found in order to ensure that our total surroundings and quality of life be preserved. One logical way was good urban planning - appropriate



zoning can do wonders for an area where improper zoning can, and will devastate it.

Therefore, in January, 1982, FRIENDS requested that the City Planning Commission (CPC) do three things for the Upper East Side: 1) ban "sliver" buildings 2) downzone Lexington Avenue, and 3) downzone our residential midblocks. Our order was tall, and it took more than just dreaming "why not" to make it happen. The effort took over three years, it took sustained and continuous work, but in all three cases the CPC and its Manhattan office worked hand in hand with us, listened to us, and put up with us. I will always have that sneaking suspicion that, just perhaps, we got what we wanted because we became a bore and a nuisance! All pleasantries aside, we will never forget that without the CPC's cooperation and help none of this would have come to pass.

1) The "sliver" buildings were everybody's monster and were, indeed, banned in 1983, with the law further amended in 1984. As all laws, this one is subject to interpretations and it appears that right now some developers have found new and esoteric ways to read it. If that is so, we may have to tuck and snip the text here and there to prevent such creative tampering. (See "Slivers Reborn")

2) Lexington Avenue (which prior to the construction of the Third Avenue El in 1870 did not even exist) worried FRIENDS very much. Because of its narrow (75 ft) width, it hardly qualified as an avenue, yet its former R10 zoning treated it as one. We requested that the zoning be made contextual and in 1983, Lexington Avenue was downzoned from the R10 which was an Rx for a tunnel, to R9X which is not, but is a prescription for light and air. In 1984 the zoning was further amended to include a beneficial sky exposure plane provision. We are pleased to report that to date the zoning works; the buildings presently going up as-of-right on Lexington Avenue are the proof of the pudding.

3) Our third request that fateful day in January, 1982, was the most ambitious. It dealt with a complex rezoning of the midblocks on the Upper East Side. This kind of dream can bring a most rude awakening and zap you in the process. But we had cut our teeth and having tasted success we had the confidence. We were perhaps no longer, as we told you in an earlier letter, the "Fools" that rush in where "Angels" fear to tread (not that we had grown wings, but at least we had become high wire artists) and we had the resolve. The midblocks were endangered because the R8 zoning was a license to build as-of-right towers or to assemble enough territory to pack large buildings into narrow streets. The erosion of these residential midblocks meant the loss of precious side streets as we now know them - livable to us, desirable to others, and fair game for exploitation. To protect them was a must, and there was no time to lose. Our remarkable volunteers took to the streets with maps and colored pencils in hand to survey, map, and inventory over 200 city blocks from East 59th to 96th Street between Fifth Avenue and the East River to make sure that what we were proposing to the CPC was appropriate, not only because we felt that this was the case, but because we could prove it. It took the spring and the hot summer of 1984 to do this part of the job and to

deliver a proposal to the CPC for its evaluation, further studies and implementation. It must be remembered here, and everywhere, that were it not for Chairman Sturz's ear and for the work of Rebecca Robertson and Dennis Ferris of the CPC's Manhattan Office, our own work and effort could not have succeeded. We owe much to many, and apologies to some. We must have bothered so many so much that we have to make a blanket apology right now to all.... And now for the thanks. The gratitude for the zoning becoming a reality has to go to many, too many to enumerate. This letter cannot be written without bowing from the waist and thanking profusely the City Planning Commission and its staff, our Community Board 8, and Connie Adamec (who chaired some terrific hearings and ran a subcommittee on which we served and which set a record for how good it is for so many to work together for a cause), nor without forever remembering the essential part that our elected officials played during the Uniform Land Use Review Procedure (ULURP). Such persons as Councilman Bob Dryfoos, Councilperson Carolyne Maloney, Assemblymen Alexander (Pete) Grannis, Mark Alan Siegel, Senator Roy Goodman, and Congressman Bill Green, and their staffs were always there when needed. When the time came for decisions, the members of the Board of Estimate and their staffs came through beautifully and our thanks go to them as well. We honored many persons at our Annual Meeting on January 7, 1986, but honoring them and thanking them is one thing, and an inadequate thing, when compared to what the New York Times called after the R8B zoning became law, "The most sweeping zoning change for the area since 1961...."

For a young civic organization to have successfully worked on so important an issue and to have done it without the help of attorneys, consultants, and/or PR experts, is cause for joy, for pride, and for a terrific high, almost as much, or is it more than winning a Pulitzer Prize for a first novel? But it is essential for us all to remember the support received and to cherish the friendships made which grew as we worked together on something that needed us while we needed each other. Is there anyone we did not mention? Yes, our opposition. But at the end, on that Red Letter Day of September 19, 1985, when the Board of Estimate voted to approve the zoning change, the opposition melted, (except for the lonely representative of the Real Estate Board). We had managed to get the others to join us in support so that, in our finest hour, we saw the greening of all chests and lapels wearing the FRIENDS' button which read: "R8B NOW!" Wow!

