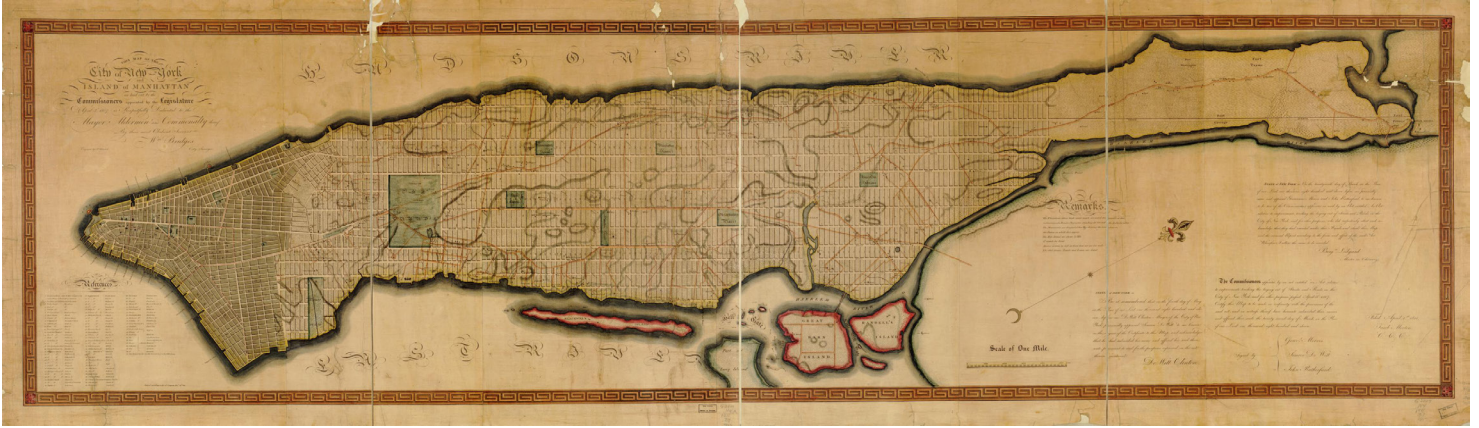


No Joke

Plans and Counterplans in Downtown Manhattan

Michael Robinson Cohen



William Bridges and Peter Maverick. *This map of the city of New York and island of Manhattan, as laid out by the commissioners appointed by the legislature, April 3rd 1807, is respectfully dedicated to the mayor, alderman and commonalty thereof.* (New York: 1811)

A city is often portrayed as a magnificent discord of forces that cannot be contained. Any attempt to mediate the expansive and dissonant thrust of the urban is believed to be not only futile but antithetical to the nature of the city. The classic Yiddish proverb, “we plan, god laughs,” is typically evoked in relation to the everyday life planning of people, but perhaps the better joke is any endeavor to plan cities. However, the dismissal of planning that underlies the above adage, can also be interpreted as a means to conceal the planning that is fundamental to reproduce the existing power structure. Such a coercive rationale is evident in the ideology of free market capitalism. Insistence that an invisible hand guided by the organic logic of supply and demand stabilize the capitalist economy, obscures the non-competitive coordination and cooperation that is critical to maintain commodity exchange. Similarly, the characterization of the city as unplanned, masks the reality of how life and material are managed and organized in urban space. Implemented to cloak how the city is fashioned to sustain capital, private property and profit driven development, this process of mystification, is, in fact, the direct outcome of planning. In the form of both regulation and calculated deregulation, planning primes the land of the city for exploitation by private interest while ensuring that the biased character of the underlying plan is not fully evident to the public. New York City is a prime example of this condition. The scale and dynamism of the five boroughs certainly defy the notion of a comprehensive plan, yet, in no other place are finance and real-estate power fostered more fully to exploit land and resources. Although the Yiddish aphorism positions the act of planning as a laughing matter, in reality the punchline of the joke is not the attempt to plan but rather failure to see that a plan exists. At the risk of ruining a good joke by explaining it, this essay attempts to unpack the plan that does exist in New York City with the aim of contemplating the possible origins of a counterplan.

PLANNING WITHOUT A PLAN

The New York City Department of City Planning (DCP) plans but it does not have a plan. In 1969, with the support of the federal government, the DCP devised a comprehensive plan that considered development and demographic trends across the entire city. Due to lobbying by real estate interests, the Planning Commission did not adopt the document.⁰¹ In absence of a masterplan, the DCP was left to mobilize planning logics across a subdivided territory. In New York City, the grid block structure organizes the land, while zoning determines its use. Both the grid and zoning are seemingly objective apparatuses; however, further scrutiny reveals their utility for advancing profit driven growth, especially in the absence of a plan that operates across the entire city. The commissioners' plan of 1811 set forth the original design of Manhattan's grid system. Consisting of standard twenty-five-by-one hundred-foot lots, this rectilinear pattern creates discrete plots that can be bought, sold and held as property. Avoiding the omnidirectional compositional designs of European cities, the strictness of the grid's geometry is essentially a physicalized real estate ledger that obliterates nature and subjugates it to an abstract rationale.⁰² Despite its totalizing breadth, the grid in itself delimits planning beyond the bounds of each block. As Rem Koolhaas, Madelon Vriesendorp and Zoe Zenghelis's project *The City of the Captive Globe* demonstrates, unending architectural speculation is imaginable within the block, but the uniformity of the gridiron always remains.⁰³

