

Planners Bend in Landmarks Battle

By ROBERTA B. GRATZ

The city Planning Commission has revised a controversial proposal that would give the final go-ahead to a precedent-setting midtown development project that includes the preservation of the landmark Villard Houses at Madison Av. and 50th St.

The revisions made in executive session late yesterday appear to take into account the strong opposition raised by the Landmarks Preservation Commission and community groups, The Post has learned.

The revisions clarify jurisdictional responsibilities of the two agencies — leaving architectural and design issues squarely with the preservation agency and leaving zoning and density matters with the planning agency. Earlier drafts of the legislation gave powers to the planning agency already assigned by law to the landmarks agency.

Landmark Safeguards

The legislation would establish a long-needed mechanism for the preservation of landmarks in midtown and downtown areas without hindering new development.

The revised draft — still not fully worked out — was arrived at yesterday by the planning agency after a week of intensive work aimed at resolving inter-agency differences and public concerns. Commission sources indicated last night that the most controversial aspects have been ironed out but, they noted, further revisions could come

since the proposal must still be presented to the landmarks agency, must be considered at public hearings by community boards and the Planning Commission, and then given final approval by the Board of Estimate.

The legislation would enable developer Harry Helmsley to proceed with his plan — announced a year and a half ago — to incorporate the 1880s landmark into the plans of a new hotel-office-residential tower. It would also affect future development proposals that include the preservation of a landmark in the high density, commercial areas between 34th and 59th Streets and in Lower Manhattan.

Reworked Provisions

According to Planning Commission sources, the revisions now provide:

¶ A bulk or FAR (floor area ratio) limit of 18, the maximum now permitted for builders who provide special amenities such as plazas and arcades; the earlier draft allowed a developer a double bonus with a maximum 21.6 FAR.

¶ The Landmarks Commission a final say on issues concerning historic, significance, architectural harmony between the old and new buildings, and the maintenance program for the landmark. The earlier draft, in effect, would have given the planning agency veto power over such decisions by the landmarks agency.

When questions arise concerning the interiors of designated landmarks that are

not themselves designated landmarks, the judgment on the historic significance of those interiors would be left to the Landmarks Commission.

The Villard Houses — an Italian Renaissance palazzo designed by the architectural firm of McKim, Mead & White — were, until a few years ago, the headquarters of the Archdiocese of New York and the Random House publishing firm. The U-shaped building is actually five brownstone structures with a common facade facing a courtyard. It was constructed for journalist and railroad magnate Henry Vil-

lard, who occupied the south wing and sold adjacent houses to friends.

In the year and a half since Helmsley proposed the marriage of landmark and skyscraper, his plan has been radically modified and most of the early controversial design and preservation issues have been resolved. The Landmarks Commission gave its final approval in November 1975.

Egypt's Outasight Law

CAIRO (AP)—Parliament passed a law yesterday forbidding Egyptians to drink any alcoholic beverage in public.

TIE UP
A MAIL