Reading this long and convoluted foreword, you may ask that since this was such a great labor of love, what else was there? You may ask, is there life after R8B? You bet there is! And for all the news and future plans, read on. We are proud and happy of having worked with you, and having earned your continued trust and support for the things that we do together. We are grateful to all of you for making FRIENDS what it is.

Walt Whitman wrote in the Leaves of Grass: "A great City is that which has the greatest men and women...." New York is that city and you are the men and women who made it so. Thank you.

Halina Rosenthal, President

CHANGES

Our organization has lost some members whose terms have expired and we have gained new ones. We have been joined by new board members: Christopher Angell, Robert Davis, and Norman Marcus, all distinguished attorneys; noted preservationist Michael George; Evelyn Lauder, whose expertise has always been very helpful; architect Arthur May of the firm Kohn, Pedersen and Fox; Margaret Parker, an exemplary volunteer; Judith Price, the publisher of AVENUE magazine; and Teri Slater, whom we first met when we reported unauthorized work being done on her brownstone (!) only to acquire a top monitor and good friend. All are warmly welcomed as new board members.

EVENTS...

Since our last comprehensive Newsletter, we have held two SYMPOSIA. The first, "Rezoning of the Upper East Side Midblocks" at the Municipal Art Society, and the second in January, 1987 was held in conjunction with the "Artists talk on Art" series. The subject was, "How does building design evolve from the architect's drawing board to the streets of New York and who is responsible for the changes?" We thank all our distinguished panelists for participating in both exciting events.

SYMPOSIA

THIRD
AVENUE
FESTIVAL

Our yearly table at the THIRD AVENUE FESTIVAL seems to have become a tradition. People come to visit, talk, and walk away with tons of material, both ours and our sister organizations. This time around we were made more visible than ever because of the gorgeous balloons given to us by MORTIMER'S. Thank you Glenn Birnbaum!

MONITORS'
MEETINGS

We had three well-attended (SRO!) MONITORS' MEETINGS, the most recent on April, 22, 1987. This meeting was presented as a SYMPOSIUM, titled, "The Quest for a Certificate of Appropriateness." The panelists taking part in this timely discussion were: Giorgio Cavaglieri, William Conklin, Dorothy M. Miner, Paul Selver, Anthony C. Wood, and Halina Rosenthal as moderator.

ANNUAL
MEETING
AND
BENEFIT

FRIENDS' FOURTH ANNUAL MEETING was held in tandem with our very first ever BENEFIT. The twin events took place at the Convent of the Sacred Heart. The awards presented were as follows:

The Ralph C. Menapace Memorial Award to J. Sinclair Armstrong for his unceasing efforts to save the Saint Bartholomew's Church complex.

Restoration Award to Ralph Lauren for the meticulous restoration of the former Gertrude Rhinelanders Waldo Mansion.

Restoration Award to the Consul General of Sweden for the careful and respectful restoration of 600 Park Avenue, the Official Residence of the Swedish Consul.

FRIENDS' first Alteration Award to the Episcopal School at 35 East 69th Street for a sensitive addition to an existing landmark.

Friend of FRIENDS Award to the Golden Tulip Barbizon Hotel for reaching out to their community and for giving FRIENDS our office.

The ANNUAL MEETING and AWARDS CEREMONY were held in the Otto Kahn building, and were followed by the BENEFIT in the elegant Burden mansion. Guests were greeted by the sounds of popping champagne corks and the sounds of Lester Lanin's orchestra to which they danced late into the evening. We raffled off two round-trips to Europe (courtesy of KLM Royal Dutch Airlines), and Jeanne Brown and her "munchkins" did their usual magic tricks, making the party a huge success. (See photos.)

SPECIAL
PROJECT-
A MANUAL

We are preparing a no-nonsense MANUAL which is designed to take the myth out of historic preservation and inform owners of all designated properties what their rights and responsibilities are. The MANUAL, financed in part by a grant from the New York State Division of Housing and Community Renewal, (DHCR) will also be distributed to co-op owners, building managers and targeted architects and contractors. It will contain a glossary of terms, landmark and zoning maps for the Upper East Side, and basic information. Included as well will be LPC instructions for filing and the Application Form for an LPC Permit. Since the landmark law is the same for all parts of the city, the MANUAL can be reprinted for other areas with a simple map change. We believe that an informed public is less likely to proceed with unauthorized work, if the facts are known...authorized works better. The MANUAL will be available late in 1987, and we can't wait.

