

to create hospitable, reinforcing environments for already concentrated but weakened economic uses.

The operational conundrum in the approach lay in finding the means for finessing and financing the formal improvements intended to engender the turnaround, and the search for implementation strategies produced two problematic offspring that remain central to the city's planning efforts: the bonus and the Business Improvement District (BID). The importance of these instruments has only grown as government has become increasingly enthralled by the model of the "public-private partnership," the ongoing redescription of the public interest as the facilitation of private economic activity—government intervention to prime the pump of trickle-down. The bonus system, which exchanges some specified form of urban good behavior for additional bulk or for direct subsidy in the form of tax relief or low-rate financing, is founded on a fundamental contradiction: one public benefit must be surrendered to obtain another. In the case of increased bulk, access to light and air and limitations of scale are traded for an "amenity," for a plaza, an arcade, or simply a shift in location to some putatively underdeveloped area. With financial subsidy, the city sacrifices its own income stream—with whatever consequences for the hiring of teachers or police—in favor of the allegedly greater good of business "retention" or a projected rise in property "values" and downstream taxation. Of course, both systems are rife with opportunities for blackmail and corruption, and these continue to be exploited fulsomely.

While BIDs do not involve the same levels of public subsidy, they collude in creating a culture of exception in which the benefits of urban design (and maintenance) are directed to commercially driven players operating outside normal public frameworks, disproportionately benefiting the rich neighborhoods able to pony up for the improvements. This nexus of special districts and overlays, bulk bonuses, tax subsidies, BIDs, preservation, and gentrification has now coalesced to form the primary apparatus for planning in New York and most other cities in the United States. This outcome is yet another triumph for neoliberal economics, the now virtually unquestioned idea that the role of government is to assure prosperity at the top, an idea that has produced both the most obscene national income gap in history as well as the unabated froth of development that is rapidly turning Manhattan—where the average apartment price now exceeds one million dollars—into the world's largest gated community.