

ARTICLE V: The Future. By ANTHONY MANCINI and ROBERTA BRANDES GRAZT.

WORK PERSISTS on Federal Code Number NY-108-108. The issue is before the courts and in the political arena but the slouchy class of the pilot driver, the one a night worker who sleeps on Colonial Avenue and thrust a pillow over his head. It has, of course, become automatic by now to observe that more than a housing project is being built on 118th St. and Colonial Ave. on a parcel of land owned by the Queens neighborhoods of Forest Hills and Rego Park. The reality that, up to now, in a fenn, a hole and a contractor's shanty has become the symbol of a housing philosophy and of a resistance movement that can only be described as a middle-class revolt. What does the Forest Hills agency tell us about the future of scattersite housing?

Some politicians think the Forest Hills controversy has been as badly botched that, in the words of the neighborhood Democratic State Sen. Emanuel Gold (who faces Jerry Blatner's challenge in the coming primary), it has "set back public housing 10 years." Democratic Rep. Edward Koch (Man.) adds: "The handling of Forest Hills has been so ungracious and so antagonistic that it winds up killing scattersite housing in bona fide projects."

While such statements may be interpreted as politically self-serving and it might equally be argued that the well-thought community opposition in response to stalling progress in public housing, there is some doubt that the Forest Hills controversy has had, in the short run, anyway, a harmful impact on public housing and has widened a kind of local credibility gap.

The Lindenwood project is a good example. That project of 500 units was contracted to limbo when it led to be in December to the Board of Estimate for a similar change at the peak of the Forest Hills controversy. Given the climate of the time, it was no wonder that no action was taken (it may figure in some future compromise over Forest Hills, insiders say). Such an atmosphere, say city officials, contributed to the delay in action to make a further compromise, such as including middle-income residents in one of the sites proposed building before the action forced to consider an accommodation because of law suits.

"Changing the income-mix there would require going back to the Board of Estimate," said HA Chairman Coloz, "and considering the hysteria around now, that is really a frightful prospect."

Littoner Quaden, the 425-unit scattersite project in Flushing which was completed two years ago is often pointed out as a paragon of successful scattersite housing by housing officials. However, it is very difficult, for many reasons, to compare that project with the one of Forest Hills. First of all, it has less than half the number of units (53 per cent of which are for the elderly), does not front on any large built-up complex as in Forest Hills, and, with four buildings 10 stories high, blends more easily into the neighborhood.

Yet some people think that, if it were under construction today, it too would meet stiff community opposition. "They first started construction on the project (Littner) about four years ago," pointed out Robert Zelig of the Center for the East Abraham in Flushing. "The situation entirely reversed itself because the climate in the city was a little quaker. I think, if they started this thing here today, it would be another story. There would be plenty of opposition."

What is behind the middle-class uprising in Forest Hills, the trend is toward 80 units of low-income housing and in Lindenwood, against 500 units, also low-income. But in Joe Garbino's comparable anger was directed against a Lefrak middle-class development of 420 units over the railroad development of 420 units over the railroad. In the Harbor Village, a middle-income, garden complex.

Community protests have a familiar ring: services are overtaxed, schools overcrowded, plagued with discipline problems.

SCATTERSITE HOUSING FOREST HILLS & OTHER BATTLES



Even middle-income housing like Lefrak can't escape the anger.

RONNEY Central cities need help.

WALSH A further-out problem.

There is considerable, although not unqualified, support for the project in the neighborhood and also from groups, Jewish and non-Jewish, citywide. Besides the newly-formed Forest Hills Neighbors, the Anti-Defamation League, American Jewish Congress, the Queens Council for Better Housing and other groups and individuals support the project.

Many of them, however, favor some form of further compromise and a cooling of tensions on all sides. Perhaps, though, it is too late for compromise in Forest Hills. It may indeed be "the Selma, Alabama" of scattersite. But can the experience teach us something? Humanizing the situation could take the form, in the future, of more pleasing, low-rise architecture, wherever the economics allow. The present Forest Hills plans call for three, towering 23-story buildings with great expanses of open space. Because of rising construction costs, the HA dropped consideration of an earlier plan which some architects with respect considered environmentally better suited Forest Hills.

The original plan called for apartments and community facilities in rows of two-story structures arranged to form a pedestrian street connected to three 17-story towers and one 23-story building for the elderly. The pedestrian street and two-story houses with mixed facilities was designed to create a more human, neighborhood atmosphere in the project (although it is highly doubtful it would have satisfied more radical members of the Forest Hills Residents' Assn.). There would also have been much more open space than the present plans envision.