For over one hundred years, from the 1811 Commissioner's report to New York's first Zoning Resolution in 1916, minimal regulation existed on the development and use of each parcel. During this period, relentless construction of a dense building fabric significantly impacted the health and safety of the New York's inhabitants. The zoning code—which was rewritten in 1961 but largely remains intact—aimed to mitigate squalid living conditions and improve the quality of air and light at street level by establishing rules of land-use, building form and open space.⁰⁴ Residential, commercial and manufacturing are the three land-uses authorized by the zoning ordinance. While some commercial and residential districts overlap, manufacturing uses are always isolated in order to ensure the separation of the public from hazardous industrial pollutants. In conjunction with land-use specifications, zoning restrains architectural form primarily with height limits and floor area ratios (FAR). As a determinant of building bulk, FAR is a metric that stipulates the amount and distribution of floor area on a site. Enforcement of the Zoning Resolution is the primary responsibility of DCP in conjunction with the Office of the Mayor, The City Council, and the police department. While the resolution organizes the city into districts that span multiple blocks, zoning is a planning device that reinforces the lot-based organization of the grid. Rules apply independently to each parcel. In order to ensure the livability of a place, zoning nominally infringes upon what a landowner can build, but the laws in no way challenge the sanctity of private property.

In this way, zoning strikes a balance between private interest and collective social reproduction. Ostensibly, the code exists to safeguard the populace from the unfettered desire of a proprietor to capitalize on their property. Yet, zoning does not exist in an antagonistic relationship with the capitalist mode of production. As a product of the progressive era in the United States, the principal function of the parameters of zoning is to stabilize the ground of commodity exchange, individual ownership and wealth accumulation. Rather than simply serving the public good, the regulatory frameworks of land-use planning uphold the societal stability

01 Tom Angotti, "Land Use and Zoning Matter," in *Zoned Out! Race, Displacement, And City Planning in New York City*, eds. Tom Angotti and Syliva Morse (New York: New Village Press, 2023), 10.

02 Rem Koolhaas, *Delirious New York* (New York: Monacelli Press, 1994), 20.

03 *Ibid.*, 294.

04 Angotti, 10.

that secure future profits and return on investment. Government oversight therefore exists to a degree that guarantees the continuation of enterprise alongside a healthy public of individuals capable of fulfilling their roles as workers and consumers.⁰⁵ It is thus evident that zoning structures the city to advance social reproduction that solely aligns with existing power structure in relation to capital, but also, devastatingly, aligned to exploitative hierarchies of race. Historically, zoning was part of the systematic legal regime of redlining that segregated people of color and denied them access to homeownership and consequently the generational wealth it enables.⁰⁶ While elaborating a complete history of racialized zoning is not possible within the extents of this essay, it is critical to recognize that land-use and planning policies are not objective or merely practical and rational. Instead, they work in concert with existing institutions of power.

