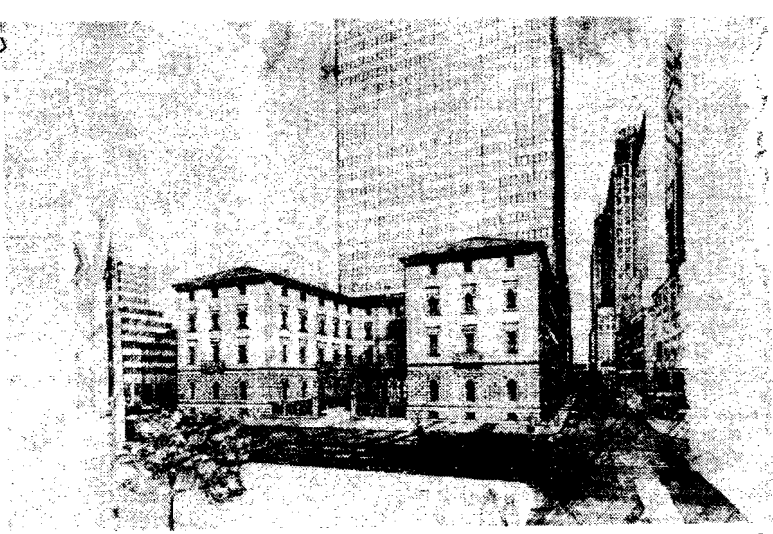


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Artist's sketch shows the proposed Palace Hotel rising above the landmark Villard Houses, Madison Av. and E. 50th St.

Landmarks Clash Near

By ROBERTA B. GRATZ

A smoldering controversy between two city agencies threatens to erupt into a full-scale tug of war and in the process endanger a precedent-setting midtown development project that includes the preservation of a landmark.

The two agencies — the Landmarks Preservation Commission and the City Planning Commission — have not in recent years been known to have the best working relationship. But the current disagreement comes at a time when they are increasingly being called upon to resolve crucial issues together.

The focus of what now is a warm disagreement but may turn into a heated dispute is the proposal by developer Harry B. Helmsley to incor-

porate the landmark Villard Houses into the base of a new hotel-office-residential tower at Madison Av. and 50th St.

Special zoning moves of some kind would be required from the Planning Commission to give the project — approved last November by the Landmarks Commission — final go-ahead.

Draft proposals are now before the planning agency. Already among members and staff of both commissions and among independent planners and preservationists, questions are being raised. They include whether the proposals:

¶ Go too far in rewarding a developer for preserving a landmark that innately enhances his new building.

¶ Pave the way for too many midtown landmarks to

be overshadowed by new skyscrapers.

¶ Take away powers from the Landmark Commission specifically mandated by law and give them to the Planning Commission.

¶ Give new credence to the argument heard in recent years that developers are being given overly generous incentive bonuses in exchange for providing amenities.

Victor Marrero, Planning Commission chairman, says that the proposal "is only a draft that we are still working on."

"It is not our intent," he adds, "to overlap the Landmarks Commission but to strengthen the tools available" for saving landmarks. "We want to complement and supplement," he says,

Continued on Page 8

Clash Looms Over City Landmark

Continued from Page 3

"not duplicate and contradict."

Beverly Moss Spatt, the Landmarks Commission's chairman, says she was "shocked and dismayed" not to be consulted before the second or third draft was completed. The move, she adds, "clearly intrudes on our mandate."

The two commission chairman met to discuss the mat-

ter for the first time on Friday. Afterwards they both expressed guarded optimism that the differences could be resolved.

The 1880s 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 around a courtyard. It was constructed for journalist and railroad magnate Henry Villard, who occupied the south wing and sold adjacent houses to his friends.

In the 20 months since Helmsley first proposed this marriage of landmark and skyscraper, the plan has already undergone radical modifications.

In effect, the better part of the initial controversial design-and-preservation issues have been resolved with the approval of the Landmarks Commission.

Enter the Planning Commission with jurisdiction over zoning changes. For several years the commission has been wrestling with the growing issue of preserving landmarks without hindering new development.