NEW
INDIVIDUAL
LANDMARKS
(See Photos)

1025 PARK AVENUE. This Neo-Jacobethan former residence of Reginald DeKoven, writer of comic opera and "Oh, Promise Me", is now a bona fide landmark. The proposal for designation of this building, designed by reknown architect John Russell Pope, was heard in public hearing in May, 1984, but the final vote by the LPC was not forthcoming until October, 1986, with final approval by the Board of Estimate on December 18, 1986. Having bored everyone to tears about this proposal for two years, we feel terrific.

LUCY DAHLGREN HOUSE. This beautiful Beaux Arts townhouse by Ogden Codman at 15 East 96th Street boasts a turning platform which rotates a car beyond the porte cochere.

CHEROKEE APARTMENTS, a/k/a SHIVELY SANITARY APARTMENTS. This extraordinary complex at 77th and 78th Streets at York Avenue is worth a visit. See especially the interior courts with open staircases.

Now that these buildings are designated, our map of landmarks is due for a new printing to reflect these welcome additions to the Upper East Side.

DESIGNATIONS
WHICH
FRIENDS
SUPPORTS

CARNEGIE HILL HISTORIC DISTRICT. We are pushing and pressing for the extension of the Carnegie Hill Historic District (CHHD). The lack of movement on the issue is frustrating. We assume that the LPC finds us obnoxious to keep harping, but together with the Carnegie Hill Neighbors, harp we will until the additional portions of Carnegie Hill are calendered and then (sooner rather than later) approved.

LADY'S MILE HISTORIC DISTRICT. We actively support the designation of this area as a district and not just a building here and there, which would fail to preserve this early and elegant shopping district of NYC. We strongly disagree that designation may hurt development of this particular area, for we see what it has done for such commercial streets as Madison Avenue where small structures have become so valuable and the rents so esoteric that the street is now second to none, save perhaps the rue de Rivoli. Therefore, we will continue pressing the LPC to move on this issue, and to move quickly.

THE CENTURY BUILDING. We worked to designate this building by William Schickel on Union Square and it happened on the very same day the LPC gave us our own 1025 Park Avenue. This is as good a place as any to say that

we consider these two items only the beginning. With 1025 Park being (well, sort of) a beginning in the general direction of the CHHD extension, and the Century Building being the crack in the door of Lady's Mile, let us open the doors further....

SAKS FIFTH AVENUE. We supported this store's designation even though it was tied in with a caveat about demolishing several adjoining brownstones and erecting a tower on the cleared site. We felt that Saks Fifth Avenue was worth preserving more than the brownstones, and that the scale of the Fifth Avenue building, not only its exceptionally fine design, was more important to the sense of place which characterizes the broad avenue

NORMANDY APARTMENTS. We were there to testify and applaud when the LPC voted to designate on the very same night that the public hearing was held. The extreme urgency in this case was the fact that windows were being changed up and down the building's facade as the issue was being discussed. It was an exciting and great moment, and we hope that the Commission will strive to act as swiftly and positively more often.

LUCHOW'S. We marched in front of the old Luchow's, and while we ended up in the Daily News (!), the LPC was not impressed. We feel the building deserves better than a march and much better than neglect.

THE WASHINGTON MARKET HISTORIC DISTRICT. We joined the efforts of the group which is trying to have this significant part of NYC recognized and to establish an historic district which would encompass some of the area's most important buildings. We were there when the idea started to germinate, and we will work with Hal Bromm and others to help secure some measure of protection for this area which deserves much more than neglect or, worse yet, exploitation.

TUDOR CITY. We worked closely with the talented and energetic Tudor City tenants. The public hearing at City Hall was an exciting event, even including a person in the classic Beef-Eater costume. Now for the real action - the designation is still to come.

UPPER WEST SIDE HISTORIC DISTRICTS. We support the designation of several Historic Districts on the West Side. They are: West 71st St Historic District, West 82nd St Historic District, West 84th St Historic District, and the West 101st St Historic District. We hope that the boundaries will be generous and will encompass what is recognized as one of New York City's treasure troves of residential architecture. The public hearing was held on November 18, 1986, and we hope that the Commission will move quickly to designate. When the districts are designated, we know that our sister organization, Landmark West!, will be as ready to monitor the Upper West Side as we were when the Upper East Side was designated. In addition, on May 5, 1987 we testified in support of the Riverside-West End Historic District.

MURRAY HILL AREA. Community Board 6 helped us when we were working to obtain the R8B zoning for the Upper East Side, and we are happy to have been able to help them in return. R8B is generic zoning and should be available to all R8 districts. The R8B and R9X zoning were approved by the Board of Estimate for the area in question in March of 1986. Our congratulations to Murray Hill!