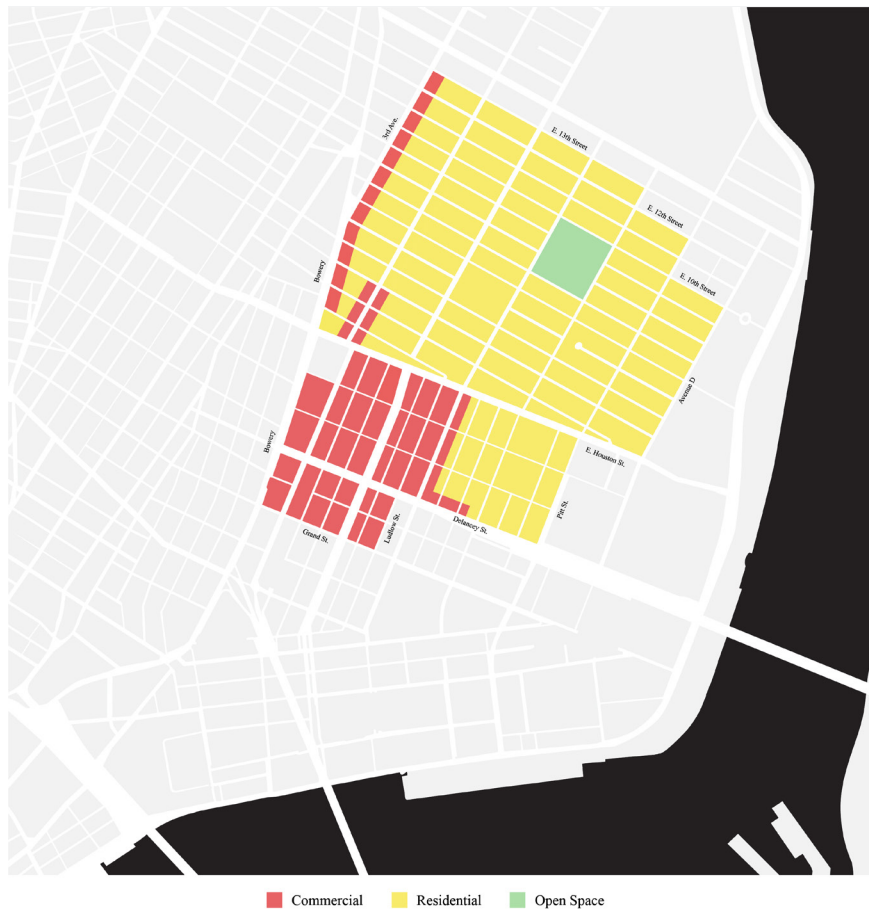
PLANS

Legal and technical language often conceal the bias of zoning rules. To move beyond this technocratic façade, the paper turns to two recent zoning proposals for downtown Manhattan. In 2008, the DCP began the process of rezoning the East Village and northern part of the Lower East Side. This procedure was initiated in response to years of discussion with the community board about intense development pressure in both neighborhoods.⁰⁷ In the 1970s, when the city went bankrupt, this area of Manhattan was inhabited by working class communities of color, who labored largely without governmental funds to rebuild the severely decaying housing stock and establish grassroots support networks. Despite their autonomous efforts, residents faced displacement beginning in the 1990s when Rudy Giuliani was elected mayor and worked to prime the neighborhood for real estate investment. The eastern portion of downtown Manhattan was particularly attractive to speculative interest because of an abundance of vacant lots—many of which were community garden sites—and the minimal restrictions on building heights. After a period of unbridled construction that significantly changed the district's character and built form, local activists and politicians successfully lobbied the DCP to implement a contextual downzoning to preserve what remained of the historic building fabric and attempt to retain a modicum of affordability for the longstanding, now marginalized, residents.

05 Samuel Stein, *Capital City: Gentrification and the Real Estate State* (London: Verso, 2019), 30-31. See also Richard E. Foglesong, *Planning the Capitalist City: The Colonial Era to the 1920s* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986).

06 For more information on this subject see Richard Rothstein, *The Color of Law* (New York: Liveright Publishing Corporation, 2017).

07 Christine Haugney, "High-Rises Are at Heart of Manhattan Zoning Battle," in *The New York Times*, Nov. 14 2008, <https://www.nytimes.com/2008/11/15/nyregion/15zoning.html>



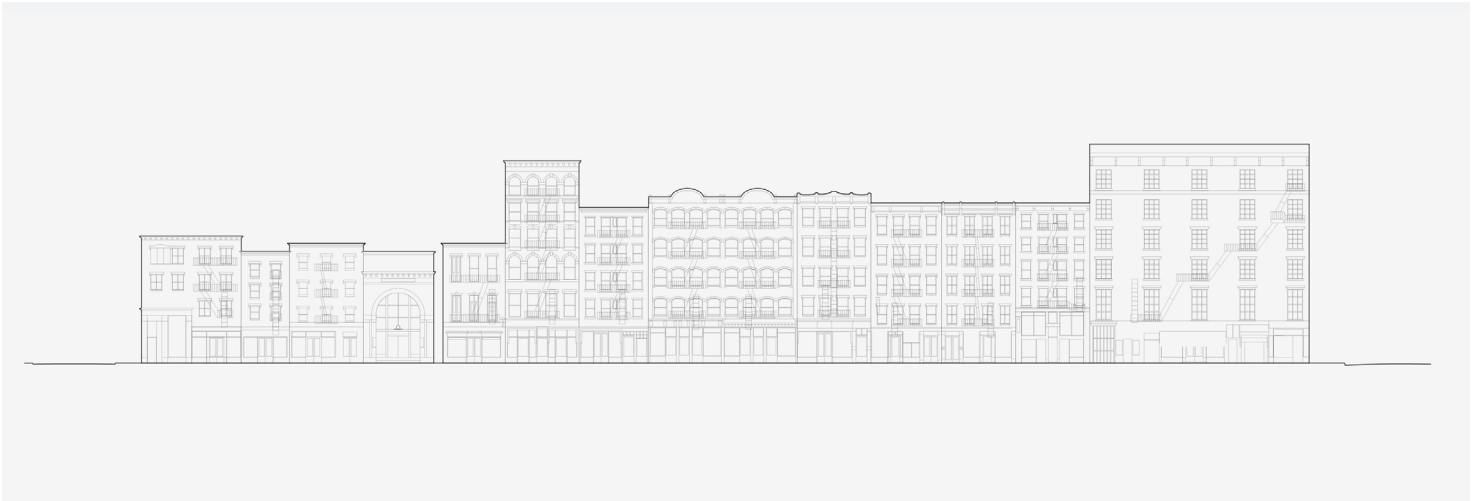
Blocks included in the East Village rezoning. Drawn by author.

