

SCATTERSITE HOUSING FOR FOREST HILLS & OTHER BATTLES

ARTICLE IV: Choosing a Site.

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WORKING CLASS resident of Queens brooded in his living room and pined a question: "Why Forest Hills?" His gaze dropped to the formica-top table at which he was sitting. "I'll tell you why," he said, answering his own question. "It's because Lindsay thought it was a soft-touch community and the liberal Jews wouldn't object. Well, he didn't expect this opposition and, boy, we're giving it to him good. They think they got us up against the wall, eh? Well, this is my way of protesting against the establishment."

The man who spoke, an active demonstrator against the low-income scatterite project the city is trying to build in his area, echoes the sentiments of many of his neighbors in largely Jewish Forest Hills.

Why, indeed, Forest Hills?
To answer the question, it is necessary to investigate the criteria, both federal and local, used to determine where to put a scatterite project. It's also useful to explore the economic, social and political limitations imposed on site selection and to take a look at the other proposed scatter sites.

Whatever the answer to "why Forest Hills?," a corollary question must be asked: "Why Forest Hills?" In the neighborhood itself, the answer is not the dominant feeling is that the Jews are being pushed out, asked to shoulder an undue share of the burden of curing social ills.

One politician said to urban specialist Rep. Edward Koch: "When the Germans squandered in Elgin, they got their teeth with Lindsay, and the Italians in Corona, you, too, Jews, though, went only once to see you saw the settlement was split in Forest Hills. The other ethnic groups get their way but the Jews were used."

Rep. Edward Koch thinks along the same lines: "It's not that they want to punish Jews," he said, waving his forefinger for emphasis, "but they thought they would be easier victims, that they wouldn't fight back. Well, it's another six-day war for us and we will win."

Do the facts bear out the feeling that Forest Hills, as a Jewish community, was singled out to take the brunt of the scatterite experiment?

"That's a lot of nonsense," said James Messia, Assistant Director of Program Planning of the Housing Authority, who is involved in the selection of sites. "I did an ethnic survey of every scatterite in the pipeline. If anything, the preponderant ethnic group affected is the Italian, or a combination of Irish and Italian."

A review of the sites, as well as been held since. While neighborhoods in New York City "outside of areas of minority concentration"—as the HUD guidelines call for—"have shown significant Jewish populations, there is no evidence that Jewish neighborhoods are being especially chosen for scatterite projects."

Still, Forest Hills to be far the largest named project with 840 units (the next largest is Lindenwood with 220 units). That project was virtually killed when it had a go back to the Board of Estimate on a "selectivity" and feeling understandably runs high there that the neighborhood was chosen "wrong" it was Jewish.

The history of the selection of that site 815 acres of marshy land adjoining Horace W. King, lends fuel to these suspicions. The project was first approved by the Housing Commission in June, 1969, except it wasn't in Forest Hills but in a store's

mostly Italian 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.

The Forest Hills community, at that time, was not consulted. After a short and stormy public hearing, the switch went speedily approved by both the Planning Commission and the Board of Estimate and the long struggle began.

A review of the 24 scatterites designated by the Housing Authority points to one clear conclusion: If Jews are not necessarily the target of this racial experiment, lower-middle class people (they Jewish, Irish, Italian, Polish or even black—er.

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Ten of the project sites called "scatterite" in HA press releases are, in reality, under other "turnkey" spouses (built by a private developer and bought by the city) or urban renewal programs and, thus, can be found even if they are not strictly outside the ghetto. Most of those 10 are in decaying or transitional neighborhoods. Some of the others are in areas—such as 180th St. and Montauk Av. in the Bronx—which were stable when the sites were selected but have changed drastically since.

Nine of the projects are exclusively for the elderly, and all but one of the remaining 15 to 25 per cent set aside for senior citizens. In fact, the New York City scatterite program, as it shapes up now, provides more housing for the elderly than it does for young low-income families. About 84 per cent of the total 6512 units are slated for elderly residents.

Since the scatterite program was launched back in 1966, only three projects, or 1,090 units, have been built and rented:

Lattimer Gardens in Flushing with 423 units, 33 per cent occupancy by the elderly; the 287-unit CR per cent elderly; Throgs Neck (Bronx) addition to an already existing low-income project of 1,183 units and the 380-unit Cassidy Pl., Staten Island, complex, exclusively for senior citizens.