**INSTITUTIONAL
EXPANSIONS
WHICH FRIENDS
SUPPORTS**

At the time of the passage of R8B, FRIENDS promised to help some of the not-for-profit institutions, specifically private schools, in exchange for their support of this zoning. We have religiously lived up to our promise and have worked with all of the following institutions to help them achieve their modest expansion plans for their own use.

CHURCHILL SCHOOL. The work has been completed at East 94th and 95th Streets in the Carnegie Hill Historic District.

EPISCOPAL SCHOOL. The work has been completed and so well executed at 35 East 69th Street in the UESHD, that, at our fourth Annual Meeting, FRIENDS presented the school with a special Alteration Award for an exemplary addition to a landmark.

BUCKLEY SCHOOL. FRIENDS supports this small addition of two floors on East 74th Street in the UESHD. A Certificate of Appropriateness (C.of A.) has been granted, and we will continue our support of the project when it goes to the Board of Standards and Appeals (BSA).

RUDOLF STEINER SCHOOL. At 15 East 79th Street, this is another small rear yard expansion which merits our support.

SPENCE SCHOOL. FRIENDS supports the plan for a small structure to be built on the site of the present playground on East 91st Street. We find that the addition is not unreasonable.

ALLEN STEVENSON SCHOOL. FRIENDS supported the small addition in the rear yard at 128-132 East 78th Street in the UESHD. We regret the loss of the school's own small garden. But, weighing the loss against the gain and especially considering how small the addition will be, we cannot help but support the school.

**INSTITUTIONAL
EXPANSIONS
WHICH FRIENDS
OPPOSES**



NIGHTINGALE-BAMFORD SCHOOL. This is the only school expansion FRIENDS opposes. Whereas the other private schools have plans for modest additions, we are confronted here with a truly immodest one. The existing building at 20 E. 92nd Street is already looming large and is out of scale with the neighborhood. The current proposal would plunk the equivalent of Bloomingdale's (plus 7 floors for a total of 160 ft in height) on a lovely residential street. While the school is not a landmark, the small residences facing it are within the Carnegie Hill Historic District. The school's supporters' contention that it is the R8B zoning which now prevents it from expanding is utter nonsense. Even under the generous provisions of the former R8 zoning the school would have needed a variance to build. On February 10, 1987, a hearing was held at the BSA, and a decision is expected soon.



WHITNEY MUSEUM. The sheer bulk of the proposed post-modern (or is it post-mortem?) addition is enough to obliterate the outstanding existing Marcel Breuer building. Both the Breuer building and the adjoining "contributing" brownstones (which would have to be destroyed in order to make room for the expansion) are located within the UESHD. FRIENDS finds the destruction of the brownstones and the adverse impact to the Breuer building to be inappropriate and cannot support it. In addition, the Breuer building has just recently been listed on the State and the National Registers of Historic Places, which makes it both a New York City Landmark as well as a national architectural treasure. The matter came before Community Board 8 and was heard in May at the LPC.



Kent Barwick, President, Municipal Art Society at the podium, at FRIENDS Annual Meeting with Natalie Menapace.



David Teitelbaum and Halina Rosenthal after the presentation to the Ralph Lauren Group: (l.to.r.) Jerry Robertson, Judith Saltzman Jeff Walker, Roz Lee, and Naomi Leff.



At the Benefit, (l.to r.) Fred Papert, Commissioner Henry Stern, and Councilman Bob Dryfoos.



Congressman Bill Green with Halina Rosenthal at FRIENDS 1986 Benefit.



ALTERATION AWARD for 1986 The Episcopal School at 35 East 69th Street.



PETER BOUW, Alexandra Scheninger and Fels Schwartz. B. U. (inset), northeast U.A. Upper East Side, New York, at event.

FRIENDS THANK 'FRIENDS'

Several feted for preserving upper E. Side

A fashion designer, the former chairman of the Securities Exchange System, the owners of a hotel and a member of the diplomatic corps were among the persons honored recently by a preservationist group.

The awards were presented by Friends of the Upper East Side Historic District, a preservationist group founded in 1983 by Halina Rosenthal.

One winner was fashion designer Ralph Lauren, who was born in the Bronx and has made it big in Manhattan. He received an award for his meritorious restoration of the Gertrude Rhineland-Walden Mansion at 22d St. and Madison Ave.

The mansion is now used by Lauren for his signature Polo shop. The restoration was completed this year.

Other winners

Other award winners included the Barlows Hotel, for providing space to local community organizations; and the Counsel General of Sweden, for restoration of its building at 600 Park Ave.