According to the official DCP resolution, the East Village and Lower East Side rezoning plan had two fundamental goals. First, the plan intended to protect the existing “scale and character” of the neighborhood by imposing height limits.⁰⁸ The built fabric that the DCP aimed to conserve, primarily consisted of four to seven-story tenement type buildings with commercial space on the ground floor and residences above. Beginning in the eighteenth century, generations of Irish, Jewish, Puerto Rican and Chinese immigrants occupied this building stock. Without the protective zoning measures proposed by the DCP, these tenements, alongside the community gardens mentioned above, were susceptible to redevelopment because many of them did not maximize the allowable built floor area on their sites.⁰⁹ The unbuilt potential of these lots, which are typically labeled “soft sites” by city planners, made them desirable to real estate developers. Also, fueling the transformation of the district, was the fact that the existing non-contextual zoning designations, established in 1961, did not have fixed height limits or dictate the way in which a building occupied the ground.¹⁰ Thus, the contextual zoning plan devised by the DCP addressed the lack of restrictions on building form, particularly in relation to the scale of buildings and aligned the allowable floor area on a given site with that of the existing tenement structures.

08 Department of City Planning, “East Village/Lower East Side-Approved!”. Last modified November 19, 2008. <https://www.nyc.gov/assets/planning/download/pdf/plans/east-village-lower-east-side/evles.pdf>

09 Floor Area Ratio is calculated by dividing the total floor area of a building by the floor area of lot.

10 DCP, “East Village.”



Mulberry Street between Canal Street and Bayard Street.

Elevation redrawn based on New York City Department of Finance 1940s Survey.

From the exhibition, *Patterns of Change*, by Violette de la Selle and Wes Hiatt (New York: Citygroup, 2023).

The second ambition of the rezoning proposal was to offer “modest” incentives for the construction of both market-rate and affordable housing along wide streets and adjacent to public transportation.¹¹ While the plan was primarily a “downzoning,” meaning it restricted the admissible dimensions of future construction, it did permit larger development on broader streets, where taller buildings would not inhibit light and air reaching ground level. Pairing preservation with growth opportunities was standard DCP practice.¹² Further, conventional transit-oriented planning principles dictated allotment of higher population density near bus and subway routes. Inhabitants of such transit zones could therefore access affordable means of collective transportation and avoid commuting by car. Most importantly, the DCP plan incorporated an “inclusionary housing” mechanism as a device to generate the production of affordable housing. Enacted in 1987, this regulation provides a floor area bonus to projects that voluntarily contained a small portion of below market-rate units.¹³ In New York City, where the housing authority is severely underfunded, enticements like the inclusionary housing program is essentially the only way to produce affordable housing. A modicum of rent regulated apartments—it cannot be labeled ‘public’ because it is not built or owned by the state—is consequently produced as a byproduct of luxury residential construction. Additionally, the affordability of this housing is debatable because the mandated rent often remains inaccessible to low-income and even middle-income residents.¹⁴

As planning theorist Samuel Stein notes, the problem with the plan was not what it encompassed by rather what it left out.¹⁵ The extents of the plan were 111 blocks east of the bowery, primarily including the East Village above Houston Street and a portion of the Lower East side north of Delancey Street. Notably, this boundary does not include the Bowery, a substantial expanse of public housing that runs along the south-east coast of downtown Manhattan, the southern portion of the Lower East Side and Chinatown. If the DCP plan only protected an isolated region,

11 Ibid.

12 Samuel Stein, “Chinatown: Unprotected and Undone,” in *Zoned Out! Race, Displacement, And City Planning in New York City*, ed. Tom Angotti and Syliva Morse (New York: New Village Press, 2023), 12.

13 “Inclusionary Housing Program (IHP),” The Furman Center, accessed November 11, 2023, <https://furmancenter.org/coredata/directory/entry/inclusionary-zoning>

14 Affordability in New York City is determined as a percentage of Area Median Income (AMI) across the entire state of New York. This statewide statistic is impacted by the median incomes of residents in many of New York’s wealthy suburbs. Consequently, tying affordability to AMI results in rents that are out of reach for numerous New York City tenants.

15 Stein, “Chinatown,” 114.

local residents and activists exclaimed that development pressure would shift to these omitted districts. Conspicuously, there existed a significant economic and racial disparity between the demographics of the people living inside and outside the rezoning border: The wealthier and whiter East Village was deemed worthy of preservation by the DCP, while the Lower East Side and Chinatown, comprised of working-class people of color, were left to fend for themselves. Furthermore, the public housing estates were excluded at a moment when efforts to privatize social housing were increasing under the leadership of business executive turned Mayor Michael Bloomberg. At community board meetings and city mandated planning review sessions,¹⁶ Chinatown and LES tenants rightfully noted the racist character of the rezoning and contended that the DCP was intentionally diverting real estate speculation toward the less gentrified parts of downtown Manhattan, where low-income populations of color resided.¹⁷ Rather than call for the annulment of the rezoning proposal, the marginalized groups advocated for the scope of the plan to be expanded.

