

HELP PRESERVE WASHINGTON SQUARE

What will be the future of our neighborhood when postwar construction begins full force?

A group of people living in and around Washington Square have been meeting informally to discuss ways and means of safeguarding the unique character of our neighborhood and its surrounding area which is threatened with drastic change by the announced plans for tall apartment structures directly on the Square. This group has come to the conclusion that nothing can be accomplished by expressions of sentimental regret. On the other hand, legal action through the proper authorities might be effective. The city can control private building through the zoning laws.

Present zoning regulations affecting our area permit erection of apartment houses covering a very high percentage of the plot, going up about 14 stories of sheer height at the street line, before setbacks, then surmounted by towers of unlimited height. These restrictions are defined by what is known as height and area districts. Most of Manhattan is now in a "B area district" and in a "class 1½ height district". Certain portions of Manhattan, however, where postwar residential development is anticipated, such as along East River Drive, have already succeeded in securing a change to "D area districts" and "class 1 height districts". Such a change restricts future buildings to a smaller coverage, ensuring larger yards and courts, and limits heights on the side streets to approximately six stories, before setbacks, and to approximately nine stories, before setbacks, on the avenues. We believe such limitations as these would be acceptable to property owners, as well as appropriate for the healthful and attractive growth of the neighborhood.

It may also be possible to limit the height of buildings around Washington Square and other squares in the Village by a city-wide regulation limiting building heights around all parks and public spaces. Such a proposal is favored by the Parks Commissioner. It would not, however, have any effect in controlling tall apartments elsewhere in the neighborhood, especially in the side streets, where such control is most needed. Nonetheless, we hope this proposal succeeds, and we are petitioning for it as well as for revised height and area zoning. Since either proposal might be defeated we are supporting both, thinking it wise to have two strings to our bow.

Accordingly, we are asking you to join us in signing a petition to the City Planning Commission requesting that both these zoning changes be made. If they are made in time, they may prevent the spoiling of Washington Square by wholly inappropriate "improvements", as well as safeguard the rest of the neighborhood against a rash of postwar overbuilding which would choke out remaining light and air and forever destroy the attractive qualities which have endeared this neighborhood to us all.