J. Sinclair Armstrong, former chairman of the Securities Exchange System, received the Ralph Menapace Award from the organization for "his gallantry, tenacity and the grace he brought to the unending effort to preserve intact the St. Nicholas' complex, an Episcopal church at 5th St.

and Park Ave.," said Rosenthal.

The church, which was designated a landmark in 1986, became the center of one of the city's major landmark battles when the church proposed demolishing its century house and constructing a 45-story office tower.

Nixed three times

The plan was turned down three times by the city's Landmarks Preservation Commission. Armstrong led the battle as head of the organization, the Committee to Oppose the Sale of St. Bartholomew's.

The third and final denial of St. Bart's application came earlier this year in January.

Friends of the Upper East Side Historic District is a nonprofit group active in landmark preservation and zoning. The group spearheaded the fight for downzoning of Lexington Ave. and the side streets on the upper East Side.

This area includes five historic districts that take in the Metropolitan Museum District and Carnegie Hill. Jane Howard

Photo Credits:
Gail Miller
Steve Miller



Swedish Deputy Consul General Hans Anderson receiving the 1986 Restoration Award from Commissioner Gillian Sorensen



FRIENDS President Halina Rosenthal and Assemblyman Alexander (Pete) Grannis and J. Sinclair Armstrong



Gene A. Norman, Chairman and Dorothy Miner Counsel of the Landmarks Preservation Commission, with Halina Rosenthal.



"Winning ticket" Round trip to Amsterdam for the Karabells (center) here with (l.to r.) Paz Binsion, Halina Rosenthal and Rita Chu.



FRIENDS first Alteration Award was presented to the Episcopal School, Betty Baxter, Headmistress (holding the award) (center) with (l.to r.) Bill Judson, Coco Kopelman, Chris and Jean Angell and Arle Kopelman.



1986 RESTORATION AWARDS

Top: The former Gertrude Rhineland-Walden Mansion, 667 Madison Avenue.

Bottom: The residence of the Swedish Consul General, 600 Park Avenue.



GUGGENHEIM MUSEUM. FRIENDS has been in the forefront to oppose this addition. We have written and testified extensively on the subject. Because it would irreparably damage the Frank Lloyd Wright (FLW) masterpiece, which is a de facto if not a de jure landmark (two years too young), we have been pressing for alternative solutions to the proposed plans which would effectively destroy the integrity of the unique free-flowing design of the existing museum. To avert denial of the requested variance, the applicant requested that the record be reopened for "major conceptual design changes". The BSA voted to allow this, which permits the museum to modify its plans until a satisfactory solution (one which would not impact the FLW building adversely) is found. While many contributed to this victory, we feel that what really won the battle was the Positive Declaration of the original City Environmental Quality Review Department (CEQR). This established the fact that aesthetic judgement will have to prevail in the case of this unique and significant building which is as world renowned as is the American architect who designed it. The superlative performance of the BSA in weighing all the facts so meticulously and carefully is reason for great rejoicing. Revised plans were presented to Community Board 8 on February 11, 1987. Whereas the former design was unacceptable, the new version is an improvement since it is less demanding and more of a backdrop structure. However, the narrowness of the addition (35' wide) makes it a bona fide sliver building, which we cannot support.

CHRONIC
LANDMARK
PROBLEMS

ST. BARTHOLOMEW'S CHURCH. Yes, very much chronic. Having exhausted the first phase, which was to present to the LPC and the public one bad design after another for an office tower which would replace the existing Community House, an integral part of the St. Bartholomew's Church complex, the church and its representatives have now taken its battle to the courts. For a few years now we have been opposing the proposals meant to destroy the integrity of the church, and we will continue to do so by whatever means are available to us. We suggest that the funds which are being spent on costly plans, consultants, attorneys, and court procedures, would be better spent ministering to the needy and the poor which the church's representatives talk so much about...or just healing and counseling their parishoners who have been divided into camps by the actions of those who are supposed to be their spiritual leaders, not their power brokers.

RELIGIOUS PROPERTIES BILL. New Yorkers happen to be sitting on one of the most expensive pieces of real estate in the country, if not the world. Every inch of it is highly valued and desirable so that whoever has an inch wishes to capitalize upon it. Arguments about the First Amendment, freedom of religion, etc. can be relegated to what the preacher said in Ecclesiastes 1:2-5: "Vanity of Vanities, all is Vanity...." All that FRIENDS wants to ensure is that when "The sun ariseth" we will be able to see it. So let us not permit it to be hidden by towers and obliterated by a mountain of arguments.