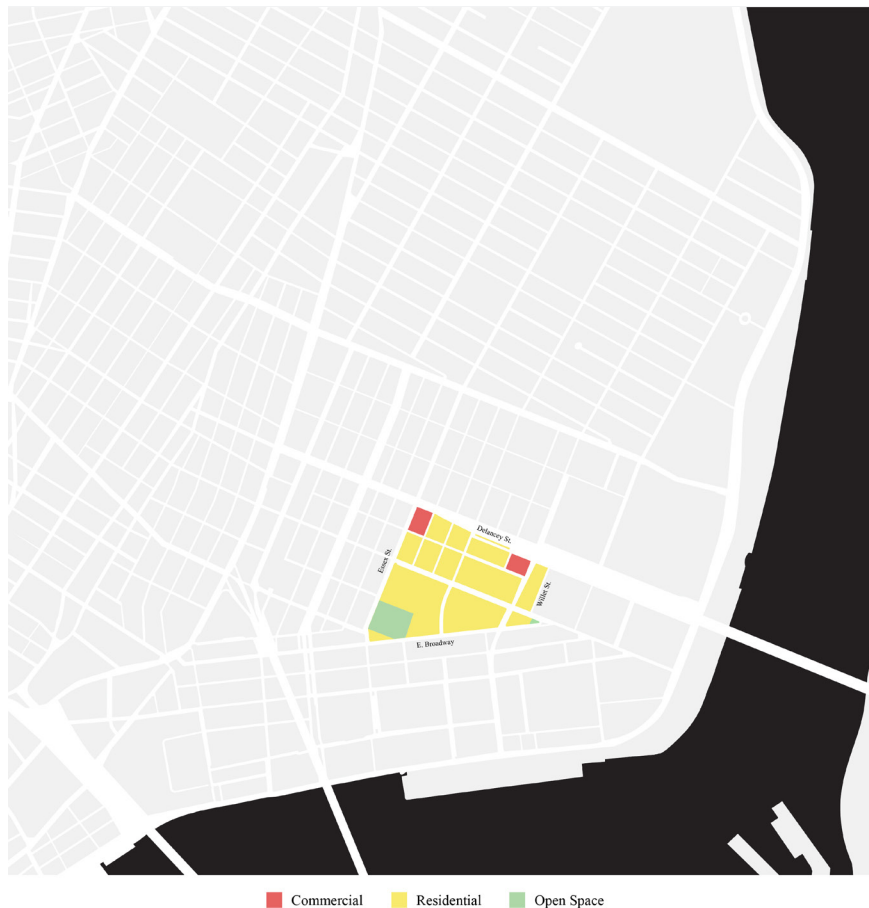
Despite concerted protests, the DCP ratified the East Village Plan. In short order the areas left unguarded were inundated with new construction. Instead of mitigating this growth, the city administration exploited the development trend by up-zoning a publicly owned site on the Lower East Side that had remained vacant for over four decades. Known as the Seward Park Urban Renewal Area (SPURA), the tenements that formerly occupied this fourteen-square block area directly south of the Williamsburg Bridge were cleared as part of a “sum clearance” program enacted by the city in the late 1960s. The destruction of the buildings resulted in the displacement of 1,852 Puerto Rican, African American, White and Chinese families, who were promised the right to return once the land was redeveloped.¹⁸ In collaboration with the United Housing Foundation (UHF)—the organization led by Abraham Kazan that sponsored and built many of cooperative housing complexes on the Lower East Side—the city government intended to construct housing for tenets of multiple income levels. Though the UHF dropped out of the project, the first phase successfully resulted in the completion of the Seward Park Extension towers. Despite the promised right to return, the 360 apartments in the two buildings were leased to primarily white residents. Ultimately, the former occupants of the site sued and were granted a portion of the dwellings, but this only accommodated a small number of the many uprooted people.¹⁹ Subsequently, two additional senior housing facilities were constructed, but despite many proposals from the community and outside developers, SPURA was largely used as parking lots for almost forty years.

16 The Uniform Land Use Review Procedure is the mandated process for revising the New York City Zoning Resolution. Public hearings are a required part of this procedure, however Community Board and resident input is purely advisory and not binding.

17 Haugney, “High-Rises.”

18 Gabrielle Bendiner-Viani, *Contested City: Art and Public History as Mediation at New York’s Seward Park Urban Renewal Area* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2018) 10.

19 *Ibid.*, 17.



Blocks included in the Seward Park urban renewal area. Drawn by Author.

