

Fifth Avenue to flower in a concrete desert

NEW YORK'S fabulous Fifth Avenue, the world's most attractive shopping centre, has been saved from the developers.

Just when it looked like going the dreary way of its parallel neighbor, Sixth Avenue, the City Planning Commission stepped in.

The vital commercial area of The Avenue, between 34th and 59th Streets, has been rezoned a "special district."

A new plan will ensure that it will not decline like upper Sixth Avenue, which must be Manhattan's number one disaster area.

Developers have made upper Sixth a desert of office blocks, squeezing shops, restaurants and houses out of existence. In the daytime it is a surging mass of office workers; at night, it dies.

Mandate

Mayor John Lindsay's scheme for Fifth Avenue will seduce developers into not only retaining the street's best qualities, but also enhancing them.

Changes on the Avenue spurred him to remark: "Without some form of public intervention, the Avenue could be transformed from an international boulevard into a street lined with anonymous office buildings."

His planners propose that the new Fifth Avenue should continue to be a great shopping centre, and that enough people be allowed to live there so that it would remain alive 24 hours a day.

Their plan is to have a mandate for the future that all new buildings on the Avenue will have provisions for retailers.

Each new building will contain a certain percentage of floor space for retail business, and that percentage would determine the size of the construction.

Each developer will be encouraged to combine retail, office and residential buildings and those who provide more than the required store space will get a bonus of additional floor area to build apartments above their office towers.

A typical mixed use building would have small shops (or a single department store) on the bottom half-dozen floors; the next 20-odd floors would contain offices; and the top floors would house apartments.

A three-storey tall pedestrian arcade would run right through the block. These arcades would be lined with stores and restaurants similar to Sydney's Her Majesty's Arcade.

The man chosen by Mr Lindsay to supervise the revolutionary plan is former Rhodes scholar Jaquelin Robertson.

Mr Robertson will have more to do with the way Manhattan looks in a dozen years than perhaps anyone else in the city's history.

No newcomer to city planning, he and his carefully-selected imaginative staff

have already proposed plans for the new special theatre district which has encouraged Broadway developers to include theatres in their new office blocks.

For the past three years, Mr Robertson has been drawing imaginative plans for the whole of the midtown Manhattan section between the East and Hudson Rivers. His main aim has been the preservation of residential life, shopping areas and entertainment centres.

On paper, at least, he has been impressive. His new West Midtown development plan combines a vast new convention centre, three new piers for cruise ships, and a new mass public transport system with commercial and residential developments along the route.

But perhaps his proposals to preserve Fifth Avenue have been the most brilliant. He has come to grips with the driving force of New York real estate development — greed — to get things done clearly in the public interest.

For instance, the zoning laws stipulate that a developer may build an office tower 15 times the amount of square footage on which it is erected.

But under Mr Robertson's scheme, a developer who adds something to enhance the area, such as an arcade, a little park, extra shopping or residential space, would be allowed more lucrative office footage.

To guide future developers to do all they can to strengthen the avenue's retail trade, to assure the kind of 24-hour lifestyle that comes with having plenty of people live on a street, and so as to retain and accentuate its shape as a great urban space, Mr Robertson has come up with a series of highly flexible controls that will encourage developers to do all of these things in their own interests — and, possibly, even more.

These controls are embodied in a set of standards for that new "Special Fifth Avenue district."

Variety

They will force developers to build right up against the sidewalk line and provide pedestrian space in enclosed arcades. These will be roughly continuous because the proposed controls say they cannot be closer than 50 feet from Fifth Avenue.

His scheme will also force developers to include a percentage of retail space in any office tower, besides offering the carrot and stick of additional office space for further retail and residential space.

Mr Robertson is an irresistible conman who knows that when it comes to trading real estate in New York, only cash has its own reward. And he is determined to preserve Fifth Avenue as the most attractive shopping centre in the world.

—Fred Knight

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Plot Ratio
Bonuses
for Retail

+ Mandatory
Retail Reqs.

" Sunday
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PC

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T. Whipple

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FIRST