ZONING
ISSUES

If you wonder why our streets are darker, or why they are more crowded and dirtier, look at what is developing on our avenues; behind a forest of cranes growing there is a fierce assault upon our diminishing view of the sky. We have been working with the CPC, Community Board 8, other Boards, and with all our sister organizations to put some sense into our urban planning so that it will serve us better. Some of the issues follow, briefly:

Housekeeping Items: A. Amending the "sliver" law (see page 12 for "A Sliver Reborn"). B. Including East 90th and 91st Streets at First Avenue in the R8B midblock zoning (It is presently C8-4 and should join the R8B family of blocks.)

Plaza Bonus: This is an ongoing item. Together with others, we have repeatedly requested the elimination of the Plaza Bonus, responsible for a 20% bonus and thus responsible for some of our overbuilding and overcrowding problems.

Tower Regulations: For similar reasons, we requested that the Tower Provisions be re-examined. We feel that towers in residential areas will destroy the streetscape entirely.

Community Facilities: We requested the study of the so-called Community Facilities, for there are facilities which serve the community and others which are simply income-producing schemes. We must separate the apples from the oranges, and know with which we are dealing.

Waterfront: We must have better access to the waterfront. New York is an island, but very few know it, and even fewer experience it. We hope to be able to change that!

Lowering of the Zoning Base: Perhaps the most important zoning change which must be brought about is the lowering of the zoning base for our residential wide streets and avenues. The benefit of the R8B midblock zoning will become meaningless if what surrounds us also overwhelms us. Our sister organization, CIVITAS, produced a fine short film, "No More Tall Stories", dealing with the possible changes. We have helped circulate this film and we have now been joined by other groups in the effort to alleviate the situation. None of the plans are final, but all of the plans are reasonable. The City must listen and we will be heard. With your help we will see results.

Inclusionary Zoning and Quality Housing: These two issues are up for certification right now. Inclusionary Zoning is a barter where the developer will receive a 20% bonus in exchange for few (too few) units of affordable housing. The same proposal, already in place in other areas of the City, did not work because it is easier to build a Plaza than to build housing. Thus the Plaza Bonus MUST GO! Quality Housing, replacing Housing Quality, sounds like Alice in Wonderland, but the idea is not bad. The criteria defining the as-of-right Quality Housing includes a more restrictive building envelope and a sky-exposure plane, front and rear, thus producing lower buildings. We are supporting the former, with many qualifications, as well as the latter. Whether these zoning proposals will work is something else again; they are both experimental programs, and no one knows if they will.

OUT OF THE
ORDINARY

THE COOPER COMMITTEE. The Cooper Committee was born of a single issue - the frustration of one developer not able to do away with the Rizzoli and Coty Buildings on Fifth Avenue. Thus the Committee was created to examine the landmark designation process. It took over one year to produce a report, and now this report threatens to do away with the integrity of the landmark law. The law works, it has worked for over twenty years, it has sustained court tests, and it must be left alone. Are there problems? Of course there are. The LPC has insufficient funding, insufficient staffing, and insufficient guidelines which would permit the staff

to do some of the work the Commissioners now do at public hearings. The problems are procedural ones which can be solved with MORE MONEY-MORE STAFF, and some simple housekeeping. Are the problems between the Department of Buildings and the LPC serious? Not at all. The intergovernmental problems can be resolved, again with some housekeeping, much better communications between the two agencies, and something very basic - compatible computers! We have made our views known -- both at an almost private (or at least not well publicized) public (?) hearing, and in writing. When the Cooper Committee announced that it would refer the matter to the City Council for a decision, we requested a delay so that important agencies such as New York City's Community Boards and others, would be able to study the lengthy report and express an informed opinion as to its contents. The Committee agreed to delay the rights of passage; no action has been taken as yet.

FOUNDLING
HOME
SITE -
TRUMP
PLANS
FIVE
THEATERS

NO! ON TRUMP THEATERS. Donald Trump, who purchased the Foundling Hospital on Third Avenue between 67th and 68th Streets where he wants to erect yet another luxury tower, remarked that the UES is the "least theatered" area in the United States. We like it this way. With 25 theaters within walking distance, we don't feel deprived. Whereas we don't oppose the tower itself which will be built as-of-right, we do strongly oppose and will actively work against having five theaters with a potential for a 2,000 person turn-over every two hours, day in and day out. Our position is a resounding No!