In 2012, four years after the confirmation of the East Village Rezoning, the DCP in conjunction with the NYC Economic Development Corporation (EDC) released their preliminary rezoning plan for SPURA. While the official plan was based on goals outlined by local residents in collaboration with planners from the Pratt Institute,²⁰ the community board initially rejected the proposal because it did not include adequate amounts of affordable housing. After revision, the plan was approved and the DCP and EDC issued a request for proposals (RFP) in 2013.²¹ The RFP rebranded the district “Essex Crossing” and awarded the development of nine of the remaining SPURA parcels to a private entity. The city thus authorized an increase in building density and height on the site for the benefit of private real estate developers. Further, property taxes would not be collected on lots that included affordable housing. Undeniably, the work of city planners was to foster the advancement of the market. The winning scheme was submitted by Delancey Street Associates, a partnership of multiple development companies and Goldman Sachs, with design support from Dattner, Beyer Blinder Belle, SHoP architects among others. Slated for completion in 2024, in total, Essex Crossing will include a multitude of commercial offerings and according to the developer’s website 1,079 units of housing, of which 50 percent will be permanently affordable.²² Yet, this allocation of non-market rate apartments does not nearly address the need for low rent accommodations in New York City, let alone the dwelling needs of the residents promised a right of return. When the first 104 apartments were made available, 100,000 people applied for leases. The historic Essex Street Market, which was a vital community source

20 For a history of the Pratt Center see Roger Katan with Ronald Shiffman, *Rebuilding Together: Case Studies in Participatory Planning and Community Building* (New York: New Village Press, 2014), 4-13.

21 Bendiner-Viani, *Contested City*, 20.

22 “Essex Crossing,” LM Development Partners, accessed November 11, 2023, <https://lmdevpartners.com/projects/essex-crossing/>

of inexpensive and quality food, was also demolished and moved to a sleek space designed by SHoP.

COUNTERPLAN

During the same period that the city up-zoned SPURA, residents of Chinatown and the parts of the Lower East Side excluded from the East Village rezoning joined together to form the Chinatown Working Group (CWG) and write their own plan. With support from the Pratt Center for Community Development, the same entity that worked with the relocated SPURA tenets, over fifty community organizations, working in three languages, convened to develop the “Special Chinatown and Lower East River District.”



Blocks included in the Chinatown Working Group (CWG) plan. Drawn by Author

The CWG Plan promised to curtail displacement in downtown Manhattan and envisioned future development that increased access to affordable housing, community amenities and neighborhood-oriented small businesses. Critically, it honored the immigrant history of New York City and strived to preserve two of the last affordable neighborhoods in downtown Manhattan.²³ Unlike the “Voluntary Inclusionary Housing” provision included in the DCP East Village district, the community proposal decreed

23 The Pratt Center for Community Development and The Collective for Community, Culture and the Environment, “The Plan for Chinatown and Surrounding Areas: Preserving Affordability & Authenticity,” (December, 2013).

deep levels of affordability in all future housing developments and included protections against the conversion of public housing into market rate residences. Completed in 2014, the CWG coalition urgently advocated for the DCP to officially recognize the plan in light of the rapid luxury construction infiltrating the districts. Most emblematic of the threat to the community was the demolition of a beloved grocery store at 225 Cherry Street and the proposed construction of One Manhattan Square, an 847-foot glass condo tower at that same address. Unfortunately, Mayor de Blasio's administration refused to enact the rezoning plan, allowing for the construction of One Manhattan Square and the subsequent proposal of four additional towers at the same scale on adjacent sites.



Partial view of One Manhattan Square over Manhattan Bridge.

In 2020, political support for the plan shifted when Christopher Marte was elected to the NYC City Council as representative of District 1, which includes both Chinatown and the Lower East Side. Passing the CWG rezoning was the primary policy issue of Marte's campaign. Beyond a matter of electoral politics, the community approached the election as an organizing effort. The City Council plays an important role in approving modifications to the city's zoning text, so having an ally like Marte in office represented a significant opportunity to realize the special district. Once he entered office, Marte included a city planner on his staff, which is unusual for councilmembers. The new councilmember and his staff have commenced conversations with the DCP, but the CWG proposal has still met resistance at the mayoral level. In a recent townhall meeting held in Chinatown, Eric Adams, the newly elected mayor, expressed opposition to the community plan. The mayor, himself a former police officer, claimed that the protective nature of the zoning impeded production of new housing. Strategically, Adams did not qualify housing with an adjective; however, it can safely be assumed that he meant market-rate housing. From the start, the new administration, which is closely tied to the real estate industry, adopted a pro-growth strategy that attempts to solve the city's housing affordability crisis with rudimentary policies of supply and demand. This approach is clearly articulated in the mayor's recently announced housing plan, suitably named "The City of Yes."²⁴ The plan proposed substantial changes to current zoning regulations and affirmed

24 "City of Yes: Zoning for a more equitable and sustainable city," Department of City Planning, accessed November 11, 2023, <https://www.nyc.gov/site/planning/plans/city-of-yes/city-of-yes-overview.page>

the advancement of profit driven speculation across the city. In this environment of capitalistic exuberance, it is unlikely that the CWG plan will gain any ground.

