

A new set of rules to reshape New York

Incentive zoning could help revive Fifth Avenue and the rest of the city as well

As fancy department and specialty stores close their doors on Manhattan's historic but fading Fifth Avenue—Best & Co. was the latest—the city's real estate lords are mulling over plans to redevelop the abandoned sites. Under the *modus operandi* followed on Third and Park Avenues and Avenue of the Americas, this would mean turning the famous shopping street into ranks of office towers set back on cheerless plazas useful mainly for collecting windblown newspapers, and with unvaried fronts of banks and airline ticket offices.

But if New York's Planning Commission has its way, the rules for building on Fifth Avenue will change drastically, as they are changing elsewhere in the city. Its proposal for Fifth Avenue, in fact, is the latest unveiling of the most innovative effort any city has undertaken in years to harness private growth to a planned, public urban environment.

This week, Mayor John V. Lindsay proposed that Fifth Avenue between 38th and 59th streets be made a so-called special zoning district. Under the new rules, which the mayor calls "imaginative but practicable," any builder putting up a new structure must devote at least the street and mezzanine floors to retail uses. He must build right out to the sidewalk lot line and he cannot put any office entrances right on Fifth Avenue. If he will provide more than the minimum retail space demanded, he will be permitted to add desperately needed apartments above the office floors.

At least one builder likes the idea. Alden Realty & Development Corp.'s president, Arthur G. Cohen, stood by the mayor's side and revealed that he will put a 45-story building, including apartments, on the Best & Co. site. **Salvage operation.** The intention behind these proposed changes is to save Fifth Avenue's distinctive character as a high-quality shopping street. This makes sense, says architect Jaquelin T. Robertson, head of the city's Office of Midtown Planning & Development which worked out the plan, not only for the avenue's merchants but to preserve its contributions to midtown hotels, restaurants, and sidestreet shops. Introducing apartments into the area,

Robertson goes on, strengthens this objective and reverses 30-year-old zoning practice.

The city's concern for upgrading Manhattan's midtown environment was echoed by some important building managers and owners. This week more than 100 of them formed an association to deal with city problems, starting with a privately financed effort to clean up trash-strewn streets. Later, they will work on ways to provide more housing and reduce crime.

If the zoning becomes law, midtown Fifth Avenue will become the city's sixth special zoning district, its newest effort to turn dry-as-dust zoning ordinances into a creative tool of modern urban design. The basic tool: incentive zoning, which means, simply, that instead of telling builders what they can't do, as zoning ordinarily does, the zoning code requires them to include features the city wants in their building plans. In return, they are permitted to add valuable floor space to compensate for the extra costs.

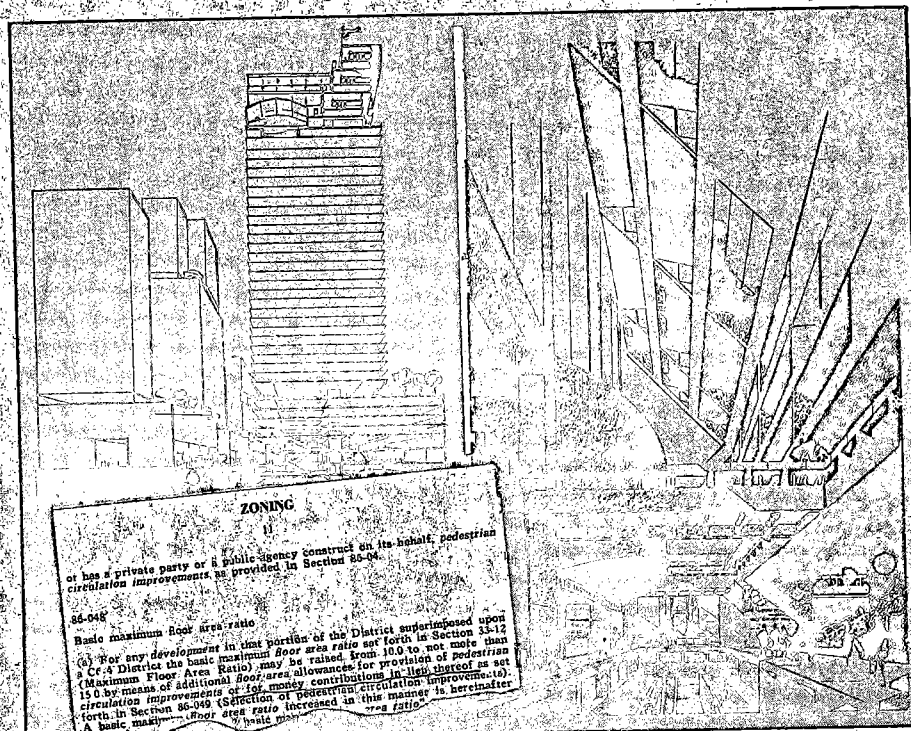
Prime example. What the city is up to shows up best in the most comprehensive new zoning district to date, the Greenwich Special Zoning District that lies in downtown west side Manhattan between Liberty Street and the Battery. Created last December, the district's zoning code offers a detailed

blueprint for developing one-third of lower Manhattan into a planner's paradise that, hopefully, businessmen and the public also will like. Richard Weinstein, Robertson's counterpart at the Office of Lower Manhattan Development, calls it "the most significant piece of zoning legislation we've ever had."

For each zoning lot in the district, the law specifies mandatory and elective improvements the builder must carry out: an enclosed pedestrian bridge, an underground concourse to the subway, an elevated shopping deck spanning the street. It specifies the type and location of certain retail space the builder must provide. And it specifies the floor space bonus he may build. Where a builder wants the floor space bonus but no improvement is specified, he may contribute money to a city fund to upgrade subway stations.

The plan is clearly taking hold. Developers of a new Bankers Trust Co. building, for example, will install an above-street pedestrian walkway linking their building to the mammoth World Trade Center across Liberty Street. They are also paying \$2-million of the costs of an underground concourse connecting the building to the U.S. Steel Co. building across Church Street, with access to the subway.

As the Greenwich district is redevelop-



Inspiration: Out of a prosaic code will come retail-office-apartment buildings for Fifth Avenue (left) and a promenade behind Avenue of Americas skyscrapers.