

NYC-131 CONS PROJ

Hour Nears 12 In Bloomingdale

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Touched to the quick by real estate speculators turning enormous profits in rooming house management, the Bloomingdale neighborhood five years ago was plummeting downward.

The stories of several families in a hovel-like room, of children sleeping four-a-bed, of rents that ranged upwards of \$20 a week for a single cell and a shared kitchen and bathroom, of mounds of uncollected garbage, and of vermin unchecked by exterminators were gathered and broadcast.

The victims were (and still are in many places) Negroes and Puerto Ricans newly arrived in the city. The families were victimized not only by the men in the rent cages but by the drifters and loners who moved in with the immigration wave—the narcotics addicts, thieves, drunks and prostitutes who themselves were victims, but for whom there existed almost no hope. For the families, especially the children, there was hope.

Slum clearance was an early, powerful treatment: it cured the malady, all right, but the patient—the neighborhood—died. For a neighborhood like Bloomingdale, in which large, spacious apartment houses stand hard by handsome town houses and brownstones, clearance was out of the question. So the city, with private organizations, put together several tested remedies—relocation, code enforcement, and tenant education—polished them up and called them conservation. They proved effective.



WHITE ELEPHANT sale benefited the neighborhood's recreation program.

Remnants of the decay remain, but the tide has receded. The Hotel Armstrong, called the "rat ranch," has been demolished; a row of teeming rooming houses along 103rd Street has given way to pleasant, pastel-colored, low-rent apartment houses; large, decrepit hotels like the Jefferson and Allendale have either been converted or are being converted into apartment houses by new owners interested in long-term gains; and the bankers who had sniffed decay and blocked the flow of mortgage money have now begun to loosen the stopper. Most important, the racial variety has not been upset.

Not a small measure of the credit is due the Bloomingdale Conservation Project, which is approaching its fifth birthday in October and facing, on June 30th, its demise. The patient appears to be cured here or faces, at worst, a short convalescence, and the city, according to the director of the project, Barbara Oliver, has a fiscal problem. The money—about \$30,000 a year in the case of Bloomingdale—is needed in other neighborhoods. But Miss Oliver, a tall, handsome woman who has been a member of the project's staff from the outset, was outlining last week the ways in which her staff, which makes its home in the Hotel Paris, West End Avenue and 95th, has become what she believes is an indispensable part of the life of the community.

Last Fall the project's staff members were informed by the Housing and Redevelopment Board's Bureau of Neighborhood Conservation that a change could be expected. The project had been

set up five years ago only as a demonstration. The plan was that eventually a neighborhood group would take over the functions of the professional staff members, but it seems unlikely that that will happen.

One suggestion from the city has been that a roving team of professionals would go from Bloomingdale, to Chelsea, to West Harlem, all of which face "phasing out," performing the jobs now done by the staffs in residence. Miss Oliver said, however, that there's barely enough time in the week for a small, full-time staff to handle a single area's problems now.

The project's steering committee has met to consider its future and has countered with three proposals: first, that the project

should continue as it is, perhaps with a reduction in funds; second, that it should reach out to cover a wider area—north to 106th Street (104th Street is its present northern boundary) and east to Central Park West; and third, that the enlarged area should have the same east-west boundary but be

expanded north to 110th Street.

In any event, it is the waiting that is distressing. With three months to go, the staff still does not know the direction the project is going to take, if it's going to go on at all. How, for instance, Miss Oliver was saying last week, are plans to be made for the

Riverside Park program when the staff may not be around to see that they are carried out? How will the code enforcement program, which needs continual followup, fare? And how—even such a minor worry—should new stationery be ordered, she wondered?