OVERDETERMINED ARCHITECTURE

The history outlined above is well documented in texts authored by historians and theoreticians of city planning.²⁵ Despite their thoroughness, these writings often fail to address the way that architects and architecture are positioned within the aforementioned rezoning initiatives. In each case, architectural design, or lack thereof, is situated differently within the planning process. First, the historic building fabric of the East Village was determined worthy of preservation. While the architecture of the tenement is not normally celebrated for its beauty, the DCP justified its protective action due to the role this typology played in the immigration history of the United States. Building type was thus a reason to spur protective planning measures. Second, at SPURA, architectural image-making played a significant role in the transition of the site from vacant to built. Photorealistic architectural renderings were critical to asserting the development team's vision for the site. Even in the earliest stages of the project, highly detailed perspectives convincingly construe the project as a *fait accompli*. Not surprisingly, the image conjured the final outcome: the architecture depicted in the initial illustrations of Essex Crossing is highly similar to what was eventually constructed. Architectural representation operates in this deterministic fashion across the city. Third, the CWG plan was written in response to the encroachment of luxury developments that were both materially and spatially out of context on the Lower East Side. The arrival of architecture with predominately glass facades marked a threat to the material and social wellbeing of the existing community. Despite assistance by planners during the formulation of the plan, the CWG did not have the aid of architects to translate their zoning document into convincing images. The fact that the community-based plan primarily exists in the technical language of zoning and not in the language of architectural representation impedes generating broader public support for the proposal.

25 See Bendiner-Viani, *Contested City* and Stein, "Chinatown."



Visualization of development under the Chinatown Working Group (CWG) rezoning plan, by Soft-Firm for the exhibition, *Plan Unplanned* (New York: Citygroup, 2021).



Group zoning pamphlet, by Citygroup and Artists Against Displacement in support of the Chinatown Working Group (CWG), 2021.



Alternative construction sign demonstrating Chinatown Working Group (CWG) rezoning principles. Installed by Citygroup for the Coalition to Protect Chinatown and Lower East walking tour, 2021.

Architectural image and image-making operate variably in respect to the three plans. In the East Village, the venerated image of the built fabric was successfully leveraged, whereas architectural imagery was employed as a means of ensuring consent for Essex Crossing. Alternatively, the operative use of image was not available to the CWG. Of course, the unrealized state of the proposal cannot merely be attributed to the absence of supportive architectural representation, but the significance of a persuasive image should not be underestimated. Recognizing this, the Lower East Side based architecture collective Citygroup organized an initiative to provide design support to the CWG. Citygroup invited architects and artists to create visualizations that clearly communicated the principles of the plan and demonstrated its impact on the built form of the neighborhood.²⁶ The media created by the participants in the project meant to translate the highly technical language of zoning into discernible and appealing graphic documents that were deployed to garner support for the plan. Conceived as public advocacy and educational content, the images were ultimately used in community town halls, on pamphlets and in zoning teach-ins. Beyond creating useful media for the CWG, the Citygroup visualization project hoped to destabilize the way that architectural rendering is used to project a vision of the city that aligns with forces of capital. The images offered by Citygroup, therefore contested the overdetermined representation of the city evident in the renderings of real estate developments. Emerging out of a grassroots planning effort, Citygroup harnessed architecture, as a pictorial language, against the hegemonic visual planning of the city.

26 The author of this essay is a founding member of Citygroup.

DISENCHANTMENT

In the essay “The Disenchanted Mountain: The Skyscraper and the City” Manfredo Tafuri charts the manifold ways that architecture interfaces with the city and its planning. Coincidentally, Manfredo Tafuri discusses an earlier urban plan for almost exactly the same area as the three plans discussed above. As part of “The Regional Plan of New York and Its Environs,” developed over a ten-year period between 1920 and 1930, a team of planners led by Thomas Adams proposed the reorganization of the blocks enclosed by 14th Street to the north, Canal Street to the South and between Bowery and the East River.²⁷ The scheme intended to economically stimulate the decaying area through the restructuring of the streets and the construction of a parkway lined with commercial skyscrapers along Forsyth and Chrystie Street. Tafuri cites Lewis Mumford’s belief that this plan and others proposed by Adam’s Regional Planning Commission reified the desires of “financial rulers” and provided welfare and services to a degree that wouldn’t disturb the health of the existing political and business establishment.²⁸ If Mumford’s critique is accepted, it is not hard to make a connection between this plan developed in the first half of the twentieth century and the East Village and Essex Crossing rezonings carried out by DCP almost one hundred years later. In the final pages of the essay, Tafuri turns his analysis to the introduction of the “super-skyscraper” to American cities in the 1960s. For Tafuri, the extreme scale of the World Trade Center and the John Hancock Tower—buildings that were forerunners to One Manhattan Square and the megatowers proposed on the NYC Chinatown waterfront—represent the complete disconnect between the skyscraper and the city. Instead of relating to the surrounding context, the supertalls that Tafuri observes attempt to themselves be cities.²⁹ Replete with the social amenities that constitute urban social life, the tower as city turns its back on the city. This tendency is even more evident in the megatowers of today.