That leaves nine sites in neighborhoods roughly comparable to the Forest Hills site (which is not in affluent North Forest Hills but on the periphery of the neighborhood), including Lattimer Gardens, the only

Koch Another Six-Day War.

one completed. Besides Lattimer Gardens, Forest Hills and the now "outman" Lindenwood site, there is one other in Queens—the site at 71st Av. and 134th St.—but the start of construction there is being stalled by land acquisition problems and other difficulties.

Four of the comparable sites are in the Bronx: 2440 Buxton Rd., 205 units (all elderly); Bailey Av. and W. 184th St., 223 units; Fort Independence-Health Av., four blocks south of Bailey Av., 244 units; and 2023 Middletown Rd., 79 units (all elderly). There is one site comparable to Forest Hills in Brooklyn: at Meeker Av. and North Henry St., 112 units but this one, too, is exclusively for the aged.

Overwhelmingly, these projects are in blue-collar, though relatively stable, white neighborhoods, often with small-homeowners.

And, while their relatively small size fits more closely than Forest Hills the original ideal of scatterite, there is still widespread community opposition to the ones that are not exclusively for the elderly.

The proposed Fort Independence-Health Av. project and the proposed Bailey Av. project, just four blocks away, are in the Kingsbridge Rd. section of the Bronx, a mixed Irish and Jewish neighborhood of apartments and frame houses. In January, the white residents staged a night picket at the Fort Independence site to which hundreds of supporters swarmed in from Forest Hills. People there have echoed the Forest Hills fears about rising crime and overburdened services. Forest Hills leader Jerry Milbach has visited the community to speak against the project.

"This is not basically a middle-class area," explains David Rosenberg, a member of the neighborhood Community Planning Board 7, "but lower middle-class, and there are very poor people in the old structures. I'm not against scatterite as a rule but one scatterite in the area would have sufficed."

East Magazine

Other repeated complaints are that services are overburdened and that the community's wishes were ignored.

"We have a poor bus system, we have no medical facilities," said one member of the Fort Independence Civic Assn., "and nobody ever asks us our opinion about anything. We're like a discarded area. You'd think we're in the boonies. The communities that border most get the most. Well, we're starting to border."

People in the neighborhood constantly bring up the subject of building scatterites in upper income areas. "Why don't they build a project like this in Poconos Estates? They got 6000 acres," suggests Isadore Berger, chairman of the Community Planning Board, which rejected both sites but was overruled.

The Faraday Wood episode in Riverdale still ranks in the Kingsbridge section. In 1967, the city tried to build a development of about 200 units, with only 20 per cent going to low-income tenants, in a parcel of land at Mosholu Pkwy. and 203rd St. called Faraday Wood. It was killed by property owners. Residents of the Kingsbridge section are quick to point out that Rep. Bludis, who lives in Riverdale and backs the Forest Hills project and other scatterites, did not actively support the project at Faraday Wood.

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City officials, with regret, admit that wealthy white areas shouldering their share of the burden.

"The man of great wealth can always remove himself and his problems," said Albert Walsh, "He can just move. And it's going to be that way as long as we have the free enterprise system. The trick is to disperse housing in such a way so that people don't feel the need to move."

Besides the fact that people in luxury areas usually have political clout, another barrier to construction of low-income housing in upper income areas is the high cost of land in such neighborhoods.

Faraday Wood was only made thinkable because a public-spirited developer was willing to sell the land at less its market value, according to Administrator Walsh.

Possible locations for scatterite projects are further limited. "The fact is we simply don't have good sites for public housing," says HA Chairman Golar, ruefully. "Private builders would give what's desirable and marketable. We get the leftovers."

When selecting a site, the city looks for vacant or under-utilized land in the outlying area of the city, thereby avoiding relocation expenses. All these limits imposed on site selection make the choosing of the Forest Hills site more understandable. Beyond that parcel of land is one extremely uninviting feature: a stream, causing a squabbling about its use and creating a barrier. Filings for the foundation have to sink deep into the land.

The HUD criteria for site selection put further limits on planners. Besides being outside of areas of minority concentration, the sites must meet a comprehensive set of guidelines, ranging from the need for low-income housing through job opportunities and the provision of a sound housing management program. HUD rates project sites as "superior" or "adequate" to receive federal funds but, given the economic realities, sites with only "adequate" ratings move to the rear of the line for federal funds and become, unofficially, dead.

Federal funds for any scatterite project in 1972, though, are scarce. Discussions are already exhausted so discussions of construction in the near future are strictly academic.

Continued Tomorrow.



Ft. Independence in the Bronx... another battleground.