"The idea that you have to build high

is often a myth," contends Richard Satlin, a housing project manager with the New York Urban Coalition. Satlin, who is in charge of the Coalition's fight to limit middle-income, vest pocket housing in the Red Hook section of Brooklyn, feels that, while some of the cost arguments may be justified, "often they build high rises because it's always been done that way and it just takes more time and imagination to innovate. The bureaucracy is suspicious of change."

The Coalition is also in the low-income, scattersite business, building a project in East New York, with the cooperation of the HA. But the scattersite project here, called City Line II, is more in the classic, vest-pocket tradition of the concept. Originally, the plan was to build 10 three-story, two-family townhouses on vacant land parcels in East New York. Even there, however, community opposition, engendered partly by the Forest Hills controversy, resulted in cutting down the plans by about half. The remainder, under the turnkey program, will eventually be owned by the low-income tenants.

"Our buildings will blend into the neighborhood," said project director Arthur J. Reiger. "Each building will house only two families in either duplex or duplex apartments. They'll have individual entrances and no common open, like hallways and elevators."

"The design factors a feeling of ownership and family-style living," Reiger, a landlord, project manager, added. "When you come home at night, you're coming home to your own unit, not to a slab of eight doors in a long corridor. There will be private entrances, a little backyard, the design will be simple and, with less shared space, they will be able to maintain and that will save a lot of money."

Reiger, who himself grew up in public housing, favors lower density but greater land use. "In my experience, open space like this plan in Forest Hills becomes a no-man's land," he said. "They become junkie hangouts and dangerous at night."

City officials insist, however, that projects like City Line II, though less desirable when they work, are often not economically feasible and will never match the magnitude of the Forest Hills, which complain that the project's rehabilitation of old structures.

Yet evidence is growing that there may be a relationship between design and crime in public housing. Recently, a study was

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begun by Prof. Oscar Newman of NYU's graduate school of Public Administration, exploring the impact of high-rise and other design features on crime and vandalism rates. While the study is not complete, and no conclusions have been reached, the preliminary results of a comparison between two projects on opposite ends of Bione Av. in Brooklyn, provide food for thought. The population density of the two complexes is almost identical, around 288 persons per acre, although the Van Dyke Houses are about 20 per cent larger.

The main difference between the projects is design. The Bionoville-style "rings" between three and six stories; the Van Dyke buildings rise 14 stories high. The study found that the Van Dyke Houses had 60 per cent more total crime, with over 2 1/2 times as many robberies, and 60 per cent more felonies and misdemeanors. In addition, the Van Dyke Houses, though eight years "younger," have 72 per cent more maintenance jobs and a much higher move-out rate.

So a more careful approach to design may brighten the future of public housing. Most housing theorists also feel that the future of low-income housing rests on a mix of housing from the inner city to outer city—more commonly known as the suburbs.

HUD is currently making a frontal assault on those bastions of exclusionary zoning laws and taxes which not only serve as bedroom communities for the despoiled cities but are developing into urban centers.

"It's impossible," says HUD Secretary George Romney, "to solve the problems of housing in the central cities alone."

Suburban Action Institute agrees. SAI is a non-partisan, lobbying, justice organization committed to opening up housing opportunities in the suburbs which have profited themselves out of the housing crash of low-income people essential to their continued development, such as janitors, bus drivers and blue-collar workers in the suburbs and burgeoning industries, not to mention senior citizens and young marrieds.

"Westchester County," said New York HDA Administrator Albert Walsh, "has an absolute housing shortage. They want to build multi-family units down there because they're concerned that their own taxpayers are moving out to Rockland and Putnam counties."

Meanwhile, SAI has moved into the county zoning and other restrictive zoning laws and the restrictions that bar the suburban areas to many low-income people even when their private development would be profitable. SAI has already succeeded in getting zoning laws struck down in Madison, N. J., and in Westchester County. It has also won a New Census, Conn. and other suburban towns. On another front, a federal district court threw out zoning laws in Leekstown, N. Y. and the decision was upheld by the U. S. Supreme Court.

Another sign of hope for the future comes from the introduction in the Senate of a resolution to strip the right of eminent domain from the Federal Housing Administration (FHA). A key element of the resolution is to strip the right of eminent domain in some water-dredged farm, is incentive to the communities to which low-income housing is sent.

These incentives, including a special grant to cover the cost of increased services and the way to make the project more viable by the project, would go a long way toward breaking the objections of people, as in Forest Hills, who complain that the project's residents would further overburden their jobbed services.

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