The detached posture of the supertall towers is not necessarily how a skyscraper must relate to the city. In “The Disenchanted Mountain,” Tafuri recounts the evolving dialectic of the American tower typology to urban space. Working backward through Tafuri’s narrative—from the “disenchanted mountain,” to the “enchanted mountain,” to the “anarchic individual”—leads to a conception of architecture as a mediating device in the city.³⁰ The mountain building, as described in the essay, is the volumetric setback skyscraper that steps away from street as it rises in height. This building form is a consequence of the bulk limitations instituted by the 1916 NYC Zoning Resolution. Often associated with the charcoal drawings of Hugh Ferriss, Tafuri instead elaborates his analysis of the setback structure in relation to Eliel Saarinen’s proposal for the Chicago Tribune Competition in 1922 and Rockefeller Center, completed in 1939.

Drawing on Louis Sullivan’s description of Saarinen’s tower, Tafuri describes how the telescoping silhouette gradually rises out of the ground and thus is an organic vertical growth of the gridiron. The natural relationship between land and tower, achieved by Saarinen, enchanted the mountain like structure with the vitality of the city.³¹ Alternatively, at Rockefeller Center the mountain is no longer magic. Rather there is a realist cynicism at work in the development where financial interest governs everything. Although replete with public spaces, granting the complex a civic character that was needed during the depression era, Rockefeller Center, according to Tafuri, is simply economic speculation buttressed by

27 Manfredo Tafuri, “The Disenchanted Mountain: The Skyscraper and the City,” in *The American City: From the Civil War to the New Deal*, trans. Barbara Luigia La Penta (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1979), 441.

28 *Ibid.*, 446.

29 *Ibid.*, 503.

30 *Ibid.*, 390.

31 *Ibid.*, 418.

the zoning code and grid.³² Consequently, Rockefeller Center lays bare the elements of the city's planning.

In both cases of the mountain, the skyscraper draws its *raison d'être* from an outside influence. The enchanted mountain is a manifestation of the city, while the disenchanting mountain reflects the capital market. Against this contingent structure, Tafuri begins "The Disenchanted Mountain" with a depiction of early New York skyscrapers as "anarchic individual(s)" that formally express the unique structural challenges of producing tall buildings. Unlike the Chicago School that attempted to imbue the skyscraper with compositional balance, New York's towers flout proportion and exclaim the exuberance of building upward. They are organisms wholly defined by the engineering logic of building and therefore stand apart from the city. Here, architecture becomes a frictional "event" in the city that spawns disequilibrium between part and whole.³³ For Tafuri, the Woolworth Building, designed by Cass Gilbert and completed in 1913, represents the culmination of this tendency in skyscraper design. The Woolworth asserts its independence within the void of City Hall Park. Tafuri doubtlessly recognizes that buildings like The Woolworth are symbolic of individual corporate power; however, the skyscraper also represents the capacity of architecture to act as an "element of mediation" in the metropolis.³⁴ The anarchic individual does not simply acquiesce to the rules of the city, instead it speaks back according to its own principles. This defiance is exhumed from the disenchanting mountain and is notably not apparent in the present-day architecture of New York City.

Throughout the Disenchanted Mountain, Tafuri reads architecture as a signifier of the urban condition. Marshal Berman takes a similar approach in "Buildings Are Judgment" or "What Man Can Build," written in 1975. As a New Yorker himself, Berman observes the history of the city's growth, and argues that the type, quality, and dimension of the city's buildings allow for judgement of the plans that people and institutions make. Berman thus evaluates the edifices rising around him and concludes that the political left of his generation, what is often called the new left, has failed to act constructively, both in terms of material production and ideological projection. Rather than despair, Berman conducts a dialectical reading of twentieth-century urban renewal in New York City in an effort to understand how to truly build things. He stands in awe of this history, despite the fact that a parkway built by Robert Moses incised his childhood neighborhood in the Bronx.³⁵ Ultimately Berman believes that the left can activate a monumental constructive force against capital and the ruling class. Improved judgements on future buildings, is dependent on the left generating the political will to implement a more humane plan for the city. Today, in light of the enormous carbon output of the building industry, the scale of change that he calls for certainly needs to be rethought; however, critically, Berman emphasizes that architecture does not inevitably have to succumb to the existing dynamic, or planning, of the city.³⁶ In a less overt way, Tafuri shares this sentiment. Berman evokes buildings that disobey historic patterns of urban development, while Tafuri's anarchic individual stands resolutely in isolation from its surroundings. Taken together, it is possible to conceive an architecture of dissent that implies a territory beyond the status quo. It is perhaps in the representation and building of this architecture that a different, more comprehensive, plan for the city may emerge.

32 Ibid., 484

33 Ibid., 390.

34 Ibid., 389.

35 Marshal Berman, "Buildings Are Judgment, or 'What Man can Build,'" in *Modernism In the Streets: A Life and Times in Essays*, ed. David Marcus and Shellie Sclan (London: Verso, 2017), 94.

36 Ibid., 124

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