

Opinions

Editorial comment

A never-ending task

Those of you who wake up to the steady thump of a pile driver, or the rumble of a flatbed truck hauling steel beams, or the squeal of a backhoe, or who find your car covered with dust from a nearby construction site know that the job of planning for and monitoring growth and change here did not end with the adoption of new zoning rules.

Those who have found themselves abandoning an errand to the shops of Johnson or Riverdale avenues because parking spaces have grown scarcer, are already feeling the impact of the building boom. A glance at the cranes and skeletal superstructures outlined everywhere against the sky tells you that the worst is yet to come.

As we cope with the noise and disruption of construction, we need to prepare for its consequences.

Like so much else in this city, the rules of the planning bureaucracy are calibrated around life in Manhattan south of 96th Street where congestion is the norm. They envision lots of singles and small families, shopping on foot or by phone, commuting via subway, bus or cab, sending their children to private schools or to public schools that have plenty of seats.

Regulations made for Manhattan ignore the reality of middle class neighborhoods in Queens, Brooklyn and the Bronx. There, schools are crowded. Residents aren't steps from a store; they are as likely to shop for big ticket items in Westchester or on Long Island

as in midtown; if they have young children, chances are mom or dad will ferry them to class and after-school programs by car. So cars are used more than in Manhattan, and families are more likely to have two cars.

If neighborhoods like ours are to survive with their character intact, residents have to think about the future and demand a share

in molding it. We have to continue to protest against regulations that permit buildings to rise too high. We have to demand revisions in the rules that allow institutions to build extra-large buildings; that give developers bonuses for doctors' offices; that permit complex deals to transfer the space over one building to the site of another; that fail to provide parking spaces in numbers sufficient to reflect the community's lifestyle. We have to safeguard our schools and parks, so that they welcome newcomers instead of being over-



whelmed by them.

In short, we have to wrest the task of shaping the future from developers and place it in our own hands.

No single neighborhood can do that alone, but neighborhoods throughout the city are facing the same issues of explosive growth that Riverdale is. By coming together, they can channel that growth, finding sensible places to house the new families pouring in from Europe, Asia and Latin America while shifting the city's priorities from accommodating developers to respecting communities.