VERY
IMPORTANT
ISSUE-
CITY
AND
SUBURBAN

CITY AND SUBURBAN (C&S). There are two C&S complexes on the UES. The complex known as First Avenue Estates between York and First Avenues on 64th and 65th Streets was originally left out of the R8B midblock zoning, but hard work by the area's residents, Community Board 8, and FRIENDS succeeded in getting it included. However, the vast complex to the north, at 78th and 79th Streets between York Avenue and the East River which has been purchased recently as a development site is in trouble. Only the 78th Street midblock is within the R8B zoning change which prevents hi-rise construction. The rest is in great danger. As a member of the Coalition to Save City and Suburban Houses, we are doing just that. The Coalition and tenants have been doing a great job of education and information, but the issue is far from resolved. The buildings (and thus their residents, many of them elderly) are far from being out of harm's way. The complex was designed by first-rate architects Harde and Short and Percy Griffith. It is listed on the State Register and is eligible for the National Register. This is an honor but not a guarantee for survival - which an LPC blessing is. We hope a public hearing on the matter will come soon to determine the worth of the buildings so that they will be spared the lot of so many structures considered underbuilt....

OVERBUILT!

108 EAST 96TH STREET. Speaking of underbuilt, now consider overbuilt, and this apartment building is just that by 12 stories. Genie Rice of our Board and President of CIVITAS discovered the extra floors by poking around if not by looking up and counting. The action brought against the developer and his architect brought results at the BSA where the claim that somehow this was someone else's mistake was deemed to be a mistake in itself. The matter has gone to court, FRIENDS joined in and has informed the Court that we support the Corporation Counsel in this matter. The Supreme Court ruled against the developer and the action is now before the Appellate Court. We have been joined by other organizations and have presented an amici curiae brief.

302 EAST 77TH STREET. FRIENDS discovered this overbuilt 13-story "sliver" three and a half years ago. At first, we were told that it was not a "sliver" at all, but just another as-of-right building. Further inquiries proved us to be on the right track. We are sorry to see that the building is temporarily abandoned. Perhaps if 108 East 96th Street is resolved satisfactorily (for our side) we may get some action on this one as well.

1317 THIRD AVENUE (BET. 75TH & 76TH). Even though most residents of this area were under the impression that this too would be an "overbuilt" structure, it is really not. As-of-right, 100 feet or the width of the street, whichever is less, can be built on an avenue. The excess height for a mechanical floor does not figure into the zoning calculations. Strangely though, this building is being built with an alteration permit from the Department of Buildings. An alteration permit is issued when a portion of the old structure, perhaps just a foundation, remains. The advantage is a speedier process and cheaper construction since the original building code, not the new building code, may be used. The old building at this site was entirely demolished and the site excavated so deeply as to hit water and necessitate pumping. We consider an alteration permit to be inappropriate here because all that was left of the old building were the memories of it. That is a nice but not a bona fide foundation. Furthermore, the building still looks too tall.

434 EAST 84TH STREET. On the site of a small and charming wood-frame house which the LPC found expendable, a 5-story building is being erected. It is in a R8B midblock district and as-of-right 60' is the maximum height. As the building grew, so did a 6' deep, 5-story high "slightly pregnant" enlargement. Thanks to the vigilance of the East 84th Street Neighbors, the work of FRIENDS and the swift action of Valery Baker, Deputy Borough Superintendent, the excess fat is gone. Complying with R8B regulations, the new building will line up with its immediate neighbors.

A SLIVER REBORN

52-54 EAST END AVENUE. Since 1983 when the "sliver" ban went into effect and the legislation was approved, FRIENDS felt that we were free of this strange phenomenon. In 1984 the regulations even got tighter. But during these 3 years, very bright people learned how to creatively read the text of the "sliver" law and how to interpret it so that its intent and spirit could be circumvented. If you see a "sliver" building going up at No. 52-54 East End Avenue, and if you ask yourself, how come? this is how: the loophole inherent in the text is getting it built, in spite of the immediate community's opposition and in spite of legal action. FRIENDS was party to a suit trying to prevent the disfiguration of the neighborhood, but the Department of Buildings approved the plans for a cleaver-shaped "sliver", leaning on lower adjoining buildings (with some consequent damage to one), and the BSA reaffirmed the interpretation. Thus, the judge felt that he could not go against two city agencies which had agreed that the proposed plans were acceptable. Even before losing this one, FRIENDS communicated with Chairman Sturz of the CPC requesting that the "sliver law" be amended, and especially be simplified, for its "clarifications" open the way for tampering.

OTHER ISSUES
FROM THE
SUBLIME TO
THE LESS
SUBLIME

We have been involved in so many preservation issues, from the successful effort to approve the Environmental Quality Bond Act, to the unfortunate cutting down of the CENTRAL PARK WISTERIA and the removal of the PERGOLA which held the vines aloft, to the HENRY MOORE sculpture in the pond (we feel that sculptures should be on terra firma), to celebrating the return of the ST. GAUDENS' ADMIRAL ("damn the torpedos") FARRAGUT to Union Square, to objecting to the shadows that would be cast by the proposed towers on COLUMBUS CIRCLE, shadows that would reach as far as the Metropolitan Museum. We could add more and more items which we accumulate since our support or opposition is sought, depending upon the circumstances, but listing all of it would fill more pages than we have already done.

CURB CUTS FOR THE HANDICAPPED. We have had some curbs cut on the UES for those persons for whom getting off a curb is an impossible task. We are pleased with the modest progress in the right direction. But we want to see all streets and all sidewalks made accessible to all persons and will continue to press for more action; it is coming.

ADVERTISEMENTS ON ILLUMINATED TELEPHONE BOOTHS. FRIENDS does not wish to see these on residential streets of Historic Districts. We felt that advertising panels by cutting visibility, are dangerous to the person making a call. The ads on the booths do not benefit us. On the contrary, the calls are getting more expensive. We opposed this scheme by the NY Telephone Company and we submitted maps to the Mayor's office and to the Bureau of Franchise and indicated locations where such promotional devices were not welcome. We are pleased to report that we have been listened to.

NEWSTAND ON EAST 72ND STREET. Thanks to the work of the East 72nd Street Block Association, the intervention of Robert Dryfoos, and FRIENDS' support, the newstand has been removed. Trees now grow where it once stood.

HITACHI ILLUMINATED SIGN. Even though this sign was really located on a commercial street (1775 Broadway) it impacted the residential streets toward which its lights were beamed. Although we were unable to remove the sign altogether, we worked with the Department of Buildings, with CB5, etc. to try to turn it around or lessen its impact. The most helpful cooperation came after we contacted the General Manager of Hitachi, Ltd. We suspect that had we been dealing with him from the start we could have done more. As a result of our complaints, a compromise was achieved - the light is dimmer but (alas) still there.

AN ISSUE NOT
YET LAID TO
REST

THE RIZZOLI AND COTY BUILDINGS. The new tower behind these landmarks is going through yet another metamorphosis. The issue was dealt with at an Executive Session of the LPC, and the tower was approved on March 10, 1987. The Rizzoli and Coty buildings may become the new home of Henri Bendel (??)

KUDOS
FROM
FRIENDS

Our hats off to all of you, but especially to: Richard Meier for again winning three honor awards; to Red Grooms for exhibiting his work all over the world and finding a possible home for Ruckus Manhattan; and to Tony Wood for going to the J.M.Kaplan Fund (we loved having him at MAS, but are happy to see him so happy); and to David and Jo Karabell for having won our raffle prize of two round-trips to Europe.

ACCOLADES
FOR
FRIENDS

FRIENDS is proud of receiving recognition for its work. We made the Mayor's Management Report for 1986 (p. 315) which stated that, "The Commission was significantly helped in monitoring individual landmark buildings in Historic Districts, due to the increased assistance of the FRIENDS OF THE UPPER EAST SIDE HISTORIC DISTRICTS, which has developed successful self-monitoring models for historic districts and because of its success, the Commission (LPC) will use the Upper East Side model to encourage similar efforts in other parts of the City."

We have also received the Metropolitan Chapter of the Victorian Society's 1986 "Preservation Award", a Certificate of Appreciation from the East 79th Street Block Association, and have been made the custodians of the CERTIFICATE proclaiming that the Upper East Side Historic District is listed on the State and National Registers of Historic Places.

CONCLUSION

This newsletter is "OVERBUILT"! It is a double issue! We realize that its length defeats its purpose since it has become something almost impossible to read. (If you are still with us, Bravo!) Our newsletters are too few. Blame time. We do too much. Blame only our inability to say "no" to anything. And, finally, blame the simple inability of some letter writers to be concise, clear, and brief. Pascal wrote, "I have made this letter longer than usual because I lack the time to make it shorter..." Do not blame Pascal, mea culpa.

MEMBERSHIP

Which brings us to our final words: We depend upon membership dues and contributions in order to do our work. All contributions are tax-deductible. Please become a volunteer--contributions of time and talent are also very important.

Edited by Halina Rosenthal, Alice McGown, and Susan Alpert

The Ruckus drawing of whispering brownstones is a gift from Red Grooms

...BE A FRIEND.....BE A VOLUNTEER...

YES! I want to help protect the Upper East Side by joining FRIENDS. Enclosed is:

____ \$15. Sr./Student
____ \$25. Contributing
____ \$50. Supporting
____ \$100. Sustaining
____ \$500. Patron
____ \$1,000. Best Friend
____ _____ Other

Please make all checks payable to Friends of the Upper East Side Historic Districts. All contributions are tax-deductible.

Name: _____
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NEW INDIVIDUAL LANDMARKS

Lucy Dahlgren House



Cherokee Apartments



1025 Park Avenue



Photo Credit: Stephen